

**Information Matters –  
Transparency and Accountability  
in the Kyrgyz Republic**

*Budget Reporting for Journalists  
and Media Training Project*

**NEEDS ASSESSMENT  
REPORT  
(Summary)**

## Introduction

After the political upheaval of 2010 the Kyrgyz Republic has a budget deficit of more than 10%, whereas, at the beginning of this year it was about 5.5%, and two or three years ago it did not exceed 4%. If, prior to the political changes, the budget of Kyrgyzstan and its deficit were managed by a special group of people, currently, we are faced with a situation when the economic development is not a prerogative of a specific layer of society, but is a common task. The actual development of the economy may be achieved, provided the country's citizens are aware of the situation and problems in the area of the state finance.

Kyrgyzstan's residents are not adequately informed of the condition of the state finance and country budget related problems in general, as well as those related particularly to local budgets. The mass media fail to execute their function of providing information on the state and local budgets to the society. This is one of a number of reasons why the residents of the republic do not perceive the relationship between the state and municipal finance and their life quality. They do not understand the way in which the public finance influences service provision. On the one hand, it results in that the citizens' attitude to the budget is that of consumers: they often expect that, they may, for instance, have their multi apartment houses repaired at the expense of the state budget, despite the fact that apartments in such houses have been privatized. Here is another example: parents are ready to pay fees to schools to cover their needs which should be covered from the state and local budgets. At the same time, the citizens, for example, have no idea of how the money allotted for the government maintenance is spent, or how the state aid is distributed. For instance, the April event victims have got monetary compensation of one million Som. The relatives of victims of the June events in Osh and Jalal-Abad have received 50,000 Som.

The Kyrgyz Republic budget is still non-transparent and the citizens do not have an adequate chance to influence budget formation, approval and execution. According to the rating of the American organization of "International Budget Partnership", in 2010, Kyrgyzstan, like Cambodia, was among the bottom countries in the rating of state budget – the transparency of the country's budget does not exceed 15 percent<sup>1</sup>.

Most citizens have a rather vague idea of the public finance, ways of its formation, role in the economic development, ways of managing it in an efficient manner, as well as means of its abuse and mercenary usage. The least transparent are issues of saving, overspending and other changes which take place in the course of budget execution. For example, under the law any change related to budget execution shall be discussed and approved at local council sessions or through a special law adopted by the Parliament in case of the state budget, and information of such changes must be available to the public. However it is not the case in real life.

The budget is still non-transparent because, on the one hand, government agencies are not eager to disclose budget information and, on the other hand, the public demand of such information SEEMS rather low. Society oversight plays a great role in achieving finance and property management transparency. When dealing with elective government bodies no coercive measures aimed at information disclosure are as effective as citizens' demands. However this control does not arise per se. The society must possess special knowledge and skills to exercise an efficient oversight of finance and property management.

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<sup>1</sup> The data provided by the "Precedent" Partnership Group. 22/10/10 13:42, Bishkek – IA "24.kg"

If you ask a remote village resident whether he/she is interested in some information related to the state budget plan for the ensuing quarter, he/she is most likely to say “no”. But, if you ask him/her whether he/she is interested in how much the state spends on the upkeep of his/her son, doing his military service, this information is, no doubt, going to be of great interest to him/her. The results of the research conducted by the Alliance “For Transparent Budget” in 2009 testify to the fact that most people in Kyrgyzstan (more than 73%) show some interest in the process of allocating tax and non-tax revenues by ayil okrugs. The residents of Osh (82%) and Issyk- Kul (87%) Oblasts demonstrated the most significant interest in how tax and non-tax revenues are allocated. The least interested proved to be the residents of Naryn (58%) and Chui (65%) Oblasts.

It is indicative that the overwhelming majority of the citizens – 76% show some interest in the stages of execution, supervision and reporting, i.e. they, want to know the ways in which the money is actually spent. But the stages of budget formulation and approval are of interest to only 24% of the interviewed, i.e. the people are not aware of any opportunity of influencing the plans of finance spending.

Practically nobody except for some NGOs and donor projects teaches people to understand budgeting processes. However mass media could provide people with some simple and comprehensible information on all the stages of budgeting process and demonstrate to them how they could take part in these stages.

Mass media have barked these and many other issues related to public finance. As a result, Kyrgyz Republic citizens are deprived of the opportunity to use media as an instrument of achieving transparency and accountability of the Government in the area of managing the state and public finance.

The input of journalists cannot be overestimated as they (mass media) are the most significant driving force capable of driving society to addressing some or other issues and forming opinions of both specific citizens and overall community. A democratic society which should be created in this country will depend on the extent of reliability and accurate interpretation of information which it will be provided by economic journalists.

## Key findings and recommendations

Training needs assessment led to the main conclusion: Kyrgyz journalists need additional knowledge and sources of information related to economics, budgetary process, etc. Below is a summary of the key findings of the assessment which support the main conclusion, and recommendations on training content and the most appropriate arrangement of the training process.

*Only 2% of the surveyed Kyrgyz journalists claim that they are educated enough to report on budget issues.*

- About 1/3 of the respondents (journalists) state that they possess the most basic and general knowledge of economics, finance, budget and fiscal policy. Around 2 percent of the interviewed highly assess their knowledge of these issues, but no journalists possess the expert level knowledge of fiscal policy issues. No more than 10 percent have taken part in special training events and about the same percentage of the journalists are engaged in self-education. Very few of the respondents indicated economics as the sphere of their interest. At the same time nearly two thirds confirmed that they would like to participate in training on the indicated topics. Nearly 40 percent of the interviewed journalists believe that they lack knowledge and skills related to the following topics: “Share of Expenditures Allotted to Social Spheres and Ministries”, “Budgetary Process at Republican Level”, “Intergovernmental Finance”, “Sectoral Development Strategy and Sector Budget Policy”. About 50 percent of the journalists lack knowledge of the following topics: “Budget Deficit and Surplus” and “Medium-Term Forecast”.

**It is recommended:** that special emphasis be put on the following topics: “Budget Deficit and Surplus” and “Medium-Term Forecast”, then, “Share of Expenditures Allotted to Social Spheres and Ministries”, “Budgetary Process at Republican Level”, “Intergovernmental Finance”, “Sectoral Development Strategy and Sector Budget Policy”.

*As regard budget, journalists touch upon a very narrow scope of topics and issues*

- Journalists who write about budget issues have a rather poor idea of budget essence and goals, so they dwell upon a narrow scope of budget topics and mostly cover such issues as budget recharge through attraction of external resources; national level budget policy, tax policy. Journalists very rarely pay attention to the laws making changes in the current state budget and practically never dwell upon budget execution. It is not as a result of lack of interest that mass media rarely dwell upon budget topics, but because most Kyrgyz journalists: 1) have no skills of dealing with economic information as a whole; 2) do not understand the tasks faced by the state budget and do not see its impact on the specific aspects of people’s life; 3) have no skills of dealing with quantitative data and have no analytical skills.

**It is recommended:** that the scope of issues covered in the process of training be expanded; journalists be demonstrated the relationship between budget and quality of state and municipal services; budget topics be “tied” to real life for the purpose of expanding the scope of budget related issues covered by media.

*It is only a small amount of materials that is dedicated to sectoral budgets and there are practically no publications on local budgets.*

- For instance, over the period of media-monitoring under this research no (!) materials have been registered to include the words “equalization grant”, “categorical grant”, “intergovernmental finance”. Given this finding, it is necessary to pay special attention to the structure and role of local budgets when developing a training program. It is also

necessary to devote more time to journalists' practical work with real examples of local