

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2006/2007

**The Development
of Sustainable
Independent Media
in Europe and Eurasia**



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The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Europe and Eurasia

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KYRGYZSTAN

The year 2006 in Kyrgyzstan was marked by dramatic political events. Analysts speak of the formation in Kyrgyzstan of a “demonstration-democracy” regime and of entering an era of ochlocracy (mob rule). In describing the political situation over the past year, several key factors of domestic policy stand out. First is a tendency toward regional and clan principles. The political elite is increasingly based on this principle, including parliament. Distribution of resources also follows this trend, both through legal and extralegal privatization. Second, conflicts among the presidency, government, and parliament have re-emerged, as the agreement between the president and prime minister to govern in tandem also has failed. Third, a large group of elites from the Akayev era has coalesced into an opposition camp, if somewhat heterogeneous and unconsolidated. Fourth, the growth of demonstrations as a means of opposition has grown since 2005 and has hindered stabilization of politics, as the street is often a preferred political outlet. Finally, the rewriting, often rapid and little debated, of the country’s Constitution and other legislation has hindered democratic development.

These and other factors directly influence the media in the country, as media are either controlled by political forces or are subject to pressure from political forces. Following events in March 2005 that led to the ouster of then-President Akayev, media have come under increasing pressure from the government and political forces, including, in some cases, the forcible change in ownership. In turn, the main line of struggle by opposition forces during the November 2006 confrontation with the regime was aimed, in part, at gaining access to the airwaves of the State Radio and Television Company and control over the company’s news policy. The trend persists.

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An important factor limiting the further development of the media sector and the transformation of media outlets from political instruments into professional businesses is economic instability. The advertising market, which otherwise might serve to mitigate political control by providing revenue to media outlets, is unable to develop more intensively, as real GDP growth declined in 2005 in an already poor country. Additionally, the expansion of the Russian and Kazakhstan advertising markets, with global brands, has hindered the development of Kyrgyzstan’s own market.

KYRGYZSTAN AT A GLANCE

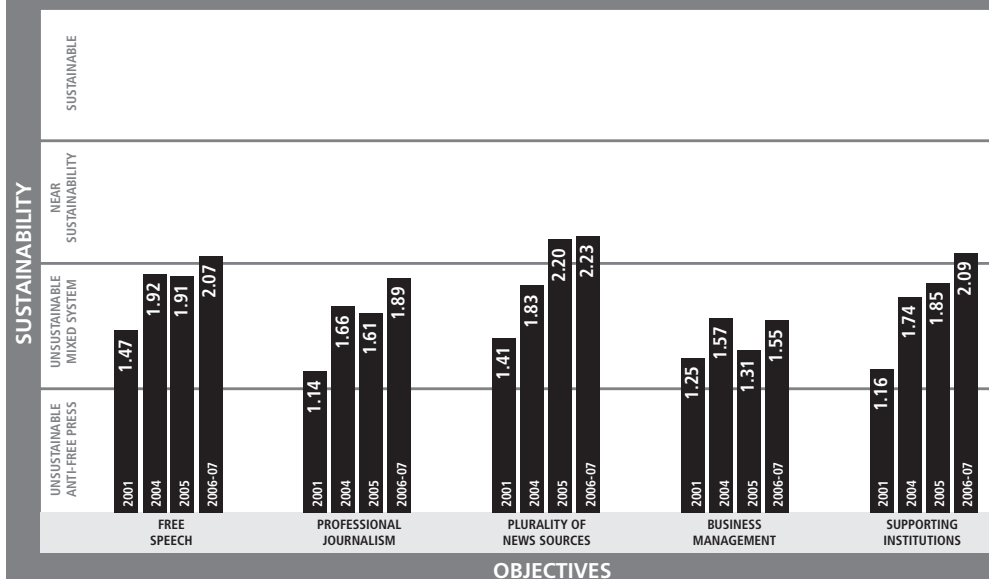
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 5,284,149 (July 2007 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Bishkek
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Kyrgyz 64.9%, Uzbek 13.8%, Russian 12.5%, Dungan 1.1%, Ukrainian 1%, Uyгур 1%, other 5.7% (1999 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 75%, Russian Orthodox 20%, other 5% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** Kyrgyz 64.7% (official), Uzbek 13.6%, Russian 12.5% (official), Dungan 1%, other 8.2% (1999 census)
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$2.554 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$1,980 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2007)
- > **Literacy rate:** 98.7% (male 99.3%, female 98.1%) (1999 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Kurmanbek Bakiyev (since August 14, 2005)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** A total of 938 media outlets are registered with Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Justice, 36 of these being radio stations and 47 of these being television stations
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** The daily independent newspaper *Vecherniy Bishkek* circulates 20,000 copies on weekdays and 60,000 copies on Fridays. The independent newspaper *Moya Stolitsa Novosti* circulates 5,000 copies on weekdays and 60,000 on Saturdays.
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **News agencies:** Kabar (government), Aki Press (independent), Bely Parokhod (independent)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 280,000 (2005, *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: KYRGYZSTAN



Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3):

Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4):

Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

Nonetheless, panelists did assess a positive change, as the replacement of political figures and political instability in the process of the redistribution of power and resources did give rise to an overall “softening” of the regime in relation to the media. Serious debates on the country’s public television led to discussions of political control. The heightened political events led to a rise in the role of political news and became an impetus for the development of the news industry—both in the format of the media and in the increasingly pluralistic news agencies.

