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25 YEARS LATER: IN SEARCH OF THE WORD FOR HARMONY. ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE STATE-BUILDING PROCESS IN KYRGYZSTAN

25жылдан кийин: гармония үчүн сөз издөө. ММКнын Кыргызстандын мамлекеттик түзүлүш процессиндеги ролу

25 лет спустя: в поисках слов для гармонии.
Роль СМИ в процессе государственного строительства в Кыргызстане

Annotation: *the phenomena brought by 1989, perestroika and glasnost, changed radically the ways of delivering and exchanging information. Media used to realize the function of promoting state ideology and being the means of propaganda. Nowadays, means of mass communication become an instrument for informing and also educating individual, who is involved into state-society relations as well as their transformation. Creating awareness, raising consciousness, educating, shaping opinion, providing space for public dialogue and political negotiation – modern media become a basis for decision-making, social and political action, and, therefore, transformation of political and social settlement in the process of state-building.*

Аннотация:*1989-жылы пайда болгон – кайра куруу жана айкындык көрүнүшү, маалымат алмашуунун жана калкка жеткирүүнүн ыкмаларын түп-тамырынан бери өзгөрттү. ММКлар (массалык маалымат каражаттары) мамлекеттик идеологияларды жеткирүүдө жана ишке ашырууда үгүттөө каражаты болуп саналат. Азыркы мезгилде массалык маалымат каражаттары маалыматты жеткирүүнүн, андан тышкары, мамлекет менен коомдун ортосундагы мамилелерде жана аны трансформациялоодогу адамдын же индивиддин тарбиясынын куралы болуп калды.*

Аннотация: *Явления, появившиеся в 1989 году - перестройка и гласность, коренным образом изменили способы подачи и обмена информацией. СМИ используются для реализации и продвижения государственной идеологии и являются средством пропаганды. В настоящее время средства массовой информации стали инструментом информирования, а также воспитания индивида, который вовлечен в отношения между государством и обществом, а также в их трансформацию.*

Keywords: *media; state-building; ideology; propaganda; Kyrgyzstan.*

Негизгисөздөр:*массалык маалымат каражаттары; коомдук түзүлүшү; идеология, пропаганда; Кыргызстан.*

Ключевые слова: *СМИ; государственное строительство; идеология; пропаганда; Кыргызстан.*

The falloff the Berlin Wallbecameamanifold symbol. On all sides, it was considered the beginning of a new era. The fall signified a promise of a rise of new-wave cosmopolitanism in a new – unified! – world, that would be less constrained by ideological resistance, non-penetrated borders and information blindness. "Wind of change" brought wider opportunities of global mobility, new local and international actors, and a great range of means of mass communication. Gradually, modernization and informatization were coming into people's lives across the Soviet Union bringing hope for equality and happiness, freedom and democratic representation, peace and harmony.

Unfortunately, states' and citizens' responsibilities and rights were easier to define than to implement right away. Patterns of thought and behaviour are hard to transform: in totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, citizens do have less rights but also bear less responsibilities, especially in decision-making sphere – you are told where and how to go, and it is quite appealing for many.

Twenty-five years later, we have to ask ourselves if results of the transformation are of the nature that has been expected. Collapse of the USSR, surge of nation-states' revival, and predominance of the centrifugal forces' combined with regional cooperation attempts and globalization effect – brought the sense of confusion into state-/nation-building attempts in the region.

Central Asian republics still face a complex task: to figure the ways of structural and social integration of their own citizens into the space of independent state along with inhibition of social tensions, creation effective social and state institutions.

Perestroika, Glasnost, Media, and New Challenges of State-building

The phenomena brought by 1989, perestroika and glasnost, changed radically the ways of delivering information to an individual in – soon to become! – the Post-Soviet space, including five Central Asian republics. Initially, *glasnost* was mostly a basis for strengthening future economic transformation and development in the time of economic decline [McCauley 2008: 407]. By instituting perestroika through glasnost, the authorities were hoping to strengthen the system, not destroy it [Daniels

2007: 384], while increasing individual investment into social and economic development based on change the citizens' behavioural patterns [Rakos 1991: 93-96]. Besides usual tactics of blaming the previous government's wrongdoings, Secretariat of the Soviet Communist party pushed for more-rights-and-freedoms policy: religious buildings were returned to people, creative works restored, and transparency level increased in media sphere.

