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# REPORT ON THE MEDIA SITUATION IN UZBEKISTAN

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## I. Summary

In the ten years since independence, the Uzbek media has degenerated to an appalling extent. Despite the large number of newspapers and a relatively developed electronic media network, there is not a single independent newspaper, television or radio station that can offer an alternative view to that of official news and analysis. The media is subject to strict controls by state-sponsored censorship in the guise of inspection for state secrets. Together with censorship, the other main factors contributing to the ruin of the Uzbek media are: the exile of intellectuals; the persecution of independent journalists; the lack of professionalism; the exhausting registration procedures; the dependence of newspapers and private electronic media on the state authorities; and the lack of rule of law. Control over the media continues under the pretext of preventing instability in a country with a population of over 25 million. Officials like to point to neighboring Tajikistan, where, they say, democracy and the media were responsible for the outbreak of civil war. However, tight controls leave journalists and editors with only two choices: to follow the official line; or face individual persecution or the closure of their media business.

Despite certain discrepancies, Uzbek media laws provide a relatively good legal framework for the functioning of journalism. They prohibit censorship, guarantee freedom of speech and access to information, and establish set of rules for the protection of journalists. However, the lack of clarity in defining certain important terms, like “state secret” and “privacy”, makes the legislation less effective. Moreover, numerous governmental decrees, which accompany any law, are restrictive and confusing and very often more powerful than the law itself. Journalists’ legal knowledge is unsatisfactory, and the majority either do not know the media laws at all or have a very basic understanding of them. This is understandable – knowledge of the law seems unnecessary in a country where they are not implemented. In general, the courts are discredited as corrupted, biased and subordinate to the executive, and in such circumstances it is difficult to obtain legal precedent that could be used as a basis for debate in media legislation.

The political leadership that committed itself to democratic principles is not interested in turning them into reality. During ten years of independence President Karimov’s autocratic regime has consistently tightened its grip on all spheres of society, including the media. Such policies have given rise to fear and inertia amongst the journalists and managers of private television and radio stations. However, it would be unfair to lay all the blame for the collapse of the Uzbek media on the authorities. There is no unity within the journalist community in Uzbekistan; on the contrary, one has the impression that every media business is responsible only for itself. Although the tight controls exercised over the media by the authorities do not allow large room for maneuver, journalists often fail to use those opportunities still open to them. This is particularly relevant to the knowledge of media legislation. There is a huge demand for training from private and state media alike. Media professionals and executives realize that in order to bring changes to the environment in which they operate, journalism must be much more professional and united than it is now. Media outlets, especially electronic media businesses, lack both financial and technical resources, as well as professional staff. Training initiatives carried out in Uzbekistan up to

now have mainly focused on the theoretical aspects of journalism, and only a few seminars have provided practical journalistic and technical skills. Many of these seminars were short-term and they did not significantly change journalists' work or the general media environment. Our mission came to the conclusion that in order to achieve notable results long-term training is required.

## II. Background

SDC mandated CIMERA, a Swiss network of consultants, to train, follow up and manage media-related projects in Central Asia, in parallel to the Central Asia Media Support Project (CAMSP). Within this framework, CIMERA is engaged in strengthening local partners' capacity, providing technical monitoring for the media projects, and consulting with SDC to develop future strategy in the field of media-related projects in the region of Central Asia. Shahida Tulaganova conducted a fact-finding and prospective mission in Uzbekistan.

## III. History

In the two years after independence, 1991 to 1993, the Uzbek media experienced an openness and freedom unlike that to come in the following years. Relative freedom of speech and expression were reflections of the reforms brought about by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987, and were still intact in the first few years of post-independent Uzbekistan. "During the last few years of Perestroika and the first two years of independence, the media was free," says a newspaper editor. "I could publish articles criticizing local and regional Communist party committees, the conditions in women prisons, human rights abuses, the cotton harvest problems, etc. Now this is impossible. In general, the last few years of the Soviet Union were marked by a greater media freedom than in independent Uzbekistan"<sup>1</sup>. A certain degree of freedom was still apparent after independence, when the political environment was different from how it is now. Active opposition parties and movements attracted large numbers of Uzbek intellectuals, including writers and journalists, who eagerly embraced these new opportunities. There were several opposition newspapers, among which the most noteworthy was *Erk* (Freedom), of the political party with a similar name. After the crackdown on the opposition during 1992 to 1993, the government tightened its control over the media. The closure of opposition parties, the persecution and imprisonment of their members and the voluntary exile of opposition leaders deprived society of the front-runners of intellectual thought and forces who challenged the government. In 1993 President Karimov issued his five principles of the development of Uzbekistan, which stipulated that the government is the main reformer in the country. A member of a non-governmental organization involved in media support, says that these principles legalized autocratic rule and barred any attempts at free and independent thought in Uzbekistan. "It was clearly stated that only the government has the

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<sup>1</sup> CIMERA interview, 6.09.01

right to determine what is right and wrong in the country, and that state institutions are always right.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Crackdown on independent media**

Since 1994 the Uzbek authorities have stipulated their efforts to combat independent journalism inside the country and to control the flow of information from foreign media. Broadcasts from *ORT*, the only Russian channel available on state television, have been limited to 4 hours a day since 1995, while transmissions of the Russian radio station “*Mayak*” were removed from state frequencies. In 1998, after a series of programs about the human rights situation in Uzbekistan, the authorities unilaterally terminated their contract with the BBC World Service and removed its programs from medium and short wave frequencies. The Uzbek government was trying to create a supportive media that welcomed its political reforms, and those who aired their criticism were not welcome. In 1997 the editor of the only independent newspaper *Hurriyat* (Freedom), Karim Bakhriev, was forced to resign after publishing a series of critical articles. Another prominent journalist who paid high price for criticizing authorities is Shodi Mardiev, the producer of the *Samarqand* state radio station. The legal action against him stemmed from a broadcast on June 19, 1997 that Mardiev produced, which satirized the alleged corrupt activities of the Samarkand Deputy Prosecutor, Talat Abdulkhalikzada. Following the broadcast, Abdulkhalikzada accused Mardiev of defamation and filed legal suit. The court sentenced Mardiev to an 11-year prison sentence for threatening Abdulkhalikzada with broadcast material in order to extort money, even though little evidence was produced to support this allegation. Mardiev is still serving his sentence, and according to human rights NGOs his health is rapidly deteriorating. Numerous appeals from international organizations to release him have not produced any results.

The situation worsened after the February 1999 bombings in Tashkent and subsequent trials. The media became sheer propaganda, highlighting the "Islamic fundamentalist connection" and threatening the population with the “black forces” of secular opposition in exile and Islamic radicals determined to bring disaster to the country. Those who disagreed with the government's views and conclusions were not allowed to air their opinions, unless they used international media such as Radio Liberty or the BBC.

In November 1999, the authorities illegally closed *ALC*, an independent television and radio station in Urgench, after it broadcast a report that criticised local and state government (see p. 11). *ALC* has remained closed since, and its director, Shukhrat Babajanov, who faced personal persecution, fled the country in 2001.

