

# The Many Challenges of Native Language Journalism in Central Asia: The Case of Kyrgyzstan

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The influence of the Russian language is still apparent in almost all spheres of life in Central Asia. Despite the new states’ policies of developing their native languages—policies that have now been in place for nearly 30 years—Russian remains a key language in the realms of politics, education, economics, culture, and information technology. The mediascape is no exception. In Kyrgyzstan, as in other neighboring Central Asian states, journalism is mostly bilingual. Kyrgyz and Russian—recognized in the Constitution as the state and official languages, respectively—can be used equally for legislation and other official pronouncements.

Depending on the language used, the coverage of particular events

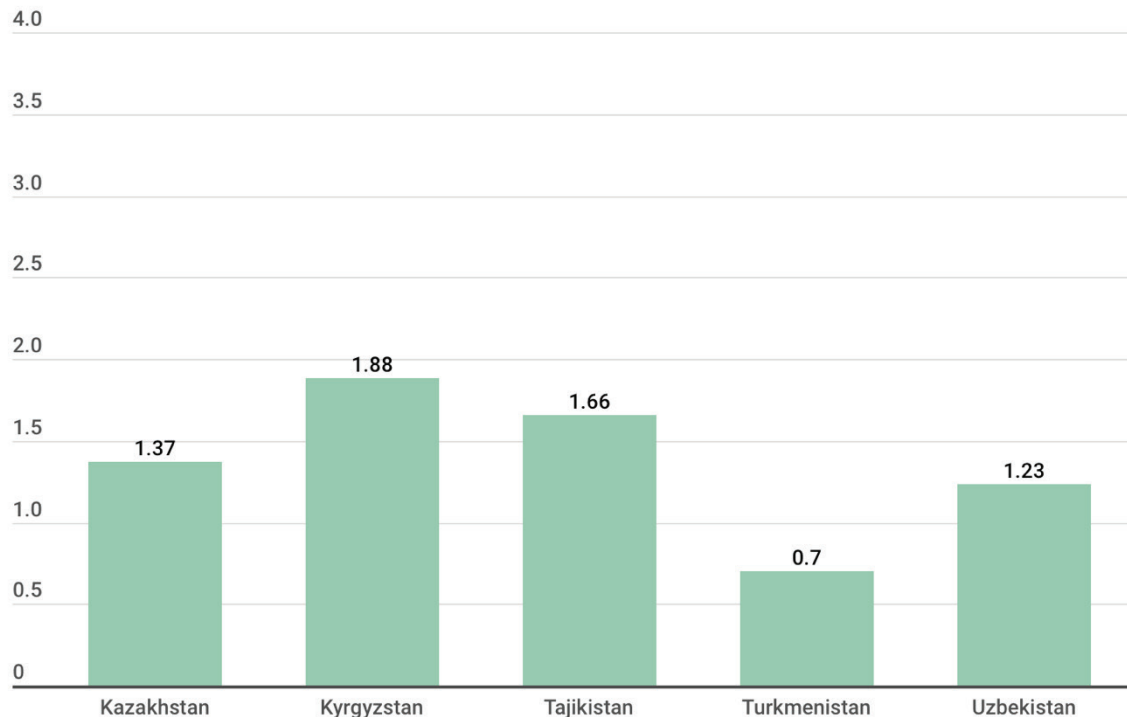
and issues varies in tone, emphasis, content, and perspective. Russian-speaking news outlets are more Bishkek-centric and some are likely to cover stories from a Russia-oriented perspective, while Kyrgyz-language mass media are more conservative and “provincial” in the sense of doing more reporting on regional issues. Oftentimes, Russian-speaking mass media have wider public resonance and social consequence than Kyrgyz-language outlets. Kyrgyz-speaking news outlets are often considered to be biased and to carry unverified information, making them closer to tabloid journalism than Russian-speaking media, even if the latter have also produced what is called “yellow press” (*zheltaia pressa*). The regional director of

IWPR in Central Asia, Abahon Sultonazarov, summarizes well the many issues faced by Kyrgyz-language media outlets:

News websites in Kyrgyz were mostly tabloid [yellow press]. Or they belonged to certain politicians. They could be opposition members, current and former politicians, and so on. Kyrgyz is a beautiful language, but you know, it was used, I would like to emphasize, unfortunately, for blackening, uncovering who slept with whom, what they did, who is the relative of whom. Kyrgyz is spoken in rural areas. The majority of people in our region [Central Asia] live in rural areas and they are the electorate. The politicians used mass media to discredit their opponents.<sup>1</sup>

Based on a study of 21 countries across Europe and Eurasia, the IREX 2018 report on media sustainability<sup>2</sup> ranks professional journalism in Central Asian countries at a very low level in terms of their quality and professional standards (see Figure 1). Some of the IREX report’s points highlight the main issues that this paper will discuss. These include the observations that, “Entertainment content tends to dominate. When the media do publish articles on political or socially important topics, the quality is

**Figure 1. IREX media sustainability assessment for Central Asia**



*Source: IREX, Media Sustainability Index 2018*

low” (Kazakhstan); “A code of ethics for journalists has been in effect since 2007, but it has little impact” (Kyrgyzstan); “Television broadcasts do not present a balance of opinions, and reports are usually written in the first person” (Tajikistan); and “The most common violations among Uzbek journalists are favoritism and plagiarism, as well as the use of a single source of information” (Uzbekistan).<sup>3</sup>

This paper investigates Kyrgyzstan’s mediascape in the country’s native language and the challenges it faces. It focuses on online media, which represent a significant share of Kyrgyzstan’s media consumption today. Although there are no generally accepted data on the level of Internet penetration in the country,

estimates reach up to 80 percent. According to a Digital Central Asia report, Internet penetration is at a low 35 percent,<sup>4</sup> while M-Vector research estimates it at 59 percent,<sup>5</sup> and calculations by local official institutions are way too high, at above 80 percent.<sup>6</sup> A large share of the population still prefers to receive news via traditional mass media; nevertheless, news coming from the Internet is increasingly prevalent across the country.<sup>7</sup> While the traditional mass media (TV, newspapers, and radio) can be effectively controlled by the government, online media in general exist without censorship and make the media environment in Kyrgyzstan fuzzy and messy by spreading fake news, sensational crime stories, gossip about celebrities and officials, etc.

This paper is based on official statistics, interviews with local and international media experts, and content analysis of Kyrgyz-language news sites. The expert interviews were conducted between December 2018 and March 2019. The content analysis comprises five Kyrgyz-language news sites—one state-funded and four private. After discussing the changes in Kyrgyzstan’s linguistic landscape, this paper explores the country’s mediascape, discusses the problems in Kyrgyz-language online media, and advances some recommendations for addressing these issues.

### **The Growth of Kyrgyz Language**

Given the Soviet past and ethnic composition of Kyrgyzstan,

the Kyrgyz language was and remains a minority language in Bishkek, the capital city. Press releases of all kinds (from state departments, international institutions, and public and non-governmental organizations alike) are usually composed and disseminated first in Russian. Press releases in Kyrgyz are thus either translations from Russian (sometimes low in quality and difficult to understand) or unavailable entirely. Notwithstanding, production in Kyrgyz is growing: more and more movies and TV series are being produced in and/or dubbed into the national language. A good amount of local literature in Kyrgyz is available, and Kyrgyz translations of foreign literature can be obtained as well, although there are only a few. Furthermore, some theater performances are now delivered in Kyrgyz. However, Kyrgyz is rarely used in academia; academic research is still mainly produced in Russian. This is explicable by the fact that the majority of Kyrgyzstan's scholars are representatives of the Soviet generation: they studied in Russian and have limited resources to translate their materials into Kyrgyz and to use the national language in their research. The situation is quite different in the provinces, where Kyrgyz is more widely used and Russian is losing its foothold.<sup>8</sup>

Language use is the object of a growing debate in Kyrgyzstan, yet not at the same level as it has been for decades in neighboring Kazakhstan. Positions diverge between those who want to promote a more proactive Kyrgyz-speaking policy and those who want

Russian to retain its status. The first group usually expresses fear of the loss of Kyrgyz culture, traditions, and values together with the loss of language. Some urge the government to implement the state (Kyrgyz) language policy.<sup>9</sup> Some insist that the status of Russian as an official language should be revoked<sup>10</sup> and that Kyrgyz should replace it in all spheres of life, while also encouraging the learning of foreign languages.<sup>11</sup> Some express concern that the quality of education in Kyrgyz is lower than that in Russian, thus causing Kyrgyz-speakers to lag behind in all spheres.<sup>12</sup> The second group, comprised of advocates of Russian, says that Russian should be strengthened and enriched because it helps to preserve Kyrgyzstan's cultural and historical legacy, including the Soviet one.<sup>13</sup> A third group worries about Russian proficiency diminishing and Kyrgyz being unable to function as a state language, seeing in this paradox a sign of the decline of literacy in the country.<sup>14</sup>