Glasnost became a powerful phenomenon very soon – rendering influence on many generations yet to come. Its consequences included greater access to historical information and documents [Powell 2012: 112; Beissinger 2002: 59], as well as day-to-day political developments. Television played a special role in reviving a sense of participation of random citizen. Broadcasting of the Nineteenth Party Conference in 1988 and the first session of the Congress of People's Deputies in 1989 made politics more open for people's understanding and involvement [Boyd 2006: 17]. In January 1987, the BBC service signal was allowed to get in, in December 1988 – Freedom/Free Europe radio became available for Soviet citizens. New analytical programmes appeared: *120 minutes* (*120 minut*), *Look* (*Vzglyad*).

Gradually, famous Soviet periodicals started to 'take a risk' of criticism. Among them: illustrated bi-monthly *Ogonek*, multilingual weekly *Moskovskie novosti*, *Literaturnaya gazeta*, and even *Izvestiya*. "The Law on the Press" (in summer 1990) forbade censorship. Further, attacks on CPSU, military, and even Gorbachev himself started to appear in press.The information space was becoming more democratic and national-oriented – something that political elites has to come to terms with.

Glasnost also gave a voice to minority groups and national consciousness. However, it demanded the new institutional order that will reflect political, social, and cultural changes in the newly independent states after 1991. In this sense, state-building means developing capacity and legitimacy of the state institutions for the sake of guaranteeing good governance.

Capacity of the state implies effective political mechanisms and resources for managing the consequences of rapid transformation, including economic decline, social unrest, or even violent outbreaks, and meeting rising social expectations. Citizens' expectations of the state and state's capacity to fulfill those expectations may be exchanged through different formal and informal channels, including media sphere. Alan Whaites notes that "even the most repressive states seek to stake a claim to some form of legitimacy, essentially a claim that state institutions have a moral right to continue to lead the statebuilding process" [2008: 5].In democratic state, higher level of satisfaction and trust towards state institutions provide higher level of legitimacy. There might be negotiation, dialogue, or bargaining on the institutions' functions present. Media, being an institution itself, serves as a platform for this kind of dialogue among all the actors.

Back in the Soviet times, media was realizing mostly the function of promoting state ideology and being the means of propaganda, influence, and opinion and behavior formation. The process was mostly one-sided and many developments, especially regarding wrongdoings of the state, as well as protests, or calamities and catastrophes (e.g. one in Chernobyl) were out of Soviet citizens' knowledge. Nowadays, accountability and transparency as well as continuous exchange of views and negotiating between society, elites, state and its institutions are surely basis for higher legitimacy level in democratic state, which the Kyrgyz Republic is considering itself.

Unfortunately, political turmoil and economic degradation due to revolutions and inter-ethnic clashes in the South brought Kyrgyzstan on the edge of being a 'fragile state' characterized by the following: corruption, high crime rates, low pensions and scholarships, bad conditions in orphanages and nursing homes, insufficient support for invalids and poor, high-level unemployment of the youth etc. Political institutions are present and functioning, but the quality of their performance, aggravated by severe corruption and nepotism, is not satisfactory. Interestingly, we might realize it only in case of openness when certain information is accessible and delivered to those interested.

Media in the Kyrgyz Republic

According to InterMedia research (2008-09), more than 90 percent of Kyrgyz households own or have regular access to a television, translating to around 3 million 787 thousand 903 (USAID 2012). TV of different kind is still the most popular medium, including local, state, satellite, or online channels. Local and state broadcasting is realized both in Kyrgyz (state language) and Russian (official language) (58 % prefer to watch TV in Kyrgyz, 36, 5 % - in Russian, 5 % in Uzbek [USAID 2012]. Article 20 oftheLawoftheKyrgyzRepublic "On state language of the Kyrgyz Republic" (2004) declares the state language as a main one in spheres of culture, art, and mass media.