Overall, despite the obstacles posed by political instability and economic stagnation, panel participants assessed the events taking place as more positive than in the previous year. The panelists noted progress or stability with respect to most objectives, although they emphasized that the process of democratization and attainment of independence and stability on the part of the media still had a long way to go and, unfortunately, remains reversible. Kyrgyzstan’s overall score reached 1.97, an increase of 10 percent over the previous year.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

Kyrgyzstan Objective Score: 2.07/4.00

The year’s key event was the adoption of a new version of the Kyrgyz Republic Constitution. Discussions and debates over the new Constitution took place for over a year, and

LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

Marina Sivasheva, an instructor in the sociology program at the American University of Central Asia, said, “The best is the enemy of the good. There have been repeated attempts to create a law on the media. Incidentally, the present state secretary, Madumarov, as a deputy in the previous parliament, attempted to propose such a law...many points of which were written poorly and in a confused and overly rhetorical fashion and was killed there.

citizens got tired of the number of versions of the new Constitution and the ensuing debates. Several stages of work of the Constitutional Conference were not completed, since the current president had little interest in revisions that could weaken his power. In the end, opposition protests and pressure led to a new version of the Constitution being passed by parliament and signed into law by the president in a matter of hours. In the various versions discussed, the principal contentious issue focused on the relative powers and status of the country’s president, government, and parliament. The Constitution adopted on November 9, 2006, proclaimed a presidential-parliamentary form of government.

The process of adoption and the content of the new Constitution have received varying interpretations throughout the country. Negative assessments, along with the certainty that it will soon be revised, predominate. Revisions were offered by key political figures almost immediately after its adoption. As Zholdosbay Osmonov, of Jalalabat State Television and Radio Company, notes, “It was adopted in haste and in secret from the people, and consequently it failed to take into account the opinion of millions of citizens living in Kyrgyzstan. This ‘miracle’ Constitution is still not accessible to the broad circle of the country’s public, and not even to all of its higher officials and politicians. The information vacuum surrounding the content of the country’s basic law has resulted in a situation in which differing interpretations of the principal provisions of the document differ among the public, depending on the extent of people’s knowledge of it.”

Panelists noted that key provisions guaranteeing democratic freedoms hastily “dropped out” of the Constitution’s text. Elmira Toktogulova, general director of the Nongovernmental Foundation for the Development of Media Consulting in Central Asia, said, “Kyrgyzstan’s Constitution (both old and

Others on the panel believe that the laws on the media have exhausted their usefulness to such an extent that they are substantially impeding the development of the media sector. As proof, they point to the situation in the area of distributing broadcast frequencies for television and radio, and the denationalization of the state media outlets.

new versions) guarantees freedom of speech, thought, and the press, and freedom of expression. It is noteworthy that the new version of the Kyrgyz Republic Constitution lacks the point that censorship is prohibited in the Kyrgyz Republic.”

Laws regulating the media in Kyrgyzstan were written at various intervals from 1992 through 2002 and reflected the distinctive features of the political situation at the time. The media sector and other interested groups have discussed the possibility of revising laws in this area, which, it is generally acknowledged, have for the most part become obsolete. Panelists disagreed on the necessity of revisions at this time. Some doubted the possibility of revising the laws for the better.

For instance, Marina Sivasheva, editor of the website www.media.in.kg and an instructor in the sociology program at the American University of Central Asia, said, “The best is the enemy of the good. There have been repeated attempts to create a law on the media. Incidentally, the present state secretary, Madumarov, as a deputy in the previous parliament, attempted to propose such a law...many points of which were written poorly and in a confused and overly rhetorical fashion and was killed there. The present law is not all that bad, believe me. And additional laws on protection and guarantees sufficiently augment the basic Law on the Media. Hence, it is possible to work with that law. Until we, the media community, start creating precedents and explaining to society that officials who fail to provide information should be held accountable, and such officials are harshly punished, nothing will change.” Another panelist, Aleksandr Kulinskiy, an independent journalist, supported that view. He argued, “Quite honestly, the journalistic community and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are impeding the process of revising laws in the area of the media. Because in the present parliament, it does not seem possible to adopt more liberal laws than in 1992.” An indirect argument against revising laws on the media was added by Antonina Blindina, editor of the newspapers *Chuyskiye izvestiya* and *Dlya Vas*, who spoke of elections law: “The new code

was adopted in 2005, and, in my view, there are too many provisions governing media activity during the period of election campaigns, and they over-regulate that activity. During the time of election campaigns, many media outlets refused to participate in campaigning, because there are a lot of potential pitfalls. The law is confusingly written, and some provisions lend themselves to differing interpretations; therefore, media outlets preferred...not to cover publicly important events during the election period in order not to inadvertently commit possible violations of the laws.”

Others on the panel believe that the laws on the media have exhausted their usefulness to such an extent that they are substantially impeding the development of the media sector. As proof, they point to the situation in the area of distributing broadcast frequencies for television and radio, and the denationalization of the state media outlets. In particular, Ernis Mamyrganov, executive director of the Association of Regional TV and Radio Broadcasting, said: “Actually, the existing laws were needed during that period and have fulfilled their mission. But now the situation has emerged such that the journalistic community or NGOs are attempting to postpone revising the laws. This, to the contrary, is having a ruinous effect on the media outlets themselves. This can be said both of television and of issues affecting the financial stability of the media outlets themselves. And it can also be related to the issue of ‘denationalizing’ the republic’s print publications. It has been 18 months now that this has not been resolved, because there is no basis for it in law.”