The various issues of language translation and linguistic purity are frequently taken up by mass media in different ways, sometimes producing agreement that Kyrgyz and Russian should not confront each other and should develop in parallel,<sup>15</sup> and sometimes accusing official institutions responsible for language policy of damaging the Kyrgyz language.<sup>16</sup>

One article, for instance, criticized journalists for crafting new words and encouraged them to use Kyrgyz words instead:

Our writers [journalists] have one bad habit. It's an illness of using foreign words, which are not necessarily pleasant to the ears, in their articles. Although such a "method" might seem peculiar to people who are not familiar with ancient words in our mother tongue, it feels petty, "inappropriate," to those who value the worth of words. [...] In the past, Kyrgyz people used to call wealth that is hidden in a secret place *qan salyq* [king tax]. For example, people say "the pirates could not find the king tax sniffing over the night." [...] Today, the journalists write "the president's personal foundation"—why not just write "the president's king tax?" [...] It is an insult and shame that the Kyrgyz army calls our soldiers *sarbaz* even though we have the word *jooker* in our mother tongue. This word [*sarbaz*] was used for the knights of Kokand Khanate that attacked and invaded Kyrgyz people in its time. *Sarbaz* is a Persian word with the meaning of "knight." By the way, the soldiers of Manas were called *choro*. Or to call them *eren* is also suitable.<sup>17</sup>

Another article denounces journalists for using the wrong words:

Lately we are hearing some journalists say the word *kar* (snow) with two "a"s, which is "*kaar*." Only one "a" is used in the word *kar*. It is said, "*Kar jaady*," "*kar tüştü*" (it snowed). It is said, "*Kar kalyñ jaady*" or "*kar juka jaady*" (it snowed heavily or it snowed lightly) [...] while "*kaar*" is used for angry people. For example, it is said, "one got very angry." It means one is upset. [...] One of our singers has been singing the verse "*Bolgondursuñ ömürgö özüñ cherik*" incorrectly. The sound director who recorded the song and the music editor who gave permission to broadcast it should not have permitted the song to be aired until the words of the song

were corrected. Unfortunately, they didn't. The song "Kyzyl örük" has been sung wrongly for a long time. We would like to appeal to the editors and singer who do not understand the difference between "sherik" and "cherik." "Sherik" means "friend, comrade." In the song "Kyzyl örük" it has this meaning. But "cherik" is the name of one of the four tribes of Kyrgyz people.<sup>18</sup>

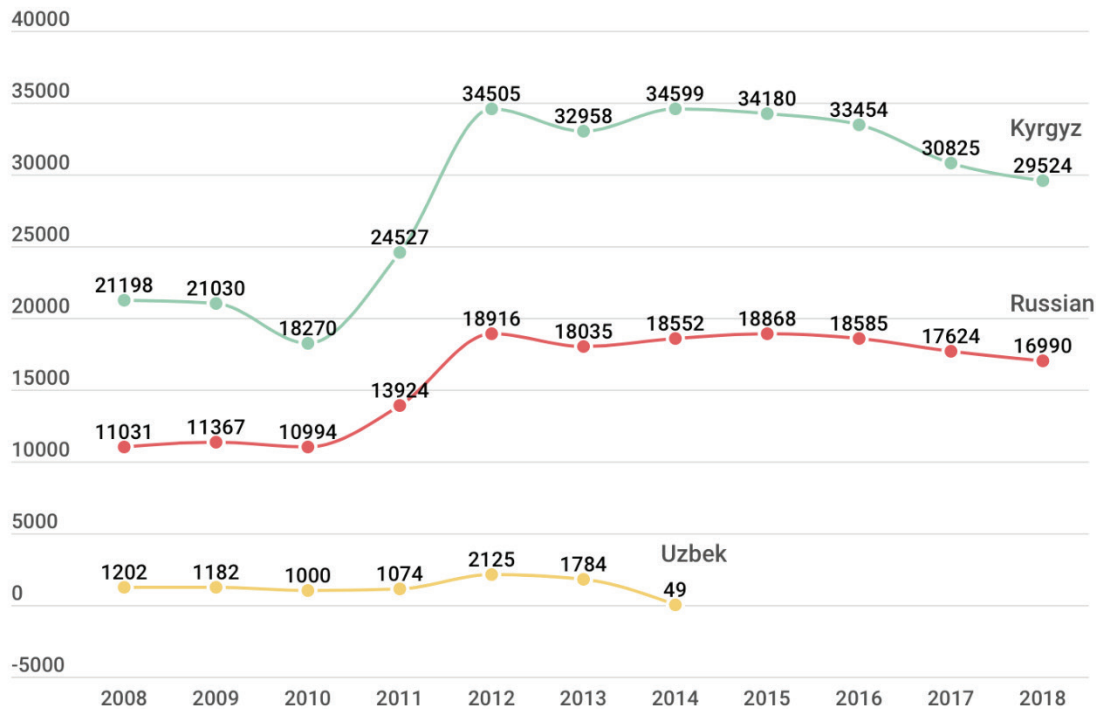
A good way to follow the growth of the Kyrgyz language is to look at secondary education. It has remained trilingual, with Kyrgyz, Russian, and, to a lesser extent, Uzbek being the main languages of instruction. Pupils graduat-

ing from secondary schools are required to take the National Test in order to apply for higher education in the country. Nowadays, the test is available in two languages: Kyrgyz and Russian. Before 2014, pupils also had the option to take the test in Uzbek, but due to reforms to the test system, Uzbek is no longer available.

As we can see from Figure 2, there is a huge difference between the numbers of National Test takers in Kyrgyz and Russian. There are typically twice as many pupils taking the test in Kyrgyz as in Russian. In 2008, a

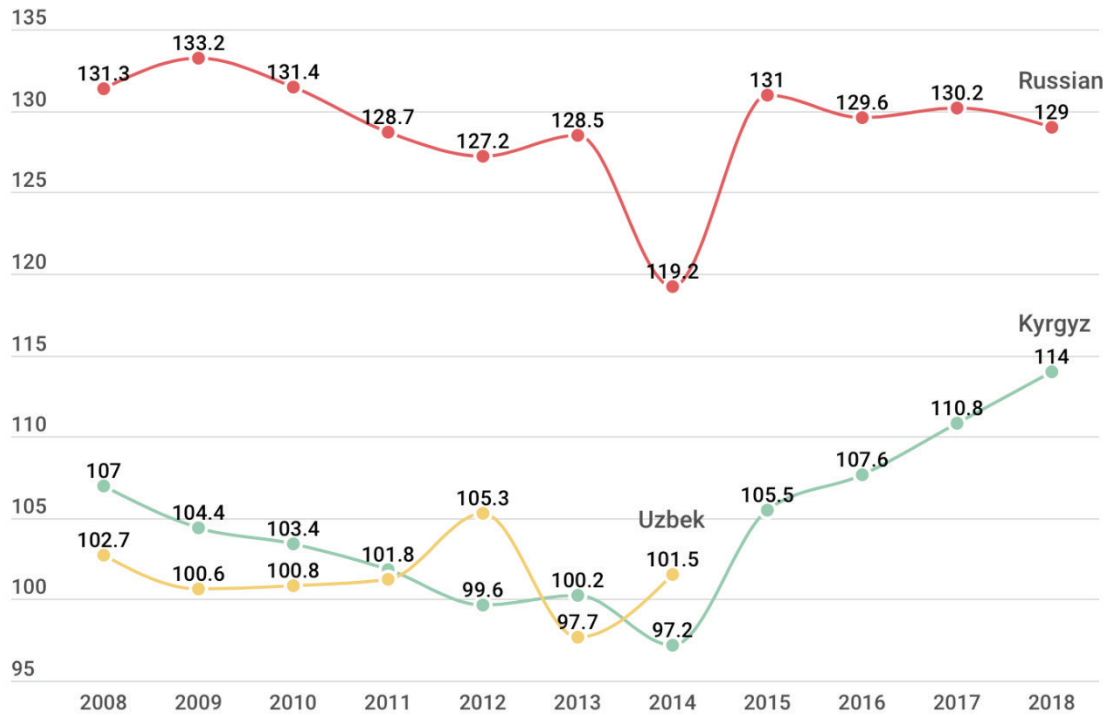
total of 21,198 students took the test in Kyrgyz, twice as many as the 11,031 students who took it in Russian. That year, 1,202 students took the exam in Uzbek. As for 2018, 29,524 took the test in Kyrgyz and 16,990 in Russian. However, as we see in Figure 3, the average score earned by Kyrgyz-speaking test-takers is typically lower than that of their Russian-language counterparts, revealing the difficulties that Kyrgyz-speaking schools have in reaching the level of their Russian-speaking counterparts and developing a full-fledged Kyrgyz language.