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<sup>2</sup> CIMERA interview, 17.09.01

## IV. LEGISLATION

### General

Despite the fact that the current Uzbek media laws provide a fairly broad spectrum of rights to journalists and guarantee freedom from interference in professional activities, existing restrictions and vagueness in the legislation significantly limit the scope of what is permissible. At the same time, the non-existence of an independent court system and the absence of fair court cases against journalists have not established a precedent of media trials and cannot form the basis of comprehensive analysis<sup>3</sup>. So far, there has been no official research on violations of journalists' rights, nor is there official data on the number of imprisoned journalists or charges against them. Even the Foundation for the Democratization and Development of Mass Media<sup>4</sup>, which is supposed to monitor the media situation, has not conducted such an investigation. Its Chairman couldn't give a precise answer when questioned about the number of court cases against newspapers and individual journalists, and instead mentioned few of them from memory. The newspaper he edits, *Hurriyat*, has had two libel cases against it this year: the first connected to infringing the private life of an individual; and the second relating to an article published about a government official, in which the journalist accused him of wrongdoing without any solid evidence.

*Hurriyat's* editor told CIMERA that requests for such information have only recently been sent to the newspapers and the data is unlikely to be available soon. Judging from the examples of Tajik newspaper such as *Oyna* (Mirror) in Samarqand, *Tashkentskaya Pravda* (Tashkent Truth), a Russian newspaper in Tashkent, and the *ALC TV* station in Khorazm, the conclusion is that media businesses that publish critical material or disobey warnings given by government officials face closure, merger or a refusal to extend their license. Individual journalists who write critical articles are usually imprisoned upon accusations of bribery (see the cases of journalists A'lo Khudjaev, Majid Abduraimov and Poulat Gadoev<sup>5</sup>). The absence of a fair court system, falsification of evidence by law-enforcement agents and a malfunctioning appeal procedure negates any rights and protection journalists have by law.

The basic outline of media activity in Uzbekistan is laid down in the Constitution, which guarantees the freedom of the press and outlaws censorship. The Uzbek media operates within a legal framework which consists of the following laws: "On Mass Media", "On the Professional Activity of Journalists", "Guarantees and Freedom to Obtain Information", "On Publishing", "On State Secrets", "On Telecommunications", "On Licensing" and a number of governmental decrees and guidelines. There are also provisions in Criminal, Civic and Administrative Codes relating to journalistic activity.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Country Report on Human Rights Practices-Uzbekistan, US State Department, February, 2001, p.1

<sup>4</sup> The Foundation is registered as a NGO, but there are few state structures in the founders board.

<sup>5</sup> see p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> The legal texts regulating the media activities in Uzbekistan are available on the Internews Uzbekistan

The general perception of media law is as a restrictive one. Uzbek legislation guarantees the freedom to obtain and spread information, but limits it from doing so to state and “other secrets” (art 6, paragraph 1, law “On Mass Media” and art 3, law “On State Secrets”). Other important limitations on journalists include a ban on covering trials, as well as infringing the private life of individuals or insulting their dignity and honor (art 6, paragraph 2, law “On Mass Media”).

Because court practice has not established a precedent defining the terms “libel” and “private life”, it has left wide room for interpretation and is used in practice to defend censorship. One peculiar characteristic of the Uzbek legal system in general, and of the media laws in particular, is that the law is not interpreted by the courts or parliament, but rather by various governmental administration's departments, which issue guidelines and mechanisms for the implementation of legislation. As Karim Bakhriev, a journalist and lawyer with the American NGO Internews<sup>7</sup> says, “In practice, guidelines issued by government officials have more legal power than the law.”<sup>7</sup> Thus the lack of clarity in law and arbitrary governmental mechanisms for their implementation invalidate any freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

## **Media laws**

### **Constitution**

The Uzbekistan Constitution states that “The mass media is free and acts in accordance with the law.” (art. 67) It also establishes the responsibility of the media for the information it provides and bans censorship. Article 29 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and thought, and the right to seek and obtain information. These rights are however limited by the same article, which excludes “information directed against the constitutional regime and other limitations provided by law”. Another limitation contained in article 29 is:

“Freedom of opinion and expression can be limited in accordance with state or other secrets.”

These two provisions deserve special attention since the Constitution does not explain what information is considered anti-constitutional, and neither does it give an exact description of “other limitations”. Similarly, the phrase “state and other secrets” is not further elaborated, thus leaving its interpretation to the discretion of the courts and state authorities. The Constitution guarantees the inviolability of private life and protection from insults to a person’s dignity and honor (art. 27), a concept that can affect the freedom of the press. Although the Constitution obliges state institutions, officials and public organizations

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website: <http://www.internews.uz/library.html> (mainly in Russian, with some texts in English).

<sup>7</sup> Karim Bakhriev, “Censorship is useless, harmful and humiliating”, speech at the conference dedicated to International Press Freedom Day, pp.2-3, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 3.05.01.

to share information with citizens (art 30), at the same time it restricts the right to have access to official documents only to those who are directly involved (art.29).

An important concept of freedom of thought and the press is contained in article 12:

“Public life in Uzbekistan is based on the pluralism of political institutions, ideologies and opinions. Neither ideology can be state ideology.”

### **“On Mass Media” law**

The “On Mass Media” law affirms media freedoms (art 2), but does not mention the prohibition of censorship. Article 6 outlaws any of the following under the term “misuse of the media”: calls to change the constitutional regime of the country; the instigation of racial, ethnic or religious hatred; and the disclosure of state or other secrets. Again, the notion “other secrets defined by law” remains unexplained. The same article prohibits attacks on personal dignity and honor and interference in the private life of a person. Most importantly, article 6 prohibits coverage of court trials until they are over, failure to do so is defined by law as interference in the implementation of justice and influence over the court’s decision. Thus, Uzbek media is only allowed to report the beginning and end of a trial, without being able to perform its public duty by reporting miscarriages of justice. A parliamentary member says that the clause on banning trial coverage was a focus of heated discussions in parliament. However, the Chairman of State Committee on Press<sup>8</sup> Rustam Shogulyamov, pressurized MPs, arguing that the clause was necessary because the country is in a period of transition and that journalists are not well trained and could easily disclose information that might actually be a state secret<sup>9</sup>. The Law does, however, state that journalists can analyze the trial after it has finished, so although the ban on covering trials takes away the media’s right to report on the administration of justice immediately and on the spot, this second clause leaves the door open for general discussions about the work of judiciary.

According to media law, state media outlets, including the Uzbek TV and Radio Company, are obliged to broadcast official information and announcements (art 25). This rule is unofficially spreading to non-state media outlets (in Tashkent its region in particular), which face criticism from the State Press Committee if they fail to publish or announce official bulletins.

Article 16 of the “On Media” law states that any media outlet can be closed in accordance with a decision by its founder, the organization that registered it, or by court ruling. The governmental decree that follows the law requires all media outlets to be registered by the State Press Committee. Thus, the Committee has the power to close media outlets at its discretion. Entrusting the executive with the right to take judicial decisions contradicts article 19 of the Constitution, which states that only the court can terminate or limit the rights and freedoms of citizens.

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<sup>8</sup> A structure depending from the government and which has the ultimate control on the content of the print media, see p. 13 "Censorship".

<sup>9</sup> CIMERA interview, 17.09.01.

Another discrepancy between the “On Media” law and the Constitution and other laws that regulate the activities of journalists and media outlets, is found in article 22, which obliges editors to send control copies of their periodicals to the state registration institution. The law obliges media businesses to send their publications to the State Press Committee prior to publication, thus constituting direct interference in content and giving a green light to censorship<sup>10</sup>. Unlike the “On the Protection of Journalists” and “On Guarantees and Freedom to Access Information” laws, the prohibition of censorship is not mentioned in the “On Media” law. Instead, this law indirectly entrusts the State Press Committee with a censorship role, something which runs contrary to other media legislation.