Kyrgyz Public TV and Radio Broadcasting Corporation (former Kyrgyz National TV and Radio Broadcasting Corporation) is state-run, and includes: Public First Channel, incorporating Informational Centre Ala-Too, Zamana studio, Ibarat studio, youth editorial office, social-economic programmes

editorial office, Doolot studio, Kelechek stdio, along with Kyrgyzteleflim (Kyrgyz TV Movies production studio)(KTRK 2014). It is the most popular among spectators, followed by the Russian First Channel [USAID 2012]. Other channels are:

5 Channel – owned by "5 Channel" CJSC (that also includes Radio Record)
NTS – private
NBT - private
Piramida - private
Osh TV - private, Osh
MIR (CIS-wide)

Radio is often available and listened to at work places and in public transportation. 44 percent own a radio, translating into 2.5 million listeners (IFDC 2012). The most famous radio stations [Guzei 2015] are:

Europa Plus
Russkoye Radio
Radio Record
Auto Radio
Ekho Moskvy
Kyrgyzstan Obondoru
Mayak
Almaz - private, Bishkek
Tumar FM
Hit FM
Piramida

Kyrgyz Public TV and Radio Broadcasting Corporation - state-run, operates Birinchi Radio, Min Kiyal FM, Tunku Beles Radio, and Baldar FM Radio. The corporation also includes Republican TV Centre.

Newspapers are still widely available but their popularity is declining due to the new media and technologies dissemination. There is currently a discussion on overreporting of the number of the copies printed by KG media. Great amount of press is of entertaining or advertising nature – easiest way to support itself. Printed editions include [Janyzak 2015]:

Slovo Kyrgyzstana - government-owned, published three times a week
Vecherniy Bishkek - private daily
Argument and Facts in Kyrgyzstan
Delo N
MSN - private daily
ResPublica - private daily
Litsa - mouthpiece of Ar-Namys Party
Delo No - private weekly
Liberalnaya Gazeta - private weekly
Obshchestvennyy Reyting - private weekly
RIF Obozreniye - private weekly
The Times of Central Asia - Bishkek-based, English-language, regional coverage. (BBC News - Kyrgyzstan profile – Media)
De Facto Press – weekly (75 000)
Pravda Kyrgyzstana – monthly (5000)
Alibi – twice a week (4000-5000)
Kyrgyz Tuusu –twice a week (6000-7000)
Super INFO – weekly (99000 -100000)

In the mobile sphere, Sky Mobile (Beeline) and MegaCom operators are retaining strong positions (around 85% of the total mobile subscriber base). The first GSM network was launched in 1998, since then, number of mobile subscribers has grown rapidly, from a few thousand in 1999 to around six million by early 2013 - by this stage mobile penetration was around 110%. As for fixed-line services, the country's national teledensity was 9% in 2012, not much different from the figure a decade earlier;

teledensity was around 25% in the capital, but only 5% in the rest of the country" [BuddeComm 2015; Media Support Center 2015; Inform KG 2012].

According to ITU (Internet World Stats) and IMF [2010], there were already 2.2 million internet users by June 2010, or 39.8% of the population. This number is even higher in State Communication Agency data: 2 379 298 (comparing to 1 141 071 in 2009 and 1 377 224 in 2010). In 2012, SCA says, there were 3 493 143 users. Households with PC in 2012 accounted to only about 7%, while around 50% of users were going to cybercafés, or had access to internet at their workplace [BuddeComm 2015]. However, internet services are growing in the market. In 2014, the number of so-called Internet-cafes is declining as computers and internet access are becoming cheaper and easier to have at home. The process is much faster in the capital. The Kyrgyz blogosphere was also considered lively - more than 2,000 blogs. Some of them use local portals, including kloop.kg.

Among news agencies are: Kabar (state-run), AKIpress (private, more than 3.5 visitors a year), 24.kg (private), CA-NEWS.org vb.kg, vesti.kg, etc. [BBC 2015]. According to Soros-Kyrgyzstan research, most of the people use e-mail as well as searching for news updates); they are also quiet interested in entertainment (e.g. namba.kg has more than 3 million users), and education through the Web [Moldalieva 2013].