The existing legal basis defines rules for issuing licenses and frequencies that are common for all types of communications operators—telephony, the Internet, and television and radio broadcasting. And a number of regulations here are clearly impeding the development of the electronic media, especially the regional media. Mamyrganov noted, “In 2001, when the bill on postal and electronic communications was submitted, which precedes the law on licensing, in order to protect the interests of the BITEL company, an amendment to it was introduced to the effect that frequencies were to be granted on the basis of an auction. Moreover, in order to take part in an auction, it was necessary to put up 20 million soms. The law on postal and electronic communications does not make any distinctions among communications operators; they are all lumped together under a single term. Not all of them (television and radio broadcasters) are able to put up that 20-million-som deposit in order to take part in the auction. But when there were precedents—Kadamzhay and Tash-Kumyr, with the help of international organizations, attempted to establish a radio station in those dying cities—they were refused because they did not meet the requirements of an auction, according to which there was

supposed to be a second applicant. Where are such applicants going to come from in those cities?”

According to Mamyrganov's information, around 60 applications to obtain television and radio broadcast frequencies are presently waiting for the National Communications Agency to resume considering applications. The situation with respect to the Agency's status is still unclear, since the structure of the government is being defined anew on the basis of the new version of the Kyrgyz Republic Constitution.

At this time, issues of licensing and the allocation of frequencies are the most pressing. The lack of resolution of this issue is creating an obstacle to the free entry of pluralistic media outlets into the media market. Licenses are increasingly becoming a mechanism for intimidating and combating the media, according to many panelists. The history of the development of the Piramida Television and Radio Company demonstrates how licenses are taken away, how they are not issued, and what sort of bargaining over obtaining a license takes place with the authorities. On the whole, the matter of licensing has gotten even worse over the past year, Kulinskiy believes.

Panelists consider another problem to be the structure of taxes for media outlets. On the one hand, the Kyrgyz Republic Tax Code guarantees media outlets identical conditions to those for other segments of the market. On the other hand, there are differences in the practice of taxation between government and nongovernmental media outlets. Thus, the former receive tax breaks, and tax audits are not aggressive in nature. This implementation of tax policy becomes an important mechanism when authorities want to pressure nongovernmental media outlets.

Other panelists argued that the media should have some tax advantages, particularly when it comes to the value-added tax (VAT). According to Nurgazy Anarkulov, deputy editor of the newspaper *Zhany Ordo*, just “recently around 20 newspaper publications have closed in the country, virtually all of them Kyrgyz-language publications. There was one reason—the value-added tax rate. Publishing houses are operating at a loss. The print advertising market is substantially smaller than that for the electronic media, and small circulations result in a high unit-cost of production.” Blindina adds: “It works out that the press pays the VAT twice—in buying paper and printing services, and then on the sale of newspapers.”

Cases of crimes against journalists and persecution of media outlets have been related to the status of the media as a political weapon. Panelists noted that the nature of the persecution of journalists has changed since the times of President Akayev. Whereas the methods of judicial prosecution and attempts to use the guise of law to cover

up the authorities' attacks on journalists used to prevail, now cases of physical attacks, beatings, and the harassment of journalists occur more widely. That is, politicians' use of extralegal methods, and arbitrary and lawless tactics, are becoming the norm. The panel's experts cited numerous examples of attacks on journalists during the November 2006 protests, in which journalists allege that even the representatives of law-enforcement agencies, parliamentary deputies, and high-ranking officials committed crimes against journalists. Investigations in these cases either are not initiated or are not carried through to prosecution.

According to data obtained in monitoring of the observance of journalists' rights conducted by the Journalists NGO, the number of infractions of the law with respect to journalists has been increasing. For example, there were 40 cases in June and 85 attacks in November.

Panel participants also deemed attacks on media outlets to be an alarming trend; they cited the examples of the robbery of the *Tribuna* newspaper and hackers' attacks on Internet resources (the website www.tazar.kg, for example). As the latter case indicates, the Internet's exclusion from laws on the media and the lack of any regulations governing Web resources are creating considerable problems for the owners of websites. In the case of the attack on the Tazar site, the law-enforcement agencies were unable to comprehend the specifics of the way that Internet resources operate and of the damage caused to them.

The authorities have not given up the judicial “lever” for pressuring the media, either. According to the information of the Media Representative Institute, over the past two years that organization has represented journalists' interests 52 times before judicial bodies. The attorneys at the Media Representative Institute participated in eight libel cases and 50 trials involving the defense of honor, dignity, and business reputation.

The issues of media agencies' unrestricted access to international news and of freely entering into journalistic activity did not draw any discussion, as there seem to be few obstacles beyond the economic. However, the issue of access to news sources is more complicated. Obtaining information from government sources is not always possible, and red tape and perfunctory replies to inquiries are common. The time frames established by law for responding to citizens' inquiries are not compatible with the immediate nature of media activity, panelists concluded. That is precisely why the materials in many media outlets are in many respects contentious. As Kulinskiy noted, “The existing law on the right of access to information states requirements but does not stipulate any sanctions. That is, it makes guarantees but does not prescribe any mechanisms for implementing

the law or mechanisms for punishment. It is impossible to create precedents. I filed an inquiry with the Supreme Court requesting a list of Supreme Court judges and their work phone numbers. Dosmatov, the first deputy chairman of the Supreme Court, refused because “that is not subject to disclosure.” If I appeal to regional-level courts, what do you think? Whose side will they be on? There is no point in creating a precedent.”