### **Law “On the Protection of Journalists”**

The law “On the Protection of Journalists” became an important step in defining journalism. It prohibits censorship, the inspection of journalist’s reports before printing, and the prevention of the report from being published (art 2). It gives a detailed description of journalist’s rights, such as the right to seek and obtain information from government officials, to be present at open trials<sup>11</sup>, demonstrations, and conflict zones, the right to refrain from disclosing the identity of a source (art 5), and to carry out a journalistic investigation (art 7). The right to seek information is restricted by art 6, which stipulates that journalist must respect the dignity, freedoms and rights of the individual. Importantly, this law obliges state institutions to give journalist access to information and to protect him/her during the performance of their professional duties (art 10). The same right is reinforced in the law “On Guarantees and Freedom to Access Information” (art 7).

### **Law “On Publishing”**

The law “On Publishing” guarantees the independence of publishers in their professional activities, including format, topics, specialization, copies and selection of contributors (art 2).

### **Law “On State Secrets”**

The law “On State Secrets” defines state secrets as “information of the highest importance to the military, and political, economic, scientific and technical information protected by the state and listed in special documents” (art. 1). According to the law, the Cabinet of Ministers determines what is considered as a state secret and issues regulations accordingly. However, as yet no such regulations have been published in Uzbekistan, and the list of information subject to become a secret remains unknown. It is well known that the law only comes into force after publication, but because no regulations on state secrets have been published no one can be arrested and tried for disclosing a state secret.

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<sup>10</sup> see p. 13, “Censorship”.

<sup>11</sup> see p. 10, “Criminal Procedural Code”.

At the moment, there is a special state secrets inspectorate within the State Press Committee, whose duty it is to read and check all material before it goes to print in order to prevent the disclosure of sensitive information. However, it is still unknown whether the inspectors themselves are fully aware of the nature of classified information on state secrets. That fact that they sometimes remove obituaries before printing leads one to think that even state officials have an approximate idea of “state secrets”. According to Karim Bakhriev, reports about corruption, ecological problems, the increasing social gaps in society, and unemployment are usually subject to the censor’s objections. “These facts cannot be state secrets. If they are secrets for the state, then for the people they are common knowledge.”<sup>12</sup> A newspaper editor in Tashkent told CIMERA that censors recently banned an article about a scientist, who was apparently on bad terms with an advisor to President Karimov: “After I disagreed with the censor and wanted to proceed with the original article, I got phone calls from the presidential office, from Press Committee officials, and finally from the Chairman of the Committee, Mr Shogulyamov, himself. I had to obey their demands and replaced the “bad” article with one about the US and Uzbekistan.”<sup>13</sup> There are numerous similar examples of the arbitrary decisions made by state inspectors. Karim Bakhriev suggests that in order to end this “laws and the relevant regulations must be made public, including to journalists and editors, who should follow them and be take responsibility if they are violated. This would free the authorities from their preliminary inspection of all printed information and media reports, which is prohibited by the Constitution.”<sup>14</sup>

## **Criminal Code**

### **Libel**

Uzbekistan’s Criminal Code defines libel in article 139 as follows:

- The spreading of false accusations by committing serious and severe criminal acts;
- The spreading of information, which can cause serious consequences;
- The spreading of information with bad intent.

The Criminal Code also provides punishment for intentionally insulting the honor and dignity of a person (art 140).

Court practice has not yet established a clear definition of libel.

### **Criminal Procedural Code**

Article 19 of the Criminal Procedural Code prohibits media participation in trials when the court:

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<sup>12</sup> Karim Bakhriev, *supra*, p.7.

<sup>13</sup> CIMERA interview, 6.09.01.

<sup>14</sup> Karim Bakhriev, *supra*.

- Is considering cases that involve state secrets or sexual harassment;
- Is considering cases that involve people under age of 18; and
- Is considering information about the private life of individuals and their private correspondence.

In all other cases, it is up to the court to decide whether the trial should be open to the public or held *in camera*. The participation of journalists during the trial is also decided by court ruling.

Article 327 of the Criminal Procedural Code obliges journalists and media businesses to disclose to the prosecutor and the court any information and sources relevant to the criminal case under investigation. This article contradicts article 10 of the law “On the Protection of Journalists”, which protects journalists from interference in his/her work and prohibits demands to reveal sources.

### **Act “On Licensing of Other of Activities”**

The “On Licensing” act entered in force on 25 May 2000, and was widely seen as a breakthrough path through the jungle of previous licensing regulations. According to the new law, a license does not expire unless the licensee wishes to limit the expiration date for whatever reason. It also gives the authorities the right to limit a licensing period, but it cannot be shorter than five years (art 12). A new law also shortens the time-period of consideration of a licensing application to 30 days, instead of one year as it was previously, but this period is unrealistic given the complexity of the administrative structures in charge. The old registration system obliged private and commercial television and radio broadcasters to renew their licenses annually. This was a laborious process, given that there was no single act regulating the licensing procedure. Instead, there were a number of confusing and contradictory statutory acts by ministries and governmental departments, which often led to abuse. In practice, the new law does not significantly change the situation. It does not provide a clear licensing procedure, leaving this to the Cabinet of Ministers, which will issue separate decrees on each type of activity mentioned in the law, including the licensing of private television and radio stations. In fact, the new law institutionalized the old system of licensing rather than easing the procedure.

So far, the only incident when a private media outlet launched a court case against the local authority was when the *ALC* television and radio company in Urgench sued the regional khokimiyat (governor’s office) for violating its rights and demanded compensation for the moral and material damage caused by an illegal closure of the station in November 1999 by the regional Interagency Coordination Committee (ICC) office<sup>15</sup>. The ICC is an interdepartmental body responsible for issuing and revoking media licenses. The official reason given by the ICC for their action was the lack of appropriate guards at *ALC*’s premises, although this condition is not included in the licensing agreement. In 2000 the

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<sup>15</sup> The ICC consists of representatives of the State Press Committee, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior, the Uzbek Agency for Post and Telecommunications, the National Security Service and the UzTeleRadio Company.

station had re-applied for registration, but its application was refused based on the expert opinion of the State Press Committee. Despite the fact that there had been severe violation of the law by the ICC's local branch, which had exceeded its powers by closing the station, the court did not find any irregularities and decided that *ALC*'s claims for compensation were ungrounded. Moreover, the court recommended that the station improve its understanding of the procedure for filing application to the ICC for re-registration. *ALC* has never got its license back and the General Director, Shukhrat Babajanov, who faced persecution and threats from authorities, was forced to flee the country to Germany.