**Figure 2. Number of pupils taking the National Test in Kyrgyz, Russian, and Uzbek over the past ten years**



Source: Center for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods, *Testing.kg/eng*

**Figure 3. Average score of test-takers for the past ten years**



Source: Center for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods. *Testing.kg/eng*

### **Kyrgyzstan’s Mediascape and Its Bilingualism**

In such a linguistic context, what is the state of the media landscape in Kyrgyzstan? According to Kyrgyzstan’s Ministry of Justice, which grants licenses to mass media, there are 2,564 registered mass media in the country.<sup>19</sup> However, online media are not included in that list, which counts 1,392 newspapers, 666 magazines, 394 TV and radio companies, and a number of almanacs, periodicals, video studios, books, newspaper and magazine supplements, and programs. The Ministry of Justice does not specify the ownership type (public or private), language,

or location of these media.

Importantly, not all of the mass media registered with the Ministry of Justice are operational—many exist only on paper. According to research conducted in 2013, the number of functioning media outlets in the country was only around 200. The Mass Media Support Center in Kyrgyzstan recorded about 112 print media.<sup>20</sup> A local organization called Tinchtik Monitoring Service lists on its webpage 27 radio stations that are available online.<sup>21</sup> The National Union of Television and Radio Broadcasting lists 30 TV channels available by satellite to Kyrgyz citizens.<sup>22</sup> The traditional media landscape is thus

much more limited than the official number of outlets registered would suggest.

The majority of Kyrgyzstan’s mass media are located in Bishkek, even if there are also a few media outlets functioning in the regions, mostly covering local issues. Some state-financed TV channels, radio stations, and newspapers operate on all levels (national, regional, and district): the TV channels KTRK, ELTR, 5 Kanal, and Piramida; the radio stations Birinchi Radio, Kyrgyz Radio, and Min Kiyal Radio; the newspaper *Erkin Too* (5,000-6,000 print circulation); and the online outlet *Kabar.kg* are all state-funded and are the

largest of the regional state news media. Besides these state media, the private sector also has a strong presence. The majority of the mass media, regardless of their type, fall into this category. Private TV companies, radio stations, and newspapers can operate in the country once they receive a license from the Ministry of Justice. In contrast to traditional mass media, online media outlets are not obliged to register.

As for the international media corporations functioning in Kyrgyzstan, three of them are widely visible and present in both traditional and new formats: Azattyk (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Kyrgyz service), the BBC's Kyrgyz service, and Sputnik Kyrgyzstan. Although less significantly, there are also Turkish (TRT Kyrgyz), Iranian (Cairnews.com/kg), and Chinese (one-hour "Travel to China" program aired daily on the biggest public TV channel, KTRK) offerings that target the Kyrgyzstani audience.

Among international radio and TV outlets, Azattyk has the most air time. Most of its programming is in Kyrgyz, the exception being a weekly 40-minute program in Russian. Its programs range from talk shows on local political and social issues to youth and world news. Azattyk averages one hour of TV airtime per day (except on Sundays), mostly in the afternoons and evenings. Its programs have been broadcast on the private NTS channel since July 2015. Before that, Azattyk's programs used to be aired on a channel owned by KTRK, the largest pub-

lic TV company in Kyrgyzstan. Its radio programs are broadcast on the regional stations as well as for three hours a day on the biggest public radio station, Birinchi: a one-hour radio program in the mornings, a 30-minute one in the afternoons, and a 90-minute one in the evenings. Radio programs consist of local and international news, in-studio talk shows on social, political, and economic topics, etc. Azzatyk's website offers online radio programming as well as archives of past broadcasts. Azattyk runs two sites (Kyrgyz and Russian) and has a strong presence on social media, with over 1.5 million users across various platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Odnoklassniki.

In comparison with Azattyk, the airtime of BBC Kyrgyz is much more modest: 15 minutes per day on airspace owned by the public TV company KTRK. BBC Kyrgyz TV programs are described as BBC world news and are delivered in Kyrgyz. The hour-long daily radio programs of BBC Kyrgyz, which cover local and international news, are also aired on Birinchi Radio. BBC Kyrgyz operates a website in Kyrgyz and is active on social media, with over 120,000 users across Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Sputnik Kyrgyzstan, funded by Russian media holding Rossiya Segodnia, has radio programs that are aired across the country. It also has a strong presence on the Internet, providing online radio, news, video, and photo stories on its site and social media pages, which attract a combined

135,000 users. Radio programs in Kyrgyz and Russian discuss social, economic, cultural, and political issues in the country. Its online radio airs 24 hours per day. During the day, content from Kyrgyzstan is included in the broadcast, while at other times it consists entirely of rebroadcasts in Russian.

In terms of language use, almost all TV channels have some content in Russian, but most of their programming is in Kyrgyz. Two TV channels, Yntymak and Nur TV, which operate in southern Kyrgyzstan, also have some content in Uzbek. On public channels, the proportion of Kyrgyz-language content ranges from a minimum of 23 percent (Piramida) to a maximum of 69 percent (EL-TR).<sup>23</sup> Not all Russian-language content is produced in Kyrgyzstan: the majority of it is rebroadcast from Russia, especially movies, series, and entertainment programs. Private channels are all bilingual, featuring content in Kyrgyz and in Russian. One of the biggest private companies, NTS, offers 40 percent Kyrgyz content and 60 percent Russian content (with the latter being both locally produced and imported from Russia). The same trend is visible in radio. The biggest public radio station, Birinchi Radio, offers approximately 70 percent of programming in Kyrgyz and 30 percent in Russian. The exceptions are Kyrgyzstan Obondoru, Sanjyra, Min Kiyal and Kyrgyz Radiosu, which broadcast in Kyrgyz only.

Unlike television and radio, print media are usually monolingual,

either completely in Kyrgyz or completely in Russian. Kyrgyz-language print media are more numerous than their Russian-language counterparts. According to Mass Media Support Center in Kyrgyzstan, 66 of 112 newspapers are in Kyrgyz, while 21 of them are in Russian. The state-financed biweekly newspaper *Erkin Too* is in Kyrgyz and Russian. It also features local political, social, and economic news in Kyrgyz. Most of the print media are privately owned and focus more on political and social issues. Eighteen newspapers are

bilingual Kyrgyz-Russian. There are also print media in Korean, Azeri, Dungan, Uzbek, English, Uyghur, and Turkish. Most of them are bilingual with Russian content, while Uyghur and Uzbek newspapers are monolingual.

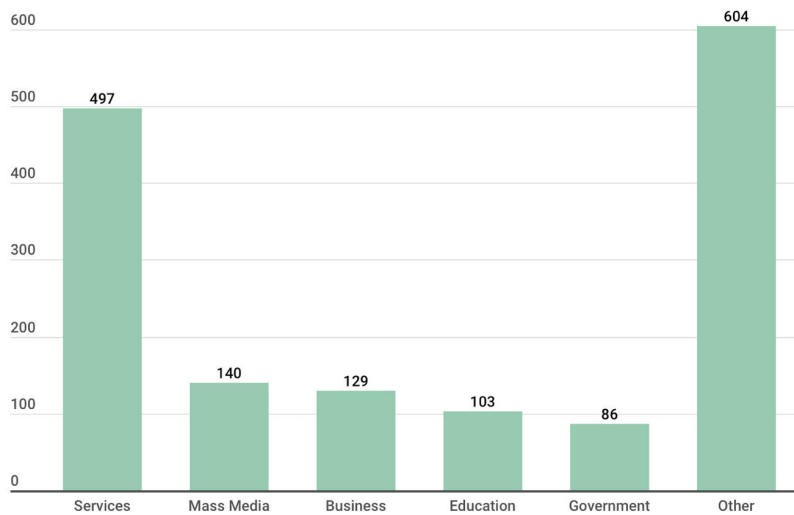
**The Kyrgyz-Speaking Online Media World**

Kyrgyzstan’s online media world is difficult to study and measure, for several reasons. First, launching a web-based mass media activity does not require state registration. Second, not all

websites are run by journalists. Activists, bloggers, experts, and the like might be running the website and competing with online media outlets for audience share. Third, a website can function and spread information among the Kyrgyz audience without being physically located in Kyrgyzstan.