In summing up the discussion with respect to indicators of the first objective, Kulinskiy argued, “We have freedom of speech. We have a law on the subject. But it has so many holes in it that they make it possible to disregard both freedom of speech and the possibility of exercising that freedom of speech. And most importantly, the law does not guarantee the protection of freedom of speech. That is, it is mostly a matter of mere declaration.” It also was noted that work on the development of media law is continuing. In particular, this autumn a Law on the Right of Access to Information at the Disposal of Government Agencies and Local Self-Government was passed by parliament and confirmed by the Kyrgyz Republic president; it will substantially improve access to information. While the panelists were overall negative, they noted a slight improvement in the atmosphere.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Kyrgyzstan Objective Score: 1.89/4.00

Journalists in Kyrgyzstan are still far from maintaining professional standards, which was the focus of the panelists’ discussion. Despite the obvious progress that panelists noted in the form of higher ratings compared with last year (1.89 in 2006 and 1.61 in 2005), considerable criticism was voiced with respect to the professionalism of journalists, as the rating still remains low.

In Osmonov’s opinion, subjectivity and the one-sided reporting of news are by no means accidental in the work of most journalists: “A situation has emerged in the media market whereby journalists dance to the tune of their ‘providers,’ treating one and the same event in various ways to suit those who ‘pay the piper.’ But not all journalists recheck the accuracy of information from various sources; that’s just not something that is demanded of them. To the contrary, in their dependent situations, they have to cover events in a one-sided, biased fashion.”

During a period of political upheaval, when the public is especially waiting for accurate information, Kyrgyzstan’s media outlets, with the rarest of exceptions, work for certain interest groups, according to most panelists. The politically

biased journalist sometimes does not even take into account basic logic and common sense. Sivasheva recalls journalists’ “accurate” reports of the statistics of November rallies: “When journalists with opposition publications started howling about 50,000 supporters gathered on the square, even an outside Russian journalist could not restrain himself and said that the square couldn’t even hold that many people!” Typical in this respect is the position taken by Bolot Maripov, a deputy, journalist, and co-owner of a newspaper, who frankly stated: “Rumors are the best source for the media. It’s not worth mentioning sources.”

Ethical standards are not well defined in Kyrgyzstan. Some standards are developed jointly by the journalistic community as a whole, while others are adopted in virtually every editorial office. The standards that are adopted do generally meet international norms, but they are not followed in practice. Toktogulova admitted, “Kyrgyzstan’s media outlets do not follow the practice of including ethical standards among the conditions of a job contract when staff members are hired. Therefore, the notions in journalists’ heads and the verbal orders of editors operate in cases where a question of ethical standards and standards for the quality of information arises.”

Almaz Ismanov, of the Osh Media Center, described typical cases of the violation of ethical norms. “In Jalalabat, the media revealed the name of a person sick with AIDS, as a result of which he ended his life by committing suicide; following the death of parliamentary deputy Erkebayev, television showed the act of public self-immolation of his brother, who was driven to despair by the inaction of the investigative agencies and the arbitrary rulings of the courts;

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

a television reporter who was interviewing a girl who was a participant in the events in Aks-Suu District reduced her to hysterics and forced her to cry on camera.”

The political and economic dependence of publications and journalists is resulting in a revival of the practice of self-censorship and the placement of taboos on certain topics. In the opinion of the panel participants, self-censorship will become typical of journalistic work so long as the risks of all forms of persecution of journalists exist. Systems of taboos are especially widespread on the level of the regional media. In most media outlets, very real censorship and quite specific taboos exist. Panelist Anarkulov, from *Zhany Ordo* newspaper, describes the “golden rule” for journalists on nongovernmental publications: “Don’t criticize your sponsor or the editor’s friends.” Overall, the media system is not subject to specific censorship, but internally, the life of media staffers has by no means been democratized; in most media outlets, the dictates of the editor-owner rule, and articles and reports are censored.

Of course, the choice of topics and coverage of key events also depend on the bias of media outlets and specific journalists. In the presentation of information, there is an observable tilt toward the non-analytic, narrowly informative genres. At the same time, it is not yet possible to say that the existing media outlets deliver citizens a timely and high-quality news product.

The panelists also discussed ways in which journalists abuse their professional status. Virtually all panelists cited examples in support of the widespread assertion that television reporters with the State Television and Radio Company extort bribes for showing a subject and blackmail and for not shooting critical materials. Mamyrganov recalled a press conference held by the widow of deputy Erkinbayev in 2006 in which she asked a journalist in the audience about the money he had received from her for his “professional work.” The panelists agreed that such unethical and even criminal conduct is doing irreparable damage to the status of journalists and is destroying trust in journalism.

The autumn political crisis, like last year’s spring revolutionary events, demonstrated the high value of timely and objective news reporting. Under these circumstances, the prestige of the electronic media grew substantially since they were able to provide fresh news several times a day, in contrast with the weekly newspapers. During the period of the autumn demonstrations, various radio and television channels, depending on their type of ownership and their editors’ political bias, covered events in various ways; nonetheless, there was no information vacuum such as the one that existed in the spring of 2005. Furthermore, in striving to inform citizens in real time about the demonstrations that

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were taking place on the capital city’s square, without time limitations, some electronic media outlets encountered the problem of maintaining their broadcast network. The NTS television channel made a decision to broadcast live only one event—the opposition protest demonstration and everything related to it.