## **Journalists' Legal Literacy**

The legal knowledge of the majority of Uzbek journalists leaves hope for the better. Not only did some of the journalists interviewed by CIMERA not know their rights and obligations provided for in media legislation, they had a very rough understanding of the basic provisions of the "On Media" law. Ravshan Khakimov, chairman of the Uzbek Association of International Law says that journalists don't know enough about the legal side of their work and that's why they can't protect themselves. "If journalists knew and were able to use them, it would considerably advance their role."<sup>16</sup> Gaps in legal knowledge not only make journalists vulnerable to abuses of power by officials but also make their work look unprofessional. A newspaper editor in Tashkent told CIMERA that some journalists attempt to write critical articles about a local governor's abuses of power without providing any proof and based only on indirect evidence. "Journalists, especially young ones, are ambitious to jump on hot issues and make a name for themselves. However, they lack the skill and professionalism to do it well. There are only a few journalists in Uzbekistan who can carry out proper journalistic investigation. If journalists followed the law, then we wouldn't have had court cases. Laws have to become the textbook of journalists."<sup>17</sup>

While the argument about journalists' lack of legal knowledge should be recognized, it would be unfair to accept it wholeheartedly. Existing legislation does not give journalists the room to maneuver that officials imagine. Journalists are not lawyers who write according to the criminal and civil code. Uzbekistan's media laws are too restrictive, incomprehensive and vague in defining sensitive concepts like privacy and state secrets. It needs revision, and this is something that could be addressed by those journalists who sit in parliament. One media observer and parliamentary member admitted that there are significant gaps in media legislation that need to be addressed as soon as possible. However, according to him, because Uzbek parliament usually revises laws five years after their adoption, this might not happen any earlier than 2003<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Herald-TV # 72, Internews-Uzbekistan, July, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> CIMERA interview, 17.09.01.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

## Censorship

Censorship is the main obstacle to press freedom in Uzbekistan. Although officially prohibited, censorship dominates and dictates the content of media output. The State Press Committee has assumed the role of chief censor. As Yelena Kandybina puts it: "Assuming a possible incompetence of editors in considering state secrets, the government has created a special structure - State Control Inspection of Protection of State Secrets in the Media, which is linked to another structure-the State Press Committee (Goskompechat). Inspectors check all the materials prior to publishing and can order any material withdrawn. The issue of the paper cannot be printed without the permission of an Inspector. Such interference in the affairs of the media is not considered by the government of Uzbekistan as a violation of the Constitution, Laws and international agreements".<sup>19</sup>

The Committee has then ministerial powers and the ultimate control over all information broadcasts or in print. But if the government justifies the need for censorship by claiming a lack of professionalism amongst journalists and a fear that by spreading information that could actually be state secrets, they could damage the stability of the state, the definition of the state secret given by the "On State Secrets" law is very vague, and the list of information categories that are regarded as state secrets has yet to be published.

"Censors are narrow-minded people," said Mukhammad Sharif Mamtkulov, an *UzA* official news agency reporter. "In September, they banned an article about the crash of an Uzbek plane in Tatrstan, Russia. The censors argued that it might damage the reputation of Uzbekistan. But what's the point of hiding it if Russian news agencies and television already reported on it?"<sup>20</sup> Journalist Sergey Ezhkov says that not all censors are bad. "Sometimes, critical material can be published, but it depends on the censor. If I know him personally, he will let it through."<sup>21</sup>

Sometimes the fear of publishing unwanted information by the state results in the most ridiculous situations. On September 11, 2001, when New York and Washington were attacked no Uzbek media outlets mentioned it. Official news programs were silent, and talked about the cotton harvest instead. Small news columns about the US attacks appeared only in the *Pravda Vostoka* and *Narodnoe Slovo* newspapers. Sergey Ezhkov says that state inspectors were scared to go ahead with this news before the Uzbek government had given their official reaction to the events.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Censorship in Uzbekistan*, by Yelena Kandybina, Lawyer of the Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations, Moscow, *Central Asian Media Electronic List (CAMEL)* # 5, July-August 2000, [www.cimera.org](http://www.cimera.org).

<sup>20</sup> CIMERA interview, 6.09.01.

<sup>21</sup> CIMERA interview 12.09.01.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

## Self-censorship

State appointed censors are not the only ones who veto information. Editors frequently act as censors themselves, preventing articles from being published or not allowing their journalists to raise sensitive issues. The editors' fear is understandable. Disobedience, or the courage to publish the results of proper journalistic investigation, which could affect government interests in any way, can result in an editor's dismissal or closure of the newspaper. This was the case with the Russian language newspaper *Tashkentskaya Pravda* (Tashkent Truth), which was famous for its critical comments about censorship and its independent perspective on state policies. Although its editor, A'lo Khudjaev, was known to be generally loyal to the Uzbek authorities, he had a column in this weekly newspaper in which he expressed his views on current issues in Uzbekistan. The authorities tolerated the newspaper's independent stance until it organized an exhibition of newspapers and magazines articles banned or altered by censorship. After the exhibition, *Tashkentskaya Pravda's* founder, the Tashkent city khokimiyat (city council) issued a decree announcing its merger with the Uzbek paper *Tashkent Khakikati*.<sup>23</sup> A'lo Khudjaev was offered retirement.

Ten years of consistent control over the media have caused significant damage to journalists' perception of what they are allowed to say and what they are not. Before bringing up issues to do with the work of governmental agencies or individual officials, they have to think twice, and very often refrain from publishing at all. Journalists fear persecution from law-enforcement agencies, dismissal, and other forms of harassment. There have been cases where journalists were jailed after being found guilty of bribery and possession of narcotics. Majid Abduraimov, a correspondent with the *Yangi Asr* (New Century) newspaper, was sentenced to 14 years in prison after being found guilty of accepting a 1000 USD bribe. As an observer says, "the trial lacked any evidence that this money belonged to him. The case against him began after he published an article critical of the local governor. This case was a set up. It's obvious that law-enforcement agents secretly put the envelope with the money in it in his pocket."<sup>24</sup> A similar case was that of Poulat Gadoev, a correspondent with the *Adolat* (Justice) newspaper. He was also accused of bribery and sentenced to 12 years in prison. In a country where the role of the judiciary remains under the control of the executive, the courts act as government agents and not as the independent guardians of justice.

## V. Media system/structure

### General

There are around 507 newspapers, 53 television and radio stations, and 4 news agencies in Uzbekistan. This data, however, is subject to change due to the peculiar registration, the merger of newspapers, and the possible launch of new media outlets. It worth noting that

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<sup>23</sup> Decree issued on 05.07.01.

<sup>24</sup> CIMERA interview, 17.09.01.

official data in Uzbekistan often contradicts reality. In the ten years since independence no independent media survey has been carried out in Uzbekistan. Despite impressive statistics, Uzbek media does not offer a variety of content to viewers or readers. Instead, almost 90 per cent of media outlets publish or broadcast identical information or play the same music. Ironically, journalists, editors and managers understand the oddity of this situation try to find solutions. However, they have to operate within a strictly limited framework and their efforts are therefore unlikely to bring notable change. Newsgathering alone is a very difficult exercise in Uzbekistan, and even if information is found there is no guarantee that it will be published. However, the situation is less strict in the regions than in Tashkent. The local authorities sometimes turn a blind eye to critical or problematic reports, as long as they do not go too far. The authorities also have different attitudes to publications in the Russian and Uzbek language. Because media in Uzbek has a wider audience, and is therefore more influential than Russian, it is subject to stricter surveillance. Besides which, publications in Russian only appear in the capital and they cannot have a significant effect on the overall population of Uzbekistan.

### **Print Media**

According to the State Press Committee, there are 507 newspapers in Uzbekistan with an annual circulation of 2 million. As the table below shows, about 90% of them are state-funded, including three national dailies. The Cabinet of Ministers and the Parliament run two of them, and the third is owned by People's Democratic Party, which is closely affiliated to the government. The "Sharq" publishing house in Tashkent prints national dailies and newspapers belonging to the ministries, government institutions, and public organizations, magazines, and almost all commercial newspapers. Regional, city and district newspapers are printed either by "Sharq" or by regional publishing houses. Each region ('oblast') has one publishing house controlled by the local authorities. There are no opposition newspapers in the country.