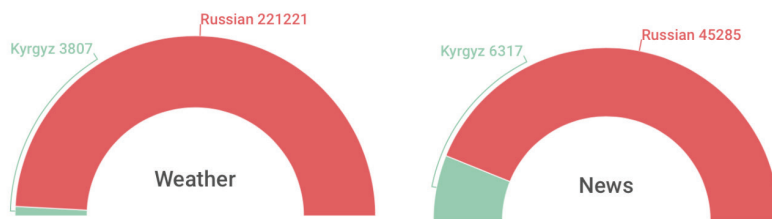
Kyrgyzstan-based aggregator Net.kg gathers information on websites that are operating in the country. As of March 27, 2019, it had data for 1,559 sites, which it groups into several categories, as shown in Figure 4. This does not include those media outlets that do not want to disclose traffic information and are therefore not captured by Net.kg.

**Figure 4. Thematic division of the Kyrnet world**



Source: Author’s compilation based on Net.kg

**Figure 5. Word usage in Kyrnet**



Source: Author’s compilation based on Yandex Keyword Statistics

Surprisingly, it is challenging to precisely identify the division between Kyrgyz-language and Russian-language media, in particular because many websites are bilingual. But one can observe high circulation among Kyrgyz-language newspapers, a growing number of Internet users consuming digital content in Kyrgyz, and more programs on public TV and radio broadcasts in Kyrgyz.

For online media, data retrieved from Yandex Keyword Statistics seems to indicate the dominance of the Russian language over the Kyrgyz language in Kyrnet. For instance, in February 2019, traffic from Kyrgyzstan shows that the Kyrgyz word for weather, *abairayi*, was used 3,807 times, while the Russian equivalent, *pogoda*, was used 221,221 times; the Kyrgyz word for news, *janylyktar*, was used 6,317 times, while the

Russian term, *novosti*, was used 45,285 times. Russian-language queries in Kyrnet are also 20 times more numerous than those in Kyrgyz, although the data show that Kyrgyz-language news websites are in demand and are consumed on an equal basis with Russian-language news portals. Indeed, according to the Net.kg ranking, of the top 20 websites, 10 are in Kyrgyz, meaning that websites in Kyrgyz and Russian are equally popular among Internet users.

Online media can be monolingual (Russian or Kyrgyz) as well as bilingual. Figure 6 shows the top 20 news sites on the aggregator service Net.kg and classifies them by language.

In this paper, I focus primarily on monolingual news sites that publish articles only in Kyrgyz. To that list, I also add several bilingual sites on the basis of their ranking on the website-ranking aggregator. For example, Net.kg shows 24.kg in its top 5, but its main page is in Russian and it has

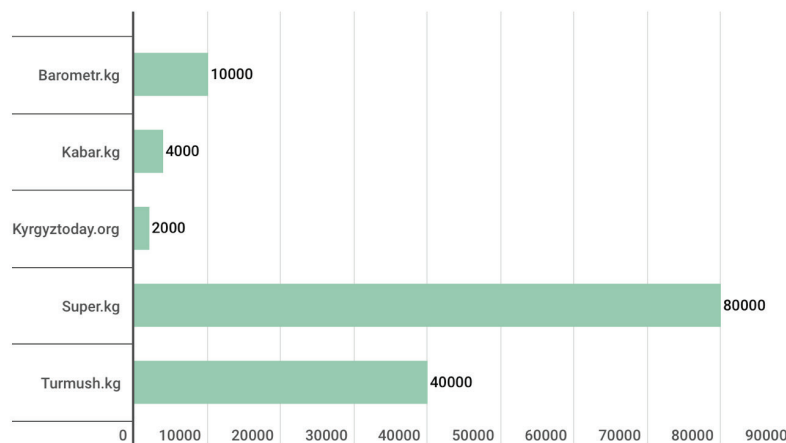
a different domain for the Kyrgyz version (24.kg/kyrgyzcha). Since I do not have traffic data for 24.kg/kyrgyzcha, I do not include this media outlet in my analysis. By contrast, *Barometr.kg* has the same domain name in Kyrgyz and in Russian; as such, I have included it in my analysis. In this paper, I investigate the following five most-visited news sites: *Barometr.kg*, *Kabar.kg*, *Kyrgyztoday.org*, *Super.kg*, and *Turmush.kg*. With the exception of *Kabar.kg*, all are private media companies.

**Figure 6. Top 20 most visited news sites according to Net.kg (listed in alphabetical order)**

Kyrgyz	Bilingual	Russian
Argument.kg	Barometr.kg	Kaktus.media
Chagylgan.kg	Eldik.media	Ca-news.org
Kalys.media	Kabar.kg and Kabar.kg/kyr	Svodka.akipress.org
Super.kg	Knews.kg	Tazabek.kg
	Kyrgyztoday.org	Mp.kg
	Sputnik.kg	Delo.kg
	Turmush.kg	
	Vesti.kg	
	24.kg	

Source: Author’s compilation based on Net.kg

**Figure 7. Daily readership of news sites**



Source: Author’s compilation based on Net.kg



**Super.kg** is the website of popular newspaper *Super Info*, a weekly with the largest print circulation in the country, at 50,000. A recent study found that it was the main print medium that respondents reported reading.<sup>24</sup> Like its print counterpart, the website is popular among Kyrgyz-speaking Internet users. The online version contains more options, such as daily news, songs, music videos, movies, and a forum. According to internet statistics, around 80,000 users visit Super.kg daily—a huge number for the Kyrgyz mediascape. The website writes mostly about singers, actors, and celebrities, as well as accidents, politics, and sports, and covers both Bishkek-based news and regional stories.

**Turmush.kg** // **Svodka.akipress.org** // **Ca-news.org**. Although these websites appear separately on ranking services, they are all part of Akipress.org, which is one of the most-visited private online media in the country. Akipress.org covers almost all spheres of life in Kyrgyzstan. It has different websites with specific content, of which these three are the most visited by Internet users, according to the aggregator. Turmush.kg's daily number of readers ranges from 40,000 to 90,000. It mostly covers news stories in regional towns and rural areas, reporting on everything taking place outside Bishkek. The homepage is in Kyrgyz and the site also has a Russian version. Svodka.akipress.org's daily readership hovers around 20,000; the site, which is available only in Russian, offers

news about crimes, lawsuits, trials, and accidents. Between 20,000 and 40,000 people visit Ca-news.org on a daily basis; the site contains news stories on Central Asia and migrants from the region. A limited assortment of international materials is also available.

**Barometr.kg**'s daily readership is between 10,000 to 20,000 people. The site, which has Kyrgyz and Russian versions, covers politics, social problems, crime, and show business as well as sports and international news. The Kyrgyz content does not usually duplicate the Russian content and vice versa.

State information agency **Kabar.kg**'s daily readership is around 4,000. Although its homepage is in Russian, it is possible to use the navigation button to go to its Kyrgyz version. It also has versions in Arabic, Chinese, English, and Turkish. Its main sections are President, Parliament, and Government, followed by Politics, Economics, Society, Analytics, and Provinces.

With between 1,000 and 6,000 daily visitors, **Kyrgyztoday.org** has two versions: Kyrgyz and Russian. Its materials are mostly focused on political and social issues in Bishkek, with a few news stories covering regional and international events. The most frequently used categories on the site are: Central Asia, World, Society, Crime Stories, Position and Power, Official News, Politics, Sports, Economics, Culture and Literature, and Show Business. The Kyrgyz content does not usually duplicate the Russian

content and vice versa.

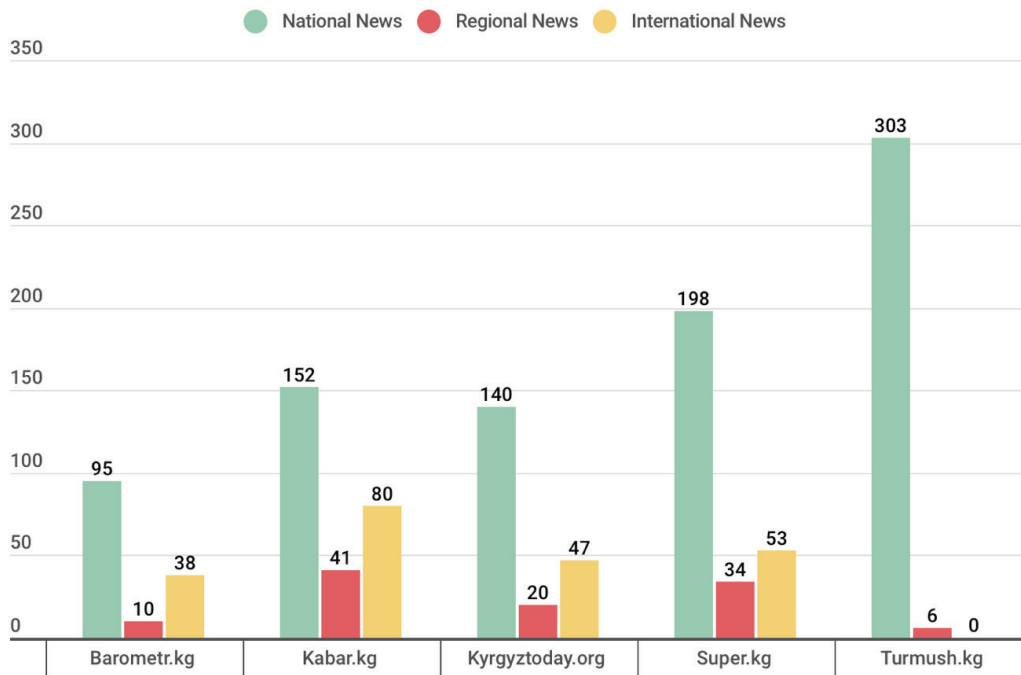
### The Kyrgyz-Speaking News World and Its Challenges

As we can see, Kyrgyz-speaking online news media form a lively and multifaceted environment. Yet the question this paper seeks to explore is not so much the quantity of Kyrgyz-language news websites as their content and the difficulties associated with producing high-quality content.