In today’s media, investigative journalism remains rare. Usually journalists attribute the lack of investigative reporting to the lack of resources to support it and the equally high risks. Anarkulov shared his experience: “I wanted to conduct a journalistic investigation concerning Kyrgyz Temir Zholdoru, but I received a warning from the deputy executive that I would be killed if I did. I had to back off.” Sivasheva sees another reason for the “disappearing genre”—professionalism. She recounted a program for training journalists under a Soros Foundation-Kyrgyzstan project whereby 44 participants in a seminar on investigative journalism were chosen on the basis of a competition, and after the training only 11 of them were able to present their investigative work.

Ismanov, regional coordinator of the Osh Media Center, sees a significant difference in the content of media depending on the language of a publication. In his opinion, the Uzbek-language media are not always relevant to events taking place in the republic. Differences in the content and quality of articles also occurs between national and regional media. The regional media outlets, in the panelists’ opinion, are substantially inferior in terms of professionalism, and the regional media outlets themselves are significantly inferior to capital-city publications in terms of production values. There are several reasons for such differences. First of all, the physical facilities and equipment of regional media outlets (both governmental and private) are very poor. The sole media outlets in remote regions may have a single voice recorder, computer, and mobile phone, and the earnings of regional journalists are barely over one-tenth those of their capital-city counterparts. Printing facilities in the regions have not been replaced in decades. Editors who make the decision

to be printed at more technologically “advanced” print shops face problems with delivery and increased production costs.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

Kyrgyzstan Objective Score: 2.23/4.00

A single information space has not yet been created in Kyrgyzstan, and each region has its own array of information sources. On the level of province or district centers, this includes the local press and electronic media (radio, television); in most regions, the State Television and Radio Company; and in the northern regions, Russian television channels and Russian and Kazakh print media. In the south, the information package includes the Uzbek media (mainly television and radio, although there is also Uzbekistan’s regional press). Radio is available throughout nearly all of Kyrgyzstan’s territory, but in some cases it can be received only over transistor radios, rather than over hard-wired receivers. The most popular radio throughout the country is Azattyk. Remote areas in the southern provinces have some zones that cannot be reached by national television broadcasts. At present, steps are being taken to bring the coverage of regional television company EITR up to nationwide standards. EITR, based in Osh, was named a public television company by the authorities after the events of March 2005. In terms of both its technical parameters and its professionalism, it remains a regional media outlet. It remains politically and economically dependent, and its content reflects that dependence.

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens’ access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

In the provincial centers, citizens have the possibility of connecting to the Internet, and in those centers there is also access to the library resources of nongovernmental and international organizations. In the districts and villages, the possibilities of reading the periodical press in libraries and of using the Internet are limited. Blindina believes that “only 30 percent of the population has access to print media outlets. And for rural residents, local media outlets are more acceptable in terms of both price and delivery time.”

Substantial information resources are available to city dwellers, especially in the capital and in Osh. Several television channels from Kyrgyzstan, cable television, satellite television, the Internet and the press of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Russia are available. It is also possible to obtain periodicals in foreign languages, but the Western press has extremely limited readership.

Panelists noted the rapid growth of local programming on all television channels since late 2005 and early 2006. News segments are the most complicated element for every television and radio company. Radio stations usually use the news agencies’ news wires and materials from the Internet, and they broadcast short, five-to-seven-minute news reports quite frequently. The situation is more complicated when it comes to television news programs, which are essentially done once a day and then repeated in several broadcasts. Sometimes one and the same news item may be broadcast on State Radio and Television for two or even three days, which in principle casts doubt on whether news programs are “news.”

A new trend has emerged with respect to the content of materials on State Radio and Television. More attention is given to information from the regions, and a significant bias toward news of the southern provinces is noticeable. The quality and style of news from the regions reproduce the reality of the 1980s, when news consisted of reports on agricultural accomplishments.

The cooperation among private television and radio studios established in the context of the Internews-Kyrgyzstan project does not yet have a stable venue for the exchange of regional news. At the State Television and Radio Company, regional television and radio studios have been activated and broadcast their own one-hour news programs weekly.

Large-circulation print media published in the capital focus for the most part on political events and news of the capital. The weekly nature of most publications makes the preparation of timely and significant information difficult. In the only daily (five days a week) newspaper, *Vecherniy Bishkek*, crime reports are of huge importance in the current news section, mostly because this is the information that is widely accessible to journalists; it need not be carefully

checked, and the risks of being taken to court for such articles is virtually nonexistent.

On the whole, every publication has problems with “distortions” in news content, a fact that is related to the difficulties journalists have in obtaining information from diverse sources. Despite the legally guaranteed access to publicly significant information, a number of government institutions resist the exercise of this right. For example, the Kyrgyz Republic National Security Council has no press service, and the press services of the law-enforcement agencies inform journalists on a selective basis. In Kulinskiy’s opinion, “every agency should have regulations on the activities of the press service that define its powers and duties. However, not a single body, except the parliament, has such regulations that are accessible, and usually agency employees have not even heard of such a document.” It was generally agreed that the most transparent body in the country at this time is the parliament. However, Toktogulova voiced a somewhat different opinion: “When such an important and vital issue as the parliament’s budget was being discussed, this was done behind closed doors, and journalists and the public had no access. That is, it seems to me that for the parliament, their standard openness is nothing more than a means of self-promotion.”

Whether a journalist is one of “us” or one of “them” has huge significance in the question of access to official government information. The former receive priority access. They are invited to significant government activities sufficiently in advance, and they are taken along on trips within the country and abroad. Journalists who belong to “them” must know how to cultivate ties and contacts for obtaining access to official information. Independent journalists have particular problems. This is related to the fact that the law does not define such a category of journalist, and in official places a journalist is automatically expected to produce an official document from his or her editorial office. Without such a document, access to information is shut off.