<b>NEWSPAPERS</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Publication</b>
National	4	5 days a week
National	72	Weekly
Regional	162	Weekly
City newspapers	47	Weekly
District newspapers	45	Weekly
Commercial newspapers	50	Weekly
Public organizations	63	Weekly
Ministerial	133	Weekly
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>507</b>	
<b>MAGAZINES</b>		
State	99	
Public organizations	34	
Commercial	24	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>157</b>	

## **Structure of the print media**

### **State publications**

There are primarily three national daily newspapers funded by the state: *Ouzbekiston Ovozi* (The Voice of Uzbekistan) has editions in Uzbek and Russian; *Khalq Suzi* (The Word of People) also has editions in Uzbek and Russian; and *Pravda Vostoka* (Truth of the East) which is published in Russian only. These papers publish official state reports, such as information about the President's activities, his speeches, state laws and decrees, propaganda and literary works. They never criticize the authorities and in general do not face logistical problems, while the editors of these papers carry the same status as government officials.

Regional, city and district newspapers are state-subsidized and financed from the budgets of those administrative authorities that founded them. Neither national nor regional newspapers are ready to work in the free market and would not survive without state funding.

Each ministry, ministerial committee, state institution, public organization and stock exchange has its own publication. They are published nationwide on a weekly basis, and derive most of their income from subscriptions and are partly financed by their founders. Subscriptions to such papers are often compulsory for staff working for the founding organization, otherwise they are generally unpopular and there is low demand for them. State-funded newspapers all have a similar format, contents and point to make to their readers, who buy them to read new decrees.

### **Advertising newspapers and commercial publications**

These are financially stable and multi-page newspapers in which advertising dominates. They offer their readers a comprehensive catalogue of property for sale or exchange, shoes, foodstuff, professional services, teaching courses, etc. The biggest and the most professional newspaper of this kind is *Chastnyi Sector* (Private Sector), and its Uzbek edition *Mulkdor*, which is published in Tashkent and controlled by the "Prestige" press group (see the description below).

The only popular print media in Uzbekistan are commercial newspapers of a semi-tabloid nature. They carry a mixture of advertising and "yellow" information, which is taken from the Internet or re-printed without permission from the Russian press. The two biggest tabloid newspapers, *Darakchi* (Herald) – published in Russian and Uzbek – and *Prestige* – published in Russian – belong to two different media groups. *Darakchi* is owned by STV, the private television and radio station in Samarkand. Its founder, Firdavs Abdulkhalikov, was recently appointed as President Karimov's deputy spokesman. *Prestige* is part of "Prestige" press group, which is controlled by Mikhail Perper, an advisor to the president on economic issues. Another tabloid newspaper, *Tasvir* (Review), appeared on the market recently and has a second-rate quality when compared to *Darakchi* and *Prestige*. *Tasvir* is published in Andijan and belongs to Shukhrat Akhmedov, the founder of the *Echo Dolini*

(Valley Echo) private radio station. He has also been given the governmental position of deputy Chairman of the State Press Committee.

The content of Uzbek language tabloids differs considerably from those in Russian, even if they are the same newspaper. *Darakchi* in Uzbek publishes original material and offers a bigger diversity than its Russian counterpart. For example, *Darakchi* in Uzbek publishes articles on how to apply for work outside Uzbekistan, articles on crime, several interviews with Uzbek pop stars, theatre actors and a martial arts champion, as well as compilation material about western lifestyles and famous actors. The same edition in Russian, however, is fully comprised of re-printed material from the Russian press and hardly qualifies as a tabloid. Still, both editions share the same crosswords, puzzles, stories and weekly horoscopes. Ozod Soliev, former editor of *Darakchi* and current general director of *STV*, explains the difference in content between Uzbek and Russian newspaper by saying that they have different readers and that the mentality of Uzbek readers differs a lot from Russian readers.<sup>25</sup> In both languages *Darakchi* is printed in an A4 format, but the number of pages varies each issue within the range of 48 to 52. The declared circulation of the Uzbek edition is 170,000 and the Russian is 47,000.

*Prestige* is popular among educated, Russian-speaking, city-dwellers, primarily because it publishes full listings for Russian television, cable and satellite television. *Prestige*'s founder, Mikhail Perper, says he has agreement with Russian television channels and buys their listings in US Dollars, something other newspapers cannot afford to do. He then sells the listings to local papers in the national currency, soms.<sup>26</sup> Some articles published in *Prestige* are taken from Russian Internet sites and can rarely be found in other commercial newspapers, either because they do not have access to the Internet or because they simply try the easier option of re-printing articles from the Russian "yellow press" (tabloids). Some of its readers also claim that *Prestige* has the most accurate horoscopes, which is a noteworthy point given the scale of horoscopes' popularity amongst readers. *Prestige* is printed on 30 pages in an A4 format and its declared circulation is 170,000.

*Tasvir* is part of the Shukhrat Akhmedov media group. *Tasvir* is published in Tashkent and targets Uzbek language readers, in both the capital and the Ferghana valley. There is less social gossip and interviews with pop stars in this paper, but plenty of personal drama and crime stories, family issues and articles about morality. *Tasvir* is printed on 32 pages in an A4 format and its declared circulation is 26,000.

Because of the lack of original material, especially in the Russian language commercial newspapers, these newspapers hardly qualify as tabloids, but they are far more popular than any of the official press. These newspapers' owners are government officials and they have no intention to start publishing serious newspapers. One of them speaking confidentially, said that in the present circumstances in Uzbekistan it is better to stay on the safe side and publish yellow papers, rather than dig any deeper and face trouble.

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<sup>25</sup> CIMERA interview with Ozod Soliev, 13.09.01.

<sup>26</sup> CIMERA interview with Mikhail Perper, 23.10.01.

Tabloids are the only income-generating newspapers in Uzbekistan and most of their income comes from sales on the street and, to a lesser extent, advertising. Like television and radio stations they are facing a crisis in advertising. Another source of their income is the so-called 'undeclared sale'. As journalist Sergey Ezhkov says "the big tabloids like *Tasvir* and *Darakchi* are printed in much larger numbers than is officially declared. Therefore, sometimes the income from undeclared sales, which is untaxed, is bigger than the income from official sales".<sup>27</sup> Both *Tasvir* and *Darakchi* are donors for their sister-companies, the *Echo Dolini* radio station and the *STV* Television and Radio Company.

## Other newspapers

*Business Vestnik Vostoka* (Business Herald of the East) was founded in 1991 and has a good reputation amongst readers of independent (under Uzbek conditions) and intellectual newspapers. It occasionally publishes critical articles, but as journalist Sergey Ezhkov says, "each critical article is a potential problem for the newspaper".<sup>28</sup> When in 2000 *BVV* published an article about abuses of power by the then-Deputy Chairman of the Taxation Committee, Mr. Kuralov, its editor was summoned several times to the Cabinet of Ministers to answer 16 complains Mr. Kuralov had filed against the paper. However, incidents like this do not stop *BVV* from publishing critical material and articles on the rising problems in Uzbekistan. *BVV* also publishes good analytical pieces on international politics and the neighboring Central Asian countries. However, news and articles make up only 5 to 7 pages of the newspaper, and the rest is advertising and announcements. It is one of the few newspapers that is still staffed by experienced journalists, unlike many new print media. It is printed in Russian on 16 pages in an A4 format, and its declared circulation is 200,000.