All the data presented here are from the week of March 25 – March 31, 2019. The news sites in question do not always offer materials that comply with journalistic principles such as fairness, balance, accuracy, and ethics.

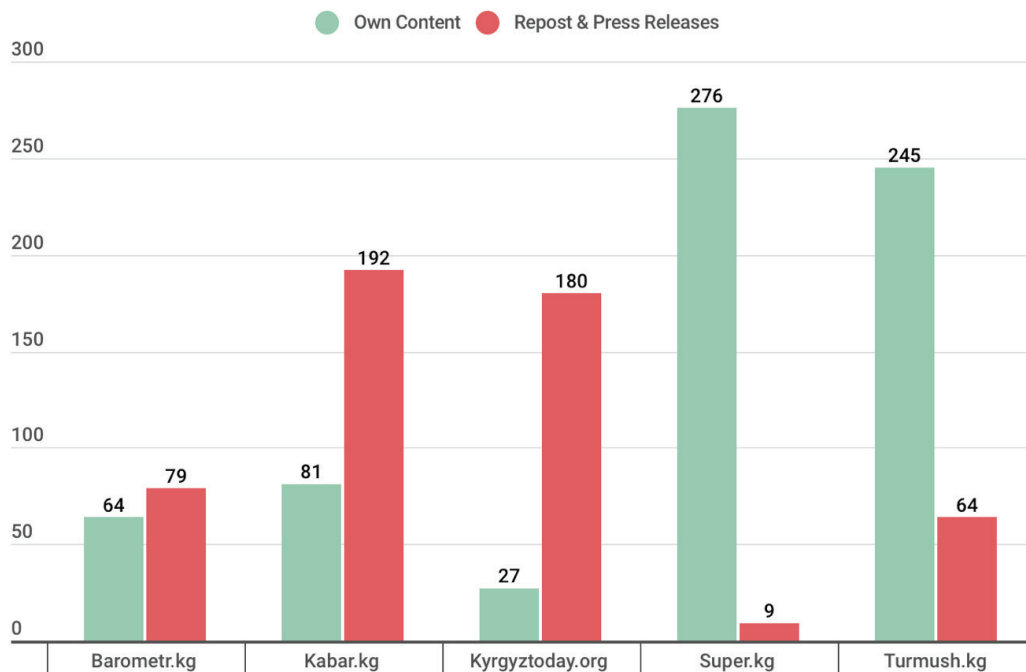
The coverage of different issues varies depending on the news portals' editorial policy, which is not always clearly stated (see Figure 8). For instance, on Turmush.kg, one cannot find news about national-level events taking place in Bishkek and related to the president, government ministries, and members of parliament. Instead, the site's focus is on events outside the capital. In contrast to Turmush.kg, Barometr.kg, Kabar.kg, Kyrgyztoday.org, and Super.kg are more Bishkek-centric. The majority of international news on Kabar.kg and Kyrgyztoday.org are reposts from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Central Asia service. Barometr.kg and Super.kg also provide international stories in Kyrgyz, with or without referring to the sites where they were originally published. Turmush.kg's international news stories usually relate to Kyrgyz citizens who have lived or still live abroad.

**Figure 8. News coverage of sites**



*Source: Author's compilation based on content analysis*

**Figure 9. Content production of news sites**



*Source: Author's compilation based on content analysis*

Another important point regarding the content of news sites is whether the materials are collected and processed by journalists themselves. For example, as shown in Figure 9, Barometr.kg, Kabar.kg and Kyrgyztoday.org repost more from other outlets than they produce their own content. Having said that, it is not always easy to identify which material is their own and which is not. Super.kg and Turmush.kg, meanwhile, have more of their own content than republications. The presence of expressions like “... told Super.kg” and “As Turmush.kg’s regional journalist reported...” indicate that they interviewed their sources themselves. The former three news sites often lack such formulas.

In general, news sites’ narratives are heavily descriptive and often present the views of only one side. They thus fall short of fair and balanced reporting, which is vital to quality journalism.

Let us briefly summarize the significant differences between these websites. Turmush.kg is successful at informing its readers about everyday life in the country’s provinces. It offers stories about people’s everyday lives and achievements and covers almost all activities carried out by local municipal authorities at various regional levels (towns, districts, villages). But most of the time, the stories are covered loosely, without emphasizing why it is important that the story be told. Some pieces come across as little more than press releases: they just provide information about new appointments and what the local municipal admin-

istration is doing. Some pieces are purely personal and intimate stories of ordinary residents, who share their successes or tell about their bad luck. There are several articles that mainly involve people complaining about bad infrastructure in their neighborhoods.

The majority of publications on Barometr.kg are social media posts, press releases from state organizations, and international news. These are often sensationalized, presenting extreme opinions and events—with little or no editing and based on one or no sources (where there are sources, these are often of dubious trustworthiness). Celebrities’ social media posts are published under sensationalist titles; some articles treat social media posts as news without providing any further development or analysis.

Kabar.kg looks more like a press-release website. The majority of its content is comprised of press releases and statements by state officials or about their meetings and visits to other places.

On all the websites, stories about accidents and crimes feature prominently. These may be local or international and can range from car accidents to sexual abuse to deadly offenses. Such events are taken up by news outlets and offered as sensational stories.

On Barometr.kg, Kabar.kg, and Kyrgyztoday.org, photos are presented without credits. Super.kg and Turmush.kg, meanwhile, watermark their photos, indicating that they hold the copyright for the images they are using.

Building on these case studies of the five main Kyrgyz-speaking online news outlets, one can identify three main issues facing Kyrgyz-language online journalism: lack of transparency, lack of ethics and lack of professional training. Yet Kyrgyz-language news websites are not the only ones facing these issues; Russian-language sites have similar limitations.

### ***Lack of Transparency***

Transparency about how news is collected and how information and facts are cross-checked is one of the main issues relating to Kyrgyzstan’s media. First, not all websites provide basic information about what type of media company they are, what their editorial policy is, and who works on their team. It is not always clear whether the website is commercial, noncommercial, private, government-affiliated, nongovernmental, etc., nor what its financial status is. As a result, readers are unable to determine whether websites earn advertising revenues, receive grants, are financed by politicians or businessmen, etc.

The majority of Kyrgyz-speaking websites describe themselves variously as news portals, news agencies, internet publications, information agencies, internet editions, or information-analytical portals, among other descriptors. But they rarely provide information about their editorial policy, while contact information is often limited to phone numbers and email addresses. Some websites are easy to use and navigate,

while others are dominated by advertising or contain distracting formatting that confirms the low level of professionalism of website designers (not to mention the actual content of the website).

To take one example, Barometr.kg provides only a phone (and WhatsApp) number and email address in the footer of its webpage, briefly mentioning that it is an information agency. But if one digs into its advertising media kit, it calls itself the “fastest-growing news portal” in Kyrgyzstan and states:

We assist readers in understanding complicated political, economic, and social problems with the help of argumentative analysis and an accessible/comprehensible mode of explanation. Our resource is actively developing its communities and groups across key social media using its “viral” (*quote in original*) material. We post materials with different points of view, which removes restrictions and promotes discussion.

### ***Lack of Code of Conduct***

The professionalism of Kyrgyz-speaking online media is limited by several factors. Although international media outlets usually function in accordance with journalistic principles and ethics, the Central Asian bureaus of some international media outlets may not be neutral, expressing either support for the government or systematic criticism.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, local journalists working at international media outlets may not share the values of their umbrella organization, for instance some may oppose NGOs that are supported by the West. For their part, local websites can be divided into two broad categories: those that (try to) comply with journalistic principles and ethics (e.g., Kloop.kg) and those that are less concerned with this. Most of the websites that appear on the Net.kg list of most-visited sites fall into the second category.