In general, Kulinskiy noted, “citizens in Kyrgyzstan have access to all forms of media. It is limited only by each specific user’s financial ability.” As for media access to publicly important information, panelists said, it continues to be made difficult and requires a unified struggle on the part of journalists and requires precedents of success.

The news agencies are of key importance in the production of real-time news with a broad thematic sweep. There has been obvious progress here. Whereas there were two news agencies operating in the country before the 2005 revolution,

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today one can speak of a competitive environment: the Kabar, Aki Press, 24 kg, Bishkek Info, and Bely Parokhod news agencies. Every key agency has its own advantages and shortcomings, but the existence of competitors gives them incentives to develop on an accelerated basis.

The public-television project has not yet been drawn up, although public discussions have been extremely vigorous. Ismanov said, “The discussions of public television are the result of political bargaining between the authorities and the opposition. The authorities have been attempting to show strength in resolving the matter, calling EITR public, while the climate at this time of the year has prevented the opposition from ‘flexing their muscles.’ There is a great danger today, on the wave of political struggles, of creating a mere imitation of public television, although in my view, the establishment of public television merits even greater priority than constitutional reform.”

Information on the owners and incorporators of newspapers is generally not provided, or the obscure designations of LLC or JSC (joint-stock company) are given. This sort of information is considered a commercial secret. The panel discussion accented the problems of the lack of transparency of ownership and of the processes by which media outlets are changed from one form of ownership to another. For example, after it was announced that Kyrgyz Public Radio and Television was to become Channel Five and to be under private ownership, many questions arose in journalistic circles. In particular: How could a media outlet with a high percentage of government ownership (a substantial bloc of shares were held by a number of governmental entities—the National University, the Kabar News Agency, etc.) become a private outlet? The concealment of information about owners among nongovernmental media outlets, which tout their lack of bias and their independence, has a damaging effect on the level of trust in such media outlets, according to the panelists.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Kyrgyzstan Objective Score: 1.55/4.00

The tempestuous political events of 2005 and 2006 exposed the weakness of media management, according to panelists. Media outlets in the country continue to be political and ideological instruments, but not business enterprises.

Toktogulova notes, "The main purpose of their operation is to support various financial and political groups, and the way in which the public is informed about events in the country depends on the owners' position."

Television channels' production of their own programming, which had experienced an upswing, declined again in the second half of the year. Today, the "Nashe vremya" programs on Piramida do not conclude with analytical wrap-ups; Apta is no longer carried by Kyrgyz Public Educational Radio and Television; and there is no analysis on Independent Bishkek Television. The reason lies in financial problems. Grants for television channels have dried up, and although sponsors still provide some money, it is not sufficient. Only a few media outlets succeed in being profitable enterprises.

Panelists discussed cases of economically successful media businesses. As in the past, *Vecherniy Bishkek*, *Agym*, and *Delo No.* continue to be examples of successful business enterprises. The example of *Vecherniy Bishkek* is interesting. As Sivasheva noted, "They have their tradition, and the city's residents have been reading it for several generations now. It has been in the market for 30 years. *Vecherniy Bishkek's* ads—all linear ads—have found their niche." Another publication, *Agym*, which celebrated its 80th year in November, also has established its traditions and found its niche.

INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

"The survival of nongovernmental print publications is largely a matter of management," believes Mamyrganov. "As a newspaper owner, I form a management concept and an economic strategy. A publication's editor, on the other hand, is responsible specifically for a newspaper's policy with respect to content. It is important to separate management and professional journalism."

Another successful business example is the new publication, *Super info*, the circulation of which, according to panelists, is reaching 60,000. Panelists assessed that publication not as an information newspaper as such but as a "clipping service" newspaper. Blindina commented on the publication's business success in this way: "In this type of media outlet, 90 percent of which consists of materials provided by the Internet and 10 percent of rumor and gossip, there is no need to worry about journalistic personnel or about copyrights or ethical problems." Anarkulov believes that "the *Super info* phenomenon cannot only be viewed as an example for condemnation. There are many things that the newspaper's editor and owner have managed to achieve as good businessmen and managers. For example, *Super info* is delivered even to remote regions. And whereas the leader of the Kyrgyz-language print media, *Agym*, is sold at retail for 12–13 soms, *Super info* goes for 7–8 soms. The point is that the owners of this newspaper have established a more efficient distribution system. They have established direct contracts with specific postal departments for distribution of the paper and 'bypassed' the costs of the monopoly of both state-controlled Kyrgyzbasmazoz and Kyrgyzpochtasy."

Extremely important factors in the success of a print media outlet as an economic enterprise are high-quality and affordable printing services. The state of printing facilities varies from region to region. Thus, in Bishkek there is a choice of print shops. But even here, all is not well. Whereas nongovernmental media outlets have received preferences at the print shop of the Center for Support of the Media, for government publications the services of that print shop have either been off limits or cost much more than for private publications. It is a noteworthy fact that the print shop of the Center for Support of the Media follows a policy of transparency and truthfulness with respect to newspapers' circulation numbers. All publications printed at that print shop are now forced to indicate their actual circulation.

Blindina shared her experience of the drawbacks of working with government print shops. "If we are printed at the Uchkun State Company, it is important to keep watch over our pressrun. That means that we need to station people on all five floors. Our papers get shamelessly stolen. And then they're sold cheaply and undercut our regular prices." Regional print shops, as a rule, do not own technologically modern equipment, and

therefore regional media outlets incur high production costs. The situation in each region has its own distinctive features. In Osh, there are two private print shops, but both of them are headed by government officials whose jobs are to work with the media. Thus, one print shop is operated by the director of a government print shop, and the other is managed by the director of *Kyrgyzpochtasy*. Both successfully combine their government service and private business with maximum benefit for the latter.