*Mokhiyat* (Importance) is a publication belonging to the *Turkiston-Press* independent news agency. Founded in 1999, this newspaper does not enjoy mass popularity. It attempts to raise critical issues within permissible limits and carries endless references to the President. It re-prints and translates articles from the Internet and world news agencies, but in contrast with other newspapers it always mentions the source. *Mokhiyat* was one of a very few Uzbek newspapers which published a detailed account of the attacks in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001.

All newspapers must buy paper from the Foundation for the Democratization of Mass Media. However, there is no official decree on this and the rule is an unofficial order made by the State Press Committee. Paper is exported from foreign companies, designated by the State Press Committee, despite the fact that Uzbekistan has the infrastructure to produce paper. According to Sergey Ezhkov, newspapers are not allowed to buy paper from anywhere other than the Foundation for the Democratization and Development of Media Support, even if they find it cheaper elsewhere<sup>29</sup>. Editors say that the price of paper represents 20-30% of their budget. None of the Uzbek newspapers, except tabloids, are self-financed and they struggle to pay for paper. Newspapers, which cannot pay are printed

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<sup>27</sup> CIMERA interview, 12.09.01.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> CIMERA interview, 12.09.01.

on credit, which makes them even more dependent on the state. The printing houses belong to the state and are managed by the local authorities; they are therefore complicit in censorship and another tool used to control the media. In one incident, the editor of the *Samarqand* weekly newspaper refused to comply with the censor's recommendation to remove 30 lines from an article titled "Who Loves the Fatherland More", and instead the article went to print with a blank spot. The punishment the newspaper faced was a refusal by the publishing house to print its next issue<sup>30</sup>. The publishing house reminded the editor that he had not paid for his paper for several months and that unless he cleared the debt, no more editions would be published. Apparently, the newspaper's debt did not bother the publishing house once the editor showed more obedience.

## Television and Radio

### Statistics

TV stations	32
Radio stations	7
TV and radio companies	15
TOTAL	53

### State Television

The Uzbek Television and Radio Company, *UzTeleRadio* (formely UzGosTeleRadio), has four television and radio channels and covers the whole of Uzbekistan. Channel 1, *Uzbekiston*, follows a strict official line and broadcasts official news and presidential speeches, as well as topical programs, traditional musical concerts and movies made during the Soviet era. Channel 1 is mostly popular amongst the older generation and its audience is primarily concentrated in the provinces. Channel 2, *Yoshlar* (Youth), as its name suggests, targets a younger audience. It has so far proven to be the most promising and popular channel amongst younger and middle-aged people. It has a different format from the other three channels and offers its viewers a variety of programs. Its program *Davr* (Times) broadcasts news, social and economic reports from the whole of Uzbekistan (this program has its own correspondent in the regions) and gives a different perspective to events (within permissible limits, in the context of Uzbekistan). Compared to the other channels, *Youshlar* has wider entertainment programming (pop concerts, interviews with pop stars, western movies), which boosts its ranking amongst its audience. These two channels cover about 97% of Uzbek territory. Channel 3, *Toshkent*, is available only in the capital and surrounding area, while Channel 4, *Khalqaro kanali* (International Channel), covers 62% of the territory. *UzTeleRadio* has branches in all of Uzbekistan's regions and its audience ranges between 60-70% of the whole country. *UzTeleRadio* had to switch to

<sup>30</sup> See *First Step in Uzbekistan to Combat Censorship*, Isqandar Khamkho, *CAMEL*, May 2001 ([http://www.cimera.org/publications/ind\\_camel.htm](http://www.cimera.org/publications/ind_camel.htm)).

self-financing several years ago, but it has been unable to fully achieve this goal and although part of its financing comes from advertising, the state still covers the biggest share of its expenses.

Not all areas of Uzbekistan are covered by television and radio. In the mountainous areas on the Uzbek-Tajik border the terrain prevents the transmission of radio signals. The only solution to reaching these areas would be to launch satellite television, but this option is hardly likely due to low demand and the scarcity of people who live there.

## **Independent Television**

There are around 19 independent television stations whose broadcasts are limited to the area in which they originated. None of them broadcasts to the whole country or even to a neighboring region. Most of them broadcast only local news and congratulatory programs, and only a few re-broadcast materials from foreign media. There are 6 television stations in the Ferghana valley in the following cities:

- Bekabad
- Namangan
- Margilan
- Kokand
- Andijan
- Zafarabad

There are two television stations in Bukhara and one in Samarkand. In the central-north part of Uzbekistan, there are television stations located in:

- Zarafshan
- Uchkuduk
- Jizzak

There is only one private television station in Tashkent that does not broadcast original output and limits itself to movies and other entertainment programs. There is only one private television station in the Karakalpakstan autonomous republic in Turtkul. To the north from Tashkent there are television stations in Chirchik and Yangiabad. The only private television and radio company in the Khorazm region, *ALC*, was closed in 1999.

Private television stations rely on their relationship with the local authority. Disagreements or disobedience may bring about a station's closure, as happened to the *ALC* television and radio company in Urgench. There have been instances when local authorities have tolerated criticism, but in most cases journalists and the station management face problems if a critical report that mentions government officials is aired. As Saodat Omonova, an *STV*

journalist, says, “management is so afraid they will be deprived of their license that they pressurize journalists not to touch sensitive issues”.<sup>31</sup>

The main source of income for private TV stations comes from advertising and congratulatory programs. On average one minute of advertising on television costs around 3 USD. However, the advertising culture is not firmly rooted in Uzbekistan and there is only a limited number of advertisers. Roughly 90% percent of commercials come from foreign companies such Coca-Cola and BAT, while locally produced adverts hardly make up 10%, leaving regional television companies to rely on congratulatory programs. Since none of the regional television stations reach an audience of more than 2 million people, foreign advertisers are reluctant to invest in local advertising. Instead, they advertise their products via the state *UzTeleRadio* company. “After *UzTeleRadio* became self-financing, most of their advertisers switched to Channel 2 (*Yoshlar kanali*),” said Ozod Soliev, *STV*’s Director General. “The Youth channel takes all the advertising, leaving us without our main source of income”<sup>32</sup>.

In order to tackle this problem, five private television broadcasters in the Kashkadarya region set up the “Kashkaradya Tele Media” association, so as to offer advertisers a wider audience. “The audiences of five television stations taken separately are not very large,” said Abdurashid Sharipov, director of the “Kaldirghoch” TV station. “Each of us individually is of no interest to foreign advertisers. Now, united in an association, we can offer advertisers a joint audience of about 1.5-2 million people. 90% of the money will be divided equally between the 5 stations”. This initiative offers one solution to the advertising problem, however the situation could worsen. In a last 5 years the number of foreign companies, and consequently advertisers, in the country decreased to two, BAT, the tobacco multinational, and Coca-Cola. After a recent row and an investigation into the latter that was launched by the Uzbek authorities, one could doubt its future in the Uzbek market. Local industry is underdeveloped and so far there are no indications that the situation will change in the near future. These are negative factors for private television and radio stations which rely heavily on advertising.

The Republic TV and Radio Industry Corporation (RTRC) distributes all of Uzbekistan’s television and radio programs. Its main client is the state-funded Uzbek TV and Radio Company, which accounts for roughly 90% of its orders. Independent television and radio stations account for the remaining 10% share of orders. RTRC also leases transmitters to some of them. Old equipment remains an obstacle to the development of a sophisticated telecommunications network. According to the head of RTRC, Mr. Atamukammedov, eighty percent of RTRC’s equipment is worn out, and it is planning to use USD 120 million of international credit to change television and radio transmitters in the center, south and south-east of the country; in Navoi, Kashkadarya, Khorezm, Bukhara and Karakalpakstan.