Interesting and successful phenomenon is Diesel forum (diesel.elcat.kg) (about 3 million users) – self-regulating Internet community for sharing any kind information of individual and/or social interest as well as citizens' opinion. In terms of public and social activity, as well as personal or formal opinion expression, Facebook is gaining more interest among citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic. However, more people follow pages that are connected with purchasing, entertainment, and transportation services in Kyrgyzstan [Socialbakers 2015] (but citizenship is not defined by the research). News pages are also gaining interest of the followers on Facebook:

Vb.kg – 26 427

Kloop - 6571

Vesti.kg – 718

Telekanal NBT - 431 likes

Ferghana.ru – 9 722

Stanradar – 5482

BBC Kyrgyz service (Kyrgyz Kyzmaty) – 10 513

(Interesting to see with the background of the BBC World News – 7, 7 mln and BBC News – 10, 5 mln, Euronews – 774 000).

Some resources of international character have quiet impressive audience on Facebook:

U.S. Embassy Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan – 24 002

USAID Central Asia – 16 245

OSCE Academy – 10 792

Fund Soros-Kyrgyzstan (NGO) - 4307

UNDP in Kyrgyzstan – 3 078

UNHCR Central Asia – 804.

Small non-governmental and non-profit organizations are still not very attractive:

Foundation for Tolerance International (NGO) - 128;

Analytical Center Polis Asia (community organization) - 167,

NGO Forward - 309.

Nevertheless, some of them as Bishkek Feminist Collective (NPO) (1 322 followers) are becoming popular, and even stand as a point for demonstrations and protests gatherings. It is also worth mentioning that certain resources with narrow specialization are gaining popularity while implementing certain state and/or social functions:

Trip to Kyrgyzstan (Ya otdihaiu v Kyrgyzstane) - 30 373 (Follows a noble objective of promoting the Kyrgyz Republic worldwide, attracting visitors and tourists, as well as Kyrgyzstani citizens to travel in the country).

Fund for Help to Animals of Kyrgyzstan – 2429 (Charity Foundation aimed at realizing the rights of and mostly help to animals).

Talking about the official state representatives –practice of having a facebook page is still not some common for Kyrgyz political figures, e.g. president of the Kyrgyz Republic does not have a facebook

page. Although, younger politicians might have one, e.g. Shirin Aitmatova (2250 followers on her official page on FB).

Facebook and Twitter are becoming the scene of information-sharing and discussion of political, economic, and social developments. A lot of information was online during the political turmoil of 2010 when official news channels were silent. One of the most famous FB and Twitter hashtags *#freekg* and *#newskg* has already appeared in times of Bakiev regime.

The most popular themes in news coverage and public forums are (newspaper and web-editions - websites and facebook editions - in 2013-2014): president, government and parliament activities; local self-government bodies and mayor's activities; security – situation on the borders, water problem, energy policies (including connections with Gazprom), Islamic threat (e.g. "Hizb-ut-bankir al-islami", ISIS), narcotraffic; Customs Union; KUMTOR; corruption; historical perspectives, including revolutions and its consequences; inter-ethnic tensions of 2010; army; biometric passports; international market, international politics and economics, including financial crises and Eurointegration, etc. Unfortunately, contents connected with human rights and social justice as well as good practices is rare, and present by poor vocabulary.

Internet media is the most promising source of information, but it is still not country-wide. In addition, elder generations are not technically-savvy, while younger generation shows political apathy, and extensively uses media for entertainment purposes.

Political settlement, state-building and media in Kyrgyzstan

Political settlement is represented by actors (official figures, political elites, and citizens), interests of the actors, and institutions [Deane, 2013]. Political elites and actors in power or/and with many resources in hand are interested in maintaining status quo that stable state can guarantees and gaining a legitimate status among population, business elites – in stable markets, people – in safety and prosperity. Those interests are stipulated by beliefs, values, ideas, ways of perception, and views that are being shaped, transferred, or transformed by media as well.