In Batken, print media outlets prefer to be printed outside the province—in neighboring Tajikistan—or to take their work to Bishkek print shops. The prospects for increasing the revenues of regional print shops are caught in a vicious cycle of problems. Because of weak management, it is difficult to earn profits and to update their equipment. Without new technologies, it is difficult to count on earning profits by bringing in new clients.

Capital-city publications especially suffer from delivery to the regions. Kulinskiy says that *Komsomolskaya Pravda* in Kyrgyzstan (KPK) even had a plan: print part of its circulation in the south, which would have been advantageous to both the newspaper (saving both transportation and time) and its readers (the newspaper would be cheaper and more timely). But the print shop's technical parameters did not make it possible to implement that plan.

A painful issue for the newspaper business is obtaining loans. Blindina tried unsuccessfully to get a loan at the bank and was surprised. "The banking system does not grant loans for the newspaper business. I was lucky—I received an interest-free loan from the state budget, but most media editors are greatly in need of loans. If there were a line of preferential credit for media outlets and print shops, the media market would develop further."

For most print publications, the main source of revenue is earnings from the sale of their publications (up to 80 percent, according to panelists' figures). The advertising market is very limited, represented mainly by mobile cellular phone operators, and does not exceed 15–20 percent. Nongovernmental media outlets rely mainly on commissioned articles and sponsorship, and on grants from international organizations. At government media outlets, relatively small subsidies and other government subsidies support the enterprise's budget. However, as time passes, the state has been funding government media less and less: There is symbolic support for *Slovo Kyrgyzstana* (SK), and State Television and Radio Company receives subsidies covering only five hours of broadcasting. The government press in the regions lives on "starvation rations," and even a small staff's meager wages are more than can be afforded in the regions. Editors and journalists use every available means;

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they sell newspaper space, publish paid announcements, and accept money for covering or not covering certain topics and individuals.

Diversification of revenue sources and reduction of the percentage of government subsidies are an important stage in the transition of government media outlets to political independence. As panelists noted, the autumn's political disturbances demonstrated a more restrained policy and more balanced approach to the provision of information on the central government media outlets—the State Television and Radio Company, *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, and *Kyrgyz Tuusu* (KT).

The ad agencies no longer hold monopolies, although major advertisers do work only with certain agencies, concluding contracts with them for an entire package of services. Not everyone is a winner in the distribution of advertising streams. For small print publications, there is no prospect of moving up from the position of also-rans in the ad market. All the most profitable advertising orders are filled by television. Bektash Shamshiyev, a journalist for *Azattyk* radio station, is not very optimistic in forecasting the development of the advertising market, even for television: "Major investors usually do not bother to advertise their products in the Kyrgyz media. For Kyrgyzstan's channels, advertisements for Turkish, Iranian, and local business products remain. It will still be a long time before advertising becomes a powerful financial structure for the media in Kyrgyzstan."

Nonetheless, in television a struggle is under way for distribution of the main advertising streams. But here a real problem arises with respect to measuring the advertising market. As Kulinskiy noted, "There has been a growth in the advertising market, but neither the ad agencies nor the media have any idea of the size of that market and its sectors." An acute shortage of various types of media measurements is the problem of the day. There are no reliable marketing or rating measurements. Advertising rates continue to be set arbitrarily,

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and there are no reliable figures on newspaper circulation. The very few studies of the media market that are conducted are usually commissioned by international organizations, and the study results are not brought to the attention of the media outlets themselves.

Lacking regular access to audience and market research, media managers do not understand the importance of such data. Toktogulova remarked, "Many editors of leading publications publicly oppose ratings and other media measurements. Putting forth one's own unsubstantiated ideas about market supply and demand is, at the very least, risky in an economic sense. It is incompatible with the commercial side of journalism."

Meanwhile, the incident with the record 200,000 pressrun of *Moya Stolitsa-Novosti* in spring 2005 reflects the costs of not knowing demand. At that time, a special edition of the newspaper with a pressrun unprecedented for the country sold out instantaneously in a single southern province alone. This case compels media managers to think about the real potential of consumers and their needs and interests.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Kyrgyzstan Objective Score: 2.09/4.00

In Kyrgyzstan, there are a number of professional and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work to promote the interests of various groups in the media sector—editors, managers, journalists, and media organizations and associations. There are also NGOs with a broader and less specific mandate that work on monitoring the observance of the rights of journalists or media outlets, and on protecting freedom of speech. Those organizations include the Union of Journalists, the Association of Electronic Media, the Media Workers Trade Union, the Media Resource Centers NGO, the Federation of Sports Journalists, the Voice of Liberty

Nongovernmental Foundation, the Journalists NGO, the Institute of the Media Representative, the Media Consulting NGO, the Nongovernmental Foundation for the Protection of the Rights of Journalists and the Media, etc.

In classifying the spectrum of existing organizations, Ismanov said, "Professional groups and associations represent the interests of media owners, not creative personnel. As of this time, in the outlying regions there is not a single lawyer who specializes in the media, or an attorney or even an NGO that concerns itself with these issues. Several of them halted their activity 18 months ago." Shamshiyev categorically asserted, "Until there is professional solidarity, not a single organization will operate effectively!"