Television stations that lease RTRC transmitters cannot do live broadcasts. According to Mr. Atamukammedov, this is a precondition set by the State Press Committee, which has ordered all material and programs to be shown only as recordings.

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<sup>31</sup> CIMERA interview, 13.09.01.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

## Private Radio

There are seven private FM radio stations in Uzbekistan. Five of them originate in Tashkent: *Radio Grant*, *Sezam*, *Uzbekim Taronasi*, *Khamrokh* and *Oriyat Dono*. *Echo Dolini* (Echo of the Valley) is located in Andijan, and *STV Radio* in Samarkand. As far as format, style and output is concerned, they are all similar: news updates, western, Russian and Uzbek pop music, chat shows, games, sport and topical programs. They broadcast 24 hours a day in both Uzbek and Russian. According to an order made by the State Press Committee, there must be a 50/50 ratio between the two languages. FM broadcasts are so notoriously similar that listeners cannot differentiate between them unless reminded by presenters. “All Fm stations have similar broadcasts because we do not have proper radio training,” said Akmal Saidov, the *Uzbekim Taronasi* radio news editor. “We all listen to Russian radio stations and try to imitate them. There is no access to anything else. We don’t have a radio journalism or presentation school and we have to learn on the spot from our own mistakes.”<sup>33</sup>

In the five years that FM stations have existed in Uzbekistan, no survey or marketing research has been conducted. A’zamkhon Khakimov, commercial director of *Sezam* radio, says that radio stations do not have enough resources for surveys and that they rely on the ratings of big advertisers, such as Coca-Cola.<sup>34</sup> FM stations also rely heavily on advertising, and to attract advertisers they have to fight harder than television stations. Four FM stations broadcast to the same geographical area and two of them, *Echo Dolini* and *Uzbekim Taronasi*, reach as far as Bukhara. Naturally, the biggest share of advertising goes to these two stations, as well as *Sezam*.

Radio *Sezam* is that project of an Uzbek-American joint venture known as “Rubicon Radio Systems”, which was launched in 1998. This station enjoys popularity mostly amongst Uzbek listeners and is focused on strengthening its broadcasts in Uzbek. At the moment, 60% of airtime is in Uzbek and 40% in Russian. 80% of its income comes from advertising. The station broadcasts to Tashkent and the surrounding areas of Sirdarya region and Gulistan. According to A’zamkhon Khakimov *Sezam* plans to reach audiences as far as Bukhara next year.<sup>35</sup> *Sezam* is the only station amongst seven other FM stations that has the ambition to develop a network of stringers and transform itself into a 24-hour information channel. “We want to be taken seriously,” said Khakimov.<sup>36</sup> To boost its ratings and attract more advertising *Sezam* invited Muzaffar Mirzabekov, the popular television and radio presenter, to do a program, and this has paid off. According to rough estimations, his programs attract around 100,000 phone calls from listeners.

The recording company “Taronas Records” set up *Uzbekim Taronasi* in 2000. Despite the fact that this radio station is relatively new, it has already established itself as one of the

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<sup>33</sup> CIMERA interview, 17.09.01.

<sup>34</sup> CIMERA interview, 15.09.01.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

most popular FM stations. Its strength lies in the latest singles and pop news available to it through its parent company. 80% of its income comes from advertising. According to Akmal Saidov, *Uzbegim Taronasi*'s news editor, "Taron Records" is launching a new television channel called "TV Taron" next year<sup>37</sup>.

*Echo Dolini* is a private FM station belonging to the Shukhrat Akhmedov media group. It is the only FM station outside Tashkent, covering almost all the Ferghana valley, and it also reaches audiences in Samarkand. It is, however, inferior to *Sezam* and *Uzbegim Taronasi* in terms of content and music selection.

Unlike private television stations, which are relatively evenly distributed amongst Uzbekistan's regions, FM stations are concentrated in the capital. Seven FM stations for a population of over 25 million is a ridiculous number. The Bukhara, Khorazm, Syrdarya, and Surkhandarya regions, as well as Karakalpakstan, do not have broadcasts in FM at all. However, it is estimated that each region in Uzbekistan has the potential for 10 FM stations and that the infrastructure for it is already there<sup>38</sup>.

## Internet

The Internet is still a luxury in Uzbekistan, and to access it one has to have not only money, but also a great deal of patience. The government via UzPAK, a governmental company for developing the information exchange network, monitors seven Internet providers and every Internet user. Basically, the government has control over Internet sites and with the exception of Western-run Internet centers, such as CAFÉ and the Uzbek-American Business Center, can control who logs on. These include public access Internet sites such as the Ustoz Foundation, as well as the system available at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy (both set up with international assistance).

Statistics on the number of Internet users in Uzbekistan are rather contradictory. According to UzPAK there are more than 80 thousand people using the Internet in Uzbekistan. Abdulla Aripov, Deputy General Director of the Post and Telecommunications Agency says the numbers increase by 15-20% a month.<sup>39</sup> However, private providers say that there can hardly be more than 10 thousand Internet users and that the numbers are growing very slowly. Internet prices range from 600 to 800 soms (around 1.5-2 USD) per minute, which makes it very expensive in the present economic conditions. And high prices do not mean users get an adequate service. At best, it takes 10 minutes to get connected and even when connected there is no guarantee that after a short while one won't be disconnected. This is particularly annoying for private radio stations, who rely on the Internet for news, as they copy Russian websites and translate stories into Uzbek. News editors complain that UzPAK frequently blocks Internet access and they are left with no other choice but to broadcast outdated information. The only explanation for the problems with Internet access

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<sup>37</sup> CIMERA interview, 17.09.01.

<sup>38</sup> Herald-TV # 69, Internews-Uzbekistan, June, 2001.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

is the underdeveloped telecommunications network, which is unable to cope with both the increasing number of Internet users and having to monitor them at the same time.

## **Licensing**

In order to operate in the media market, all private television and radio stations must obtain a license from the Interagency Coordination Committee. From a legal standpoint the licensing procedure was supposed to be significantly simplified after the adoption of a new Licensing Act in 2000, which first and foremost annulled the need for an annual renewal of licenses for private and non-governmental television and radio stations. In general, the new law provides for a permanent license, but this can be limited to a period no shorter than 5 years (this licensing law is discussed in the section on legislation, above). Like with other laws, it has yet to become a reality. The Interagency Coordination Committee (ICC) has a very complicated structure, consisting of the State Press Committee, the Ministry of Interior, the Customs and Taxation Committee, the National Security Service, the Ministry of Justice, the Post and Telecommunication Agency, and even UzTeleRadio. The involvement of law-enforcement and security agencies in the ICC is more evidence of the state's reluctance to allow freedom of press in Uzbekistan. Common sense would suggest that these agencies have no relevance to the media at all. The participation of UzTeleRadio in the ICC, represented by its Director-General, is another factor that casts doubts on its objectivity and impartiality. It suggests that UzTeleRadio's regional branches, which have to be registered as independent media organizations, will get preferential treatment compared to private broadcasters. Secondly, by registering its competitors, the participation of state-funded UzTeleRadio in other media organizations may cause problems for private broadcasters wishing to obtain a license.