Initially, political situation was definitive for the development of Kyrgyz mass media, not vice versa. After gaining independence, the flow of information was permitted to fill the space of the democratic republic. Of course, the media were not 100% free. Besides the Law of KR *On Mass Media* (1993), there were additional documents adopted: *On protection of professional activity of journalist* (1997) and *On guarantees and freedom of access to information* (1997).

The most suppressive era is considered to be the times of Bakiev regime, which is associated with silencing and even closing certain media sources (e.g. access to Ferghana.ru in 2012). At the time, such sources as Twitter of individual blogs became highly politicized.

After the revolution a new wave of "free media" was observed in Kyrgyzstan. In AKIpress or 24kg, sections appeared for discussion and comments. OTRK, Channel Five and NTS were broadcasting debate shows. Information platforms like Atameken.kg and Fergananews.com have been newly-established or resumed their work in new form. Nevertheless, presence of necessary legislation and official pledges do not guarantee actual perfection in practice. According to 2013 Global Scores of Freedom House, Kyrgyzstan has 35 points (out of 100) and "partly free" status, i.e. obstacles to access, limits on content, and violations of user rights.

Lack of financial resources cause lower quality of news coverage broadcasters – some media are supported or owned by politicians, opposition leader, etc. According to media forum "Corrupt mass media or media as business" [2007], around 90% of media are subsidized. There is no legal regulations present regarding economic basis of mass media. Media representatives are reluctant to reveal the sources of their financial support and income (some of which is coming from advertising and political campaigning). Sponsors are often perceived as advertising spenders [Internews 2012].

Information wars, libel, black PR, and populism in media are quite often. According to the 2009 poll, 81% of people would trust to Kyrgyz Public TV and Radio Broadcasting Corporation (with lower level of trust in Bishkek, and higher – in Naryn, Osh, and Batken), whereas Internet was trustworthy only for 22.4 % of respondents. The level of trust decreases with age of citizens [IRI 2009].

In fact, lower level of confidence in the media sphere that is not able to provide information up to certain standards of truthfulness is rather showing awareness of people in the country, and might decrease possibility of conflict due to rumours dissemination and provocations. Ideally, freedom of media should create stable basis for freedom of expression and pluralism of opinions but 'rumour factor' in Osh developments showed negative side of the situation. In fact, mobile phones contributed to rumours distribution as information flow was restricted, while *Forum*, *Alibi*, and *Kyrgyz Tuusu* began publishing nationally biased articles [Melcin and Umaraliev 2011: 49]. At the same time, such media sources as

Diesel forum (according to its code of conduct) were realizing restrictive policies regarding nationalistic propaganda messages. Further, media were used for humanitarian aid collection demonstrating a clearly positive impact of new technologies. Some media were critical regarding state capacity to act fast and effectively in a critical moment.

At time of crisis, well-developed media institution can promote or ruin legitimacy of the state institution. Historically embedded legitimacy was especially promoted by the media, especially government-owned ones, while talking about 2000 years of Kyrgyz statehood. At that period, understanding of state-building was almost completely intertwined with nation-building, which can be seen as a primary idea behind promotion of the Kyrgyz Epic of Manas and the Seven Precepts of Manas. However, nation-building, especially supported by media campaign or even occasional radical expressions, might spur tensions, cause social exclusion and even interethnic conflict at a certain stage. Democratic state-building is to wider extent aimed at social integrity, promoted both horizontally and vertically. Thus, the most 'difficult' type of legitimacy is one gained/regained thanks to the effective performance of state, its leaders, elites, and institutions.

It leads us to two-sided character of modern media, which has become not just means of information exchange but means of mass communication and mechanism of what Rakos called "countercontrolling responces" [1991] - it is not just about framing information, but about making and sharing conclusions and opinions, and even solving certain problems of political, social, or economic nature, and exercising control over abusive power-holders. Glasnost was "intended to prompt and reinforce the self-management skills and controlling responses that are either prerequisite behaviours to, or component responses of, efficient work behaviour" [Rakos 1991]. But it surely over-fulfilled its intended purpose – bringing possibility of controlling responses into all the social spheres and realms.