Among the main indicators of a lack of professionalism, many articles are published both without naming the source of a fact/opinion and without explaining the absence of a named source (security concerns, spoke on condition of anonymity, etc.). Kabar.kg and Turmush.kg also do not indicate the authors of articles, unlike Barometr.kg, Kyrgyztoday.org, and Super.kg.

Many articles tell stories that rely on the words of unidentified people and/or are based on rumors. In order to discredit and mock particular figures, they often deploy a judgmental, accusatory, or humiliating tone. Some texts make strong statements based on the author’s personal observations, impressions, or feelings while not providing the other side of the story. In many cases, an author will not interview sources, instead composing the story as he or she wishes, making assumptions, disinforming, and producing biased content. Such materials are prevalent on Kyrgyztoday.org in the form of reposts.

### **Box 1. Four typical articles**

#### ***Atambaev’s right-hand man Farid Niyazov also participated in the funeral of Babirbek Jeenbekov***

Author: Baktibek Ergeshov  
Date: March 25, 2019

On March 23, famous journalist and revolutionary Babirbek Jeenbekov’s funeral took place in Bishkek. Many public figures participated in it. Dosaly Esenaliev, the chief of the Presidential Administration, spoke on behalf of the state and talked about his [the late journalist’s] work for the Kyrgyz Republic and his personal qualities.

But Farid Niyazov, the representative of the former power that did not value our brother Babirbek’s work in its time, came pathetically, quickly expressed his condolences, and ran away. Atambaev should have come to the funeral himself instead of sending his right-hand man Farid.

As the popular saying goes, “Heroes make revolution, inciters get its fruit.” The 2010 revolution was accomplished by heroes like brother Babirbek, but evil individuals like Atambaev and Niyazov benefited from its fruits.

Source: *KyrgyzToday*<sup>26</sup>

***Offended Atambaev, who moved out of the residence, now wants to move back into the residence upon Putin’s visit***

Author: Baktibek Ergeshov

Date: March 26, 2019

In April 2018, when the power did not allow Almazbek Atambaev’s revanchist friends to enter the “Ala-Archa” residence, the offended ex-president moved to his palace, which was built on Maxim Bakiev’s land in Koy-Tash.

Since then, Atambaev, who [allegedly declared that he] would “never return” to the residence, is trying to move back into the residence for Russian president Vladimir Putin’s visit to Kyrgyzstan. Apparently, Atambaev is planning to meet Putin and complain about his problems.

As a reminder, in the fall of last year (2018), ex-president Almazbek Atambaev was unable to meet with Russian president V. Putin on his trip to Moscow. It was said that even his [Putin’s] press secretary Dmitry Peskov did not agree to receive him.

If Atambaev manages to meet with Putin on March 28-29, it is clear that he will hug him as always and take photos to make PR of it.

Source: *Kyrgyztoday.kg*<sup>27</sup>

***Kiyanbek Satibaldiev’s illiteracy resulted in words***

Author: Adina Sagymbekova

Date: March 25, 2019

[...] Unfortunately, Kiyanbek Satibaldiev, the representative for Government [Governor] of Jalal-Abad, could not shine for the president, Sooronbay Jeenbekov. He is going wrong. On March 17, he should have given a word to the relatives of people who died in the Aksi events. It was his duty as the governor. But he did not. The relatives of the Aksi victims were offended and it became a sensitive issue. Satibaldiev’s poor understanding of politics and incompetence at organizing public events are becoming clear in his unprofessionalism. This shames not only him, but also the president. Kiyanbek’s other “rotten behaviors” and scandals have also appeared in the mass media. How long do we have to keep illiterate and false heads in their positions? It seems probable that we cannot develop because of them.

Akin Bekchoroev

Source: *Asia News*<sup>28</sup>

***Chinibay demonstrated his cunning...***

Author: Adina Sagymbekova

Date: March 26, 2019

Chinibay Tursunbekov, once a head of coalition and speaker, two-time leader of the KSDP parliamentary faction, is currently doing the complete opposite. What this means is that he announced his withdrawal from KSDP, thanks to which he came into political arena and took high positions. He said he would not participate in the KSDP congress and implied that he would not want more problems. In other words, he demonstrated his cunning, which seeks only his personal interest. When KSDP was flourishing, he was with them; now, when it is going through a hard time, he runs away. Isn’t that “betrayal?”

Source: *Fabula*<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, it is not always clear if news sites produce their own content. Online media are more likely than their print counterparts to (re-)publish press releases with little or no editing. This is particularly the case on Kabar.kg. Moreover, press releases are often published in their original language, meaning that they are often difficult for the general public to understand.

On news sites, publications may be credited to other media outlets or authors; alternatively, they may be posted without any attribution. Some websites publish posts from social media—usually sensational crime stories, extreme political views, rumors about celebrities, etc.—without cross-checking and verifying information. Several websites contain social media posts by public figures and ordinary citizens that

express apparently surprising opinions about political, social, or personal issues. Such materials are prevalent on Barometr.kg. Box 2 contains two examples of the site publishing Facebook posts as news.

Last but not least, stories of private matters prevail, oftentimes loosely covered rather than being investigated in detail and their importance explained. Stories

### **Box 2. Two examples of Barometr treating Facebook posts as news**

#### ***Ahmatbek Keldibekov and Isa Ömürkulov went to eat free burgers***

Author: Barometr

Date: March 26, 2019

Yesterday, March 25, well-known politicians went to the opening of Timati’s Black Star Burger café in Bishkek. The activist Adil Turdukulov posted on Twitter a photo of parliamentarian Isa Ömürkulov and ex-parliamentarian Ahmatbek Keldibekov, who appeared at the café opening.

“Are they serving Black Burger for them?” he wrote.

Social media users are responding in different ways.

As a reminder, yesterday, March 25, Russian rapper Timati (Timur Yunusov) promised free burgers to residents of Bishkek in Asia Mall shopping center.<sup>38</sup>

#### ***Nazira Aytbekova: “Nobody knows about my tomorrow?! But I am not sad anymore”***

Author: Atirgül Muhammatkulova

Date: March 25, 2019

Journalist and host Nazira Aytbekova wrote that her grandmother told her to marry as soon as possible. Aytbekova posted her ideas about that on Facebook.

She posted: “Hey, girl, while you are young, marry and bear [kids]. It is difficult to be alone. When you become old, not even the dog will look at you, let alone a husband,” Grandmother said. She constantly repeats it, so that I hear it. [...] Granny, in your time, you were able to do men’s jobs as well as women’s. Your soul wants to lie and you are asleep again. When you wake up, you say you worry about me and repeat that word a thousand times. I could do nothing but smile. Nobody knows about my tomorrow?! But I am not sad anymore. My wound recovered. I am looking at life with joy. When you are sinking, you try to swim. I did the same. Didn’t want to sink. Wanted to live, granny. Made friends with water. [...]”

Certainly, it is obvious that Aytbekova wants to express her love of life with her post. Many encourage the blogger lady, saying, “Everything will be all right.”<sup>39</sup>

such as a disabled boy living in a train car, a pensioner in a rural area earning 10,000 soms daily, a cockfighter who won a car in a competition in a neighboring town, a couple that has been working in the same school for 30 years, a village kindergarten being furnished, etc., are prevalent on Turmush.kg.

To summarize, as mentioned above, the self-presentation of online news portals is often misleading. Although they promise analytical and diversified content with accessible language, they frequently fall short of keeping those promises. What they usually offer to the audience is: content based on one or no sources (resulting in heavily biased articles); articles without authors; social media reports; press releases in difficult language; and sensational crime stories. But on one point they prove to be successful, namely “promot[ing] discussion and receiv[ing] greater visibility and audience on social media.” The

majority of their content may go viral, provoking broader discussions. There are even some cases where the state administration has resolved problems following social media discussions.

### **Lack of Professional Training**

All the issues discussed above imply that journalism faculties at universities are not necessarily successful in their goal of training professional journalists. In total, seven universities teach journalism in Kyrgyzstan (see Figure 10).<sup>30</sup> The majority of the higher educational institutions preparing journalists are based in Bishkek, with Osh State University the only provincial institution that still has a journalism faculty. Depending on the type of university (private, national, international), the language of instruction varies. Some faculties offer courses only in Kyrgyz, Russian, or English, while other programs are bilingual (Kyrgyz-Russian and

Kyrgyz-Turkish).