Each body within the ICC structure must separately consider documents submitted by television and radio stations. The law limits the period of consideration of license applications to 30 days, but, as already said, this period is unrealistic given the complexity of the ICC structure. One of the radio stations launched in Tashkent last year, *Oriyad-Dono*, waited 2 years to get registered and the *Khamrokh* radio station waited 1.5 years. The ICC claims that most of the applications are turned down because organizations fail to submit the required list of documents; there are flaws in their charters, or they have failed to pay their transmitter fees. However, taking into consideration that fact that experts from different government departments and ministries inspect documents, it is hard to follow a universal design that would please all of them. The existing complicated and confusing procedure allows the government to control independent broadcasters and get rid of those who do not follow the official line. That was a case with *ALC*, and the private radio station *Moy Gorod* (My City) suffered the same fate, when it was closed in 1999 due to re-broadcasting BBC World Service programs. Its application for registration in 2000 was also turned down, officially because it had submitted outdated documents. In April 2000, the ICC also closed down the independent Urgench newspaper called *Panorama*. *Panorama's* publisher, Konstantin Aksianov, had purchased his own presses and was thus able to produce and distribute his newspaper without undergoing censorship by the Committee for the Protection of State Secrets. However, private printing presses also

require licenses and in April the State Press Committee, without any explanation, revoked *Panorama's* license to print and warned other printers not to print the newspaper.

There is serious concern about the wide powers given to the ICC and its interference in the management and editorial policy of private television and radio stations. For example, the ICC presented a claim against the *Aloka AK* private television station in Gulistan, which concerned the re-transmission of a Russian channel, TV-6. The ICC argued that it “took up too much time in the station’s broadcasting schedule and recommended the station broadcast locally-produced programs in Uzbek.”<sup>40</sup>

In an interview with Internews, an American media NGO, the ICC’s Vice-Chairman, A. Jikaev, accused private broadcasters of a lack of professionalism and creativity and advised them to seek expertise from their competitor, UzTeleRadio<sup>41</sup>. However, arguments like this only partly give the true picture. Visits to several independent stations convinced CIMERA that their staff has enough training and creativity to make good programs. The problem is that they are in an extremely vulnerable position and depend fully on the local authorities and state bodies like the ICC, which can easily revoke their licenses. *STV* journalist Saodat Omonova says that almost all material that criticizes local authorities is followed by a visit to the governor’s office<sup>42</sup>. The possibility of getting a license depends on the relationship between the company’s management or founders and the local authorities. It is easier to get a license and work if the local authority is one of the station’s founders.

## V. Journalists

Uzbek journalism survives only because of enthusiasts. In a world of tight controls and threats, as well as low salaries, it is difficult to remain an objective and fair journalist. The State Press Committee’s argument that there are no professional journalists in Uzbekistan only partly reflects the reality. It is true that the majority of those who work for the media need good and long-term training. However, even those skillful journalists who went through training with international foundations are not allowed to work freely. Solih Yah’yaev, an Internews correspondent in Samarqand says that he was forced to quit the *STV* television station, where he worked before becoming a full-time Internews staff member, because the company’s management asked him to sign a letter saying that he would not co-operate with foreign media.<sup>43</sup>

At the moment, most of those who work in newspapers or news agencies are elderly people, whose mentality and understanding was shaped during the Communist era. It is difficult to expect much of them journalistically, especially when they are close to retirement. Despite the fact that number of people who enter the Journalism Faculty of Tashkent State University doesn't decrease each year, only a limited number of graduates

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<sup>40</sup> Herald-TV # 39, Internews-Uzbekistan, June, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Herald-TV # 37, Internews-Uzbekistan, April, 2000.

<sup>42</sup> CIMERA interview, 13.09.01.

<sup>43</sup> CIMERA interview, 13.09.01.

work in journalism. The reason is twofold - financial and ideological. A journalist's average salary is 20,000 soms (around 15 USD) and young journalists are therefore discouraged from starting professional jobs in journalism and turning to private business instead. Recently opened private and non-state television and radio stations offer slightly higher salaries of around 30 UDS, however this is not enough to cover basic expenses. Another reason recently graduated journalists are turning away from the media is the low prestige the profession holds in society, and the inability to work in a free environment. There are a limited number of young people who are ready to survive the daily stress of looking for news, investigating the story, and talking to government officials for such low financial remuneration.

Bribery is widespread among journalists in Uzbekistan. The publication of a promotional article about an individual, enterprise or event costs around 200 USD. The situation is particularly bad in the regions. There have been cases where journalists approached the directors of collective farms or enterprises and blackmailed them with writing the truth about what they have seen unless paid for a positive piece. According to Sergey Ezhkov, a correspondent with the *Pravda Vostoka* newspaper, the system is corrupt from top to bottom. "Journalists also have to pay editors to see their reports published. They call it "hurmat" (respect). Without *hurmat* nothing would be published, especially in state-owned newspapers."<sup>44</sup>

## **VI. The activities of local and international organizations**

### **Local initiatives**

At the local level, the Foundation for the Democratization of the Mass Media is charged with training journalists. It organizes round-tables and discussions, mainly on issues such as media democratization, which appear irrelevant to many journalists who say that when there is no democracy in practice, talking about it is pointless. The Foundation also organizes competitions like "Journalist of the Year" and "Rights and Duties" as part of its efforts to stimulate journalists. There has been some work done on increasing Uzbek journalists' legal knowledge. The Association of International Law, established in November 2000, set up a legal clinic for journalists: a program that envisages seminars and consultations on legal issues for Uzbek journalists in Tashkent and the regions. According to its chairman, Ravshan Khakimov, the Association will collect information on violations of journalists' rights and, based on this information, work out recommendations for parliament and the governmental press committees. It also aims to help journalists with court cases, free of charge.

A local NGO, the Media Resource Center, together with the national office of UNESCO, are working on a long-term training program for Uzbek journalists. The draft program seen by CIMERA seems to suggest that the proposed training will only consist of lectures by

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<sup>44</sup> CIMERA interview, 12.09.01.

Uzbek professors, some of whom don't have any media experience at all, let alone an understanding of how the media operates. During our meetings, UNESCO and the Media Resource Center indicated that they would welcome international partners in this project.

### **International initiatives**

There have been a number of short-term seminars for Uzbek journalists, mainly organized by the Open Society Institute and Internews. These training sessions provided theoretical and practical sessions, which according to their participants were very useful. However, most of the interviewees stressed that these sessions were short and that long-term practical training would have had better results.

Internews, which started operating in Uzbekistan in 1995, concentrates mainly on television development, by providing training on all aspects of TV work, both technical and editorial. The support it gives to private television stations is essential. This includes journalism and management training, legal support, marketing consultation and technical support. An integral part of the training programs are the news exchange programs that Internews facilitates. The weekly program, "Zamon" (Time), features news stories from many of the independent stations. "Zamon" functions both as a teaching tool and as the only alternative nationwide news program from state television. Uzbek journalists produce it, with consultation from Internews. Internews also conducts short-term training sessions for journalism students at the Uzbek National University. Students are taught to use video equipment and make television reports. These training sessions are proving to be useful as they fill gaps in the Journalism Faculty's curriculum, which concentrates on theoretical knowledge rather than practical skills.

The Open Society Institute, in partnership with ASTRO Media, organized press-clubs for the exchange of information and experience between journalists. At the time of writing this report there were three press-clubs in Tashkent, Namangan and Bukhara.

Deutsche Welle has held three seminars on radio production in Uzbekistan. These were two-week training sessions for radio journalists, covering news writing skills, interview techniques, live presentation, vox pop gathering and radio production techniques.