Nowadays, people have more opportunity to become part of this public action, but they must learn to get involved, to participate, to act, making a deliberate choice to obtain and reflect on information and data regarding certain local, state, and international developments. Thus, media is becoming an instrument for informing and also educating INDIVIDUAL, who is involved into state-society relations as well as their transformation. The right direction might be obtained only if media representatives demonstrate high level of professionalism, as well as independence and courage (especially, in countries where the law is not able to guarantee complete safety for journalists) combined with journalist ethics. Promotion of empathy and tolerance through presenting of certain reflections and good practices would not be futile if becomes a norm.

The video "Tolerance (What does tolerance mean to you?)", which was uploaded on YouTube on Mar 16, 2011 in the framework of social campaign for tolerance in Central Asia got only 986 views but with the help of individual participation and involvement it might have been shared and discussed becoming a background for creating more videos aimed at nation's unification and trust-building.Another great example 'on the ground' isestablishment of the first public service broadcasting organization and the first community radio in the Kyrgyz Republic [UNESCO 2012-2013].

In our present reality, "Kyrgyzstan - Our Common Home" – famous motto that had to help in bringing a renewed sense of citizenship to representatives of all generations, ethnicities, religious groups of Kyrgyzstan going through the challenges of identity void caused by instant ideological and political changes strengthened by despair of "wild capitalism", instead of welfare state support and market economics benefits. Economic (including USSR economic crisis of 1980s and global economic crisis of 2010s), political (political crises connected with two coup-d'état in 5 years in Kyrgyzstan) and social (including identity crisis) complications and cultural and educational disaster are seen as basis for the recurrent outbreaks of interethnic tensions, starting from 1989. And role of media in their resolution is highly contradictory. As media is a part of opinion and behavioral patterns formation in social and political settlement, people need higher level of intelligence and responsibility lest to be misled by manipulation through information.

Becoming a member of one's community, state, region and world without losing one's sense of identity is a great challenge for any person brought into the whirlpool of tensions of the contemporary environment in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. As individual is part of a process of state-building in our rather democratic reality, for media being supportive in such an enterprise, there are some additional recommendations: training of media-trainers; including introductory courses for promoting media-education into school and, especially university curricula; supporting journalism education; reforming curricula; developing clear state strategy for media support and development, including special support for local and community-based media; developing media development indicators for better understanding of the existing processes.

Transfer from presidential to parliamentary-presidential form of government, new anti-corruption laws, lower level of endurance for elite impunity, participation of general public in political and social discussions (often with usage of new technologies) as well as in undertaking actual initiatives (e.g. support of individuals from vulnerable social groups) etc. – demonstrate a certain shift in attitudes and practices in Kyrgyzstan. However, the positive indicators are rather sporadic and contradictory, even though providing good practices background for future development, stability and inclusiveness.

Conclusion

Media participation in state building can be present through the following scheme:

Information delivery and exchange – Awareness- building – Consciousness-raising - Education and Opinion-formation - Communication/Negotiation between political and social actors – Action of political and social actors – Positive transformation of political and social settlement, institutions-building, and good governance realization.

Additionally, means of mass communication play significant role in strengthening or undermining state institutions' legitimacy based on confidence of 3the citizens, while legitimate and effective state institutions are basis for stable development of a country.

Mass media nowadays may be seen as power realm, 'fifth estate' in the framework of a democratic state, where official voices and oppositional critics are heard, along with opinion of the international actors, as well as of 'regular people.' Role of mass communication both in nation-building and uniting people, or its capacity to ignite inter-ethnic strife is extensive but choice is always there for state and social actors. Many invisible borders and walls still exist in the era of globalization, which creates grand opportunities and great obstacles, signifying empowerment and vulnerability of individual at the same time. Perhaps, the 'golden middle' between cyber-utopianism (belief that new media and technologies will bring relieve and resolution to all the problems) and grave scepticism while following the path of pluralism and respect might become a way to a truly democratic state, sustainable institutions, and responsible individuals. It is not media itself that create a positive and negative contribution, it is people behind the words and perceiving those words that make change happen.

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