The question of the effectiveness of the activities of supporting institutions evoked disputes in panel discussion. Most of the participants saw in NGOs not the intention to support the media and free speech, but unprincipled devourers of grant money. The whole essence of the work of NGOs and other organizations that support the media was expressed in the concept "the profanation of activity," and the approach to the defense of freedom of speech was defined as "double standards." Kulinskiy, an advocate of that viewpoint, said heatedly: "There was a strike of cameramen at the Kyrgyz Television and Radio Company. Where were the trade unions? People themselves did not even know that without trade unions they could not protest in an organized fashion. In labor disputes, there is no help from anyone. At Piramida, there was an incident with a well-known anchorwoman in which management infringed her rights. So that anchorwoman received no help from either the trade union or the ombudsman, but, it's ridiculous to say, Comrade Tursunbek Akun (chairman of the Presidents Committee on Human Rights) personally helped her!"

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

Other panelists did not agree with such a radical assessment. They gave rather high marks to the activities of NGOs, emphasizing the importance of both monitoring of the observance of the rights of journalists and the media, and actions in support of free speech. Examples were cited of NGOs' repeated and active involvement in organizing actions in support of the Piramida television channel this year. The activities of the Institute of the Media Representative received high marks, as did all of those organizations that offer short-term professional training. In the panelists' opinion, the main problem is that there are not all that many organizations, and they are mainly concentrated in the two big cities—Bishkek and Osh.

Marat Tokoyev, of the Nongovernmental Association of Journalists, believes that not every media representative knows his mission and the work that can be done in specific organizations. "Take even organizations that are not very active, such as the Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters. This is a membership organization consisting of seven radio stations and one newspaper. They pool their efforts in working with advertising markets, and they help fill the airwaves with quality products, etc. As for violations of journalists' rights, as the experience of our Journalists NGO shows, the reason for the violation of journalists' rights often lies in their legal ignorance."

Legal knowledge is not the only thing journalists experience a shortage of. In the panelists' opinion, the system of professional education is obsolete and does not take the realities of journalists' work today into account. After graduating from journalism departments and divisions, poorly trained journalists come to work in media outlets. Most of them do not know how to write the most basic notes and do not know how to gather information correctly. But an even greater percentage of journalist graduates never make it to media outlets at all. Usually it is considered more prestigious and profitable to work for PR agencies, and that is where graduates try to go.

The main weakness of professional training of journalists in higher schools lies in the incorrect concept of practical studies in journalism. The standardized emphasis on history and literature seems inappropriate to the requirements of the market. It is much more important, in the panelists' opinion, to include in the curriculum courses on professional ethics and the legal foundations of journalism, as well as specialized courses for further topical specialization in journalism.

"The personnel problems at media outlets are solvable," Blindina believes. "It is important to participate in free short trainings and seminars, and we need to revive the system of mentoring at media outlets themselves. It is good that

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there are numerous specialized training courses. Internews-Kyrgyzstan plays the leading role here."

In improving the professionalism of journalists, a great deal depends on the position of management. On the one hand, editors have a stake in professional personnel. On the other, the production process brooks no delay, and time is not given to mentoring. And the staff member himself fears that he will lose wages during the time that is taken for training. Many editors see the solution in a strategy of luring away journalists who are already trained. Blindina shared her own experience as an editor in training personnel: "I took on two female employees as advertising agents. They came to the job without any knowledge or experience. I sent them to do internships and undergo training while keeping their pay. After gaining knowledge and trying their hand, the girls left and went where the pay was better. So the next time you'll think twice about whether you should develop personnel?"

Toktogulova believes that "in training employees one needs to take the comprehensive approach. There need to be training courses on the job, with a use of clear-cut indicators of the effectiveness of training and progress reports." Positive experience with comprehensive training in the residency format already exists in the republic—training in management at Kyrgyz Public Educational Radio and Television and on the newspaper *Dlya vas*, which made it possible to change the "face" of media outlets.

In residencies and the comprehensive on-the-job training of personnel, additional positive aspects are noted: The simultaneity of innovation and intervention at all levels of media outlets contributes to the implementation of reforms in work; not just those who usually participate in training

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programs, but other employees of media outlets, get involved in the training.

The need for structural, systemic changes is important in more than professional training alone. It is especially important in the demonopolization of sources of the printing and distribution of media products. In virtually every sphere of media production and distribution, the problems remain of the diversity and variety of channels, their impartiality, and their successfulness as business enterprises. As of this time, the panelists cited a number of monopolies or near monopolies that it is important to rapidly and effectively reform: The Kyrgyztelekom State Enterprise holds a monopoly on telecommunications networks, which theoretically could allow it to close off access to the Internet. The only entity that can transmit television and radio signals from Bishkek to the regions is RPO RMTR. Until there is pluralism in all of these services and channels, the authorities will have levers for pressuring the media and holding onto the media as an ideological tool.

In the system of the distribution of print products, Kyrgyzbasmasoz holds a monopoly, as does Kyrgyzpochtasy, in the system of delivery of those products to the regions. This allows them to treat various media outlets selectively and set the rates they want for services. In the capital, there are alternative entities for distribution, such as the Periodika private network, or groups of individual distributors. But on the whole, monopoly persists in the country. “Networks for the distribution of print products are under the control of the government or paragonovernmental agencies. And they quite often follow a selective policy with respect to individual media outlets,” according to Ismanov.

Panel Participants

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Antonina Blindina, Editor-in-Chief, *Chuyskiye izvestiya* newspaper, Chuy Province

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Aleksandr Kulinskiy, Independent Journalist

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