At AUCA, English is the main language of instruction. Undergraduate students receive both Kyrgyz and U.S. diplomas. The journalism departments of BHU and KNU are divided into two sections: one Kyrgyz, one Russian. At KNU, lectures are delivered in Kyrgyz and Russian, respectively; at BHU, lectures and literature are usually given in Russian, but the Kyrgyz group has the option to answer questions and participate in class discussions using the Kyrgyz language.

Students in KRU’s journalism department study in Russian. KRU issues two diplomas, one Kyrgyz and one Russian. The same is true at KTU, one of the biggest universities in Kyrgyzstan: graduates receive one Kyrgyz diploma and one Turkish one. KTU’s journalism department is bilingual, with lectures delivered in Kyrgyz and Turkish equally.

**Figure 10. Journalism faculties at universities in Kyrgyzstan**

#	Journalism Faculties	Students for 2019-2020 academic year	Language	Type
1	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)	45	English	Private
2	Bishkek Humanities University (BHU)	165	Kyrgyz, Russian	State
3	International Kuwait University (IKU)	93	Kyrgyz	Private
4	Kyrgyz National University (KNU)	284	Kyrgyz, Russian	State
5	Kyrgyz-Russian University (KRU)	136	Russian	State
6	Kyrgyz-Turkish University (KTU)	364	Kyrgyz, Turkish	State
7	Osh State University (OSU)	66	Kyrgyz	State

*Source: Author’s survey and compilation*

One can tentatively conclude that (state) universities' education system remains outdated, as it consists of heavily theoretical lectures. Practical skills are hardly taught, which may produce a disconnect between college knowledge and the reality on the ground when graduates enter the media industry.

According to Abahon Sultonazarov, Regional Director of IWPR in Central Asia, professional journalists are often graduates of faculties other than journalism. Journalism faculties, he says, have long been in need of improvement:

Good journalists did not graduate from journalism faculties. They studied philology, history. Among them, it is rare to find individuals who graduated from journalism faculties. This is true not only for Kyrgyzstan, but for all Central Asian countries, because journalism faculties focus more on TV journalism. Print journalists are very rare.<sup>31</sup>

Two vivid examples of the truth in this view are Marat Tokoev and Mars Tölögönov. Neither of them studied journalism as undergraduates, yet both are now prominent media instructors in Kyrgyzstan. They entered the journalism field in the late 1990s and have worked in all spheres of the country's mass media (TV, radio, print and online media). Between 2006 and 2016, Tokoev chaired the Public Union of Journalists; he remains a member of the union's board. Tölögönov is now chair of the Union. In separate interviews, both Tokoev and Tölögönov emphasized the low level of education in journalism faculties in Kyrgyzstan. In re-

sponse, one of the Union's main activities has been to work with Kyrgyz-speaking students and journalists to improve the quality of undergraduate journalism training.

### **How Can the Quality of Kyrgyz-Language Journalism Be Improved?**

No government organs control and monitor whether new and traditional media comply with the journalistic code of ethics. In the event of libel or defamation, the supposed victim can ask the mass media to refute the information and/or can file a lawsuit against the outlet.

To respond to these issues, the Commission for Complaints on Mass Media was created on the initiative of local journalists and has been operational since 2007. Its decisions are not legally binding but aim to publicly denounce mass media that violate journalistic ethics. The Commission acts according to the code of journalistic ethics adopted during a 2007 congress of journalists. The Commission includes 10 to 15 people with backgrounds in journalism as well as the private and public sectors. They consider only the complaints they receive and do not monitor the mass media's compliance with the code of ethics.

Journalism schools and courses could become a central place where the issues faced by mass media are addressed. In February 2019 alone, there were two different announcements of journalism trainings in

Kyrgyzstan. One of them, called Original Kyrgyz Journalism School, seemed to be addressing all the problems in the current wave of online media. Without indicating the duration of the program, it promised to teach (in Kyrgyz) the mission of journalists, the "secrets to becoming the best journalist," effective writing skills, and new directions in journalism. Prominent journalists—among them Marat Tokoev, Jyrgalbek Kasabolotov, and Daniyar Isanov—were listed as instructors. However, these types of courses are not delivered on a consistent basis and remain on a small scale.

Another institution, Kloop Media Foundation (linked to the online media outlet Kloop.kg), has been organizing journalism courses (paid and free of charge) for the past 10 years. The media company believes it is possible to become a journalist without studying at a journalism faculty. Therefore, it focuses more on applied journalism and offers its students the opportunity to practice journalism, but only after six days of theoretical training. During in-class and practical sessions, it emphasizes journalistic professionalism, including providing a balance of views, impartiality, and transparency. Its website serves as a publication platform for the news materials of its participants. Courses range in length from one month to three months and are offered both in Kyrgyz and in Russian.

Besides Kloop, there are other local and international organizations that organize journalism courses or work with journalists. These include Internews and



IWPR, among others. IWPR has been operating in Central Asia since establishing its Bishkek bureau in 1999. It has been supporting local reporters, citizen journalists, and civil society activists by providing them with various trainings. As Abahon Sultonazarov explained, in its first decade of work, his organization conducted trainings and published articles in Russian only, excluding the Kyrgyz (or other Central Asian national) language journalists. He says this was a shortcoming/omission (*upushchenie*) of the program. From 2008 onwards, IWPR began to incorporate native languages into its program and educate instructors in Kyrgyz language. IWPR organized a Training of Trainers in Kyrgyz so that they could conduct trainings in the provinces. The participants were practicing journalists and editors. As Sultonazarov explained, “There was a necessity for that. It was a time when we started to see our first results. They conducted trainings, wrote stories, and edited in Kyrgyz, and translated into Kyrgyz.”

He added that IWPR’s next project will focus on journalism faculties in Central Asia:

In our new project, we want to work with the teachers in order for them to work with the students. [...] If we work directly with the teachers and deans, and conduct trainings for them, they get education, qualifications. We will provide them with a curriculum to use in their classes. [...] The teachers do not meet the requirements of the new realities. They lag behind on innovational approaches, social media, new media, visualization, storytelling, data journalism. They still write 20 pages; one paragraph

is one page. Now, 800-900 words are enough; more is too much. It is a problem. It should be upgraded with a new curriculum and new approaches. [...]”<sup>32</sup>

Almas Turdumamatov, a media expert from Kyrgyzstan who has been working in the media sphere since 1995, agrees with Sultonazarov that journalists write too much. However, he suggests that this has improved since the 1990s, when the practice was most widespread:

During the independence years, the Kyrgyz-language journalists considered themselves writers. They used to bring 10-page articles. In order to make the print media language accessible, the new style was adopted. If I am not mistaken, it was *Asaba*. They introduced the spoken Kyrgyz language to newspapers. It really affected the print media readership. The number of big materials that occupied 4-5 pages decreased and short pieces were produced instead. On the other hand, when they introduced this style, it was accompanied by printing unverified information. I do not remember when exactly it started; it needs additional research. However, materials based on rumors started to appear more and more. It was a model for other new print media; as a result, they also deployed this style in their publications. In my opinion, our newspapers usually publish information without cross-checking, based on what they heard, [leading to facts that] are closer to rumors. This style still has impact and is being exported to social and online media.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

The international media organizations that are operating in Central Asia work to improve the

quality of journalism. However, their focus is often on engaging the Russian-speaking journalism world, whereas it should be on journalists writing in the national languages of Central Asia. Almas Turdumamatov explains:

Many international media organizations conducted most of their trainings for journalists in Russian. Of late, they are trying to conduct the trainings in Kyrgyz too, but the new formats and technologies are taught by Russian-speaking instructors. [...] I asked Internews why journalists from the regions should be trained in Russian, of which they do not have a good command; why the effectiveness and accessibility of trainings was not taken into account. They answered that they did not have experts with Kyrgyz language skills. But when the trainings were conducted in English or in other European languages, we were offered a translator into Russian language. Why they did not do the same with Kyrgyz-language trainees is another issue. [...] One might claim that Kyrgyz-language mass media are not interested in new skills. They might be right. But their announcements are all still released in Russian. I think it also might be a language barrier for Kyrgyz-language journalists. [...] If we consider that Kyrgyz-language mass media have problems, shortcomings, then the international organizations should address them, work with them, improve their level.<sup>34</sup>

Many Kyrgyz-language online media publish low-quality articles that often do not comply with journalistic principles such as fairness, accuracy, and professional ethics. Low-quality journalism has other implications, too. As Turdumamatov notes, the existence of such media outlets indicates that they are supported

and financed by figures who have an interest in influencing public opinion, and therefore that the critical issue of media independence remains to be addressed:

The independence of mass media depends on what you mean by the mass media—whether it is a business or an organization with social responsibilities and duties. Who is establishing the mass media and for what purpose? In our country, the mass media are created by politicians or those with close ties with politicians. Their purpose is not to earn revenue; their goal is to influence public opinion. [...] We do not have an advertising market sufficient to support the mass media. Despite this, many TV channels continue to operate. To the best of my knowledge, most TV channels are linked to a particular [group of] politicians.<sup>35</sup>

With a population of just 6 million, Kyrgyzstan's media sector has limited financial possibilities: the media market generates around \$19 million per year.<sup>36</sup> This has the knock-on effect that journalists rarely challenge their employer and defend their independence. "When signing a contract with the employer, the journalists should make it clear that they comply with ethical standards and principles of journalism. But again, because of financial constraints, the journalists are less likely to put forward their conditions," Tölögönov indicates.<sup>37</sup>

Yet even under such conditions, international media organizations should continue to teach young journalists the basic principles of journalism: how to prepare questions, how to interview, how to find the source of a piece of

information, how to cross-check information, etc. These skills are essential in an era of information abundance. Young journalists should learn to capture issues vital to the country and not overlook social, economic, and political problems on the ground, such as "reminding" authorities to provide rural areas with clean water, to prevent maternal mortality, to improve the level of education, and so on. Understandably, the desire to be the first to break a news story is widespread among journalists—but it should not be allowed to compromise the quality, accuracy, and impartiality of journalism.

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#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Abahon Sultonazarov, personal interview with the author, Washington, DC, March 2019.

<sup>2</sup> The report looks at five aspects: Free Speech, Professional Journalism, Plurality of News Sources, Business Management, and Supporting Institutions. These are scored on a scale from one to four, where one corresponds to Unsustainable Anti-Free Press, two to Unsustainable Mixed System, three to Near Sustainability, and four to Sustainable.

<sup>3</sup> IREX, "Media Sustainability Index 2018," accessed July 6, 2019, <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2018-full.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> We Are Social, "Digital in 2018 in Central Asia," January 29, 2018, accessed April 17, 2019, <https://www.slideshare.net/wearesocial/digital-in-2018-in-central-asia-86866176>.

<sup>5</sup> M-Vector, "Media predpochtenii naseleniia Kyrgyzstana," *Internews*, December 14, 2017, <http://internews.kg/glavnye-novosti/issledovanie-mediapredpochteniyana-seleniya-kyrgyzstana-8-ya-volna-2017-god/>.

<sup>6</sup> Anna Vorobeva, Aynura Eshaliyeva, Begaim Usenova, and Ruslan Rahimov, "Otchet po itogam issledovaniia urovnia mediagramotnosti v Kyrgyzskoi Respublike," 2018, accessed April 17, 2019, <http://soros.kg/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Otchet-po-itogam-issledovaniya-mediagramotnosti-v-KR.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Zamira Derbisheva, "Iazikovaia politika i iazikovaia situatsiia v Kyrgyzstane," *Russian Language Journal* 59, (2009): 49-58, [http://rlj.americancouncils.org/issues/59/files/Derbisheva\\_2009.pdf](http://rlj.americancouncils.org/issues/59/files/Derbisheva_2009.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> "Mavlyanova: Mamlekettik til sayasati chabal bolup jatat (video)," *Azattyk.org*, January 24, 2019, <https://www.azattyk.org/a/29727802.html>.

<sup>10</sup> “Orus tilinin rasmiy makamin joyush üçün referendum ötkörüü sunushtaluuda,” *Azattyk.org*, January 15, 2019, <https://www.azattyk.org/a/29710747.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Abdil-Ahat Kurban uulu, “Kirgizstanda kirgiz tilin ögöylöböylü,” *Azattyk.org*, February 17, 2019, [https://www.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyz\\_language\\_low/29769846.html](https://www.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyz_language_low/29769846.html).

<sup>12</sup> Sapar Orozbekov, “Mama til, papa meken,” *Azattyk.org*, August 1, 2016, <https://www.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyz-language-economics/27891546.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Daniyar Mukambetov, “O roli i znachenii russkogo iazika dlia Kyrgyzstana,” <http://www.nisi.kg/112-stati/467-o-rol-i-znachenii-russkogo-yazyka-dlya-kyrgyzstana.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Derbisheva, “Iazikovaia politika.”

<sup>15</sup> Sere Chalkanova, “Govorit po kirgizski—eto modno!” *Elgezit.kg*, January 28, 2019, <https://elgezit.kg/2019/01/28/govorit-po-kyrgyzski-eto-modno>.

<sup>16</sup> Oljobay Shakir, “Kirgiz tilin kiyratuunun massalik masshtaby,” *Azattyk.org*, December 11, 2019, [https://www.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan\\_books\\_oljobai\\_shakir/29649607.html](https://www.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan_books_oljobai_shakir/29649607.html).

<sup>17</sup> Shayloobek Düsheev, “Jookerdi ‘sarbaz’ debeyli,” *Azattyk.org*, August 25, 2018, <https://www.azattyk.org/a/shailoobek-duisheev-blog-/29447128.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Shayloobek Düsheev, “Türmө emes күrmө, cherik emes sherik,” *Azattyk.org*, June 27, 2017, [https://www.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan\\_soz\\_daira\\_duisheev\\_2017/28577057.html](https://www.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan_soz_daira_duisheev_2017/28577057.html).

<sup>19</sup> As of February 2019. This information was provided to me as an official response to my request for information.

<sup>20</sup> SMI Help Center, “Redaktsii gazet Kyrgyzstana,” accessed April 17, 2019, <http://msc.kg/ru/partnery/redakcii-gazet-kyrgyzstana/>.

<sup>21</sup> Tinchiktin Monitoring Service,

accessed April 17, 2019, <http://tms.kg/radiouk/>.

<sup>22</sup> National Union of Radio and TV Broadcasting, “Spisok telekanalov,” accessed April 17, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2CBhFYy>.

<sup>23</sup> Expert Consulting Agency, “Analiz iazika veshaniia i proizvodstva kontenta teleprogram v Kyrgyzstane,” accessed April 17, 2019, <http://www.media.kg/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/presentation.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> M-Vector, “Media predpochteniia naseleniia Kyrgyzstana.”

<sup>25</sup> Peter Leonard, “US-Funded Broadcaster Under Scrutiny for Enabling Tajikistan’s Strongman Rule,” *Eurasianet.org*, March 26, 2019, [https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-broadcaster-under-scrutiny-for-disseminating-propaganda-11556184602](https://eurasianet.org/us-funded-broadcaster-under-scrutiny-for-enabling-tajikistans-strongman-rule; Jessica Donati, “U.S. Broadcaster Under Scrutiny for Disseminating Autocratic Propaganda,” <i>The Wall Street Journal</i>, April 25, 2019, <a href=).

<sup>26</sup> Baktibek Ergeshov, “Babirbek Jeenbekovdu akirki saparga uzatuu zynatina Atambaevdin on kolu Farid Niyazov da keldi,” *Kyrgyztoday.org*, March 25, 2019, [https://kyrgyztoday.org/news\\_ky/babyrbek-zheenbekovdu-akyrky-saparga-uzatuu-zyjnatyna-atambaevdin-on-kolu-fyrid-niyazov-da-keldi/](https://kyrgyztoday.org/news_ky/babyrbek-zheenbekovdu-akyrky-saparga-uzatuu-zyjnatyna-atambaevdin-on-kolu-fyrid-niyazov-da-keldi/).

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<sup>28</sup> Adina Sagimbekova, “Kiyanbek

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<sup>29</sup> Adina Sagimbekova, “Chinibay kuulugun aygineledi,” *Kyrgyztoday.org*, March 26, 2019, [https://kyrgyztoday.org/news\\_ky/chynybaj-kuulugun-ajgineledi/](https://kyrgyztoday.org/news_ky/chynybaj-kuulugun-ajgineledi/).

<sup>30</sup> As of March 2019. This information was provided to me as an official response to my request for information.

<sup>31</sup> Abahon Sultonazarov, personal interview with the author, Washington, DC, March 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Almas Turdumamatov, personal interview with the author, Bishkek, December 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Akchabar, “Reklamnii rynek Kyrgyzstana otsenivaetsia v \$19 mln v god—issledovanie,” April 25, 2019, <https://www.akchabar.kg/ru/news/media-ads-2019/>.

<sup>37</sup> Mars Tölögönov, personal interview with the author, Bishkek, December 2018.

<sup>38</sup> “Ahmatbek Keldibekov menen Isa Ömürkulov akisiz burger jegenge barishti,” *Barometr.kg*, March 26, 2019, <https://barometr.kg/ahmatbek-keldibekov-menen-isa-mrkulov-akysyz-burger-zhegengebaryshty>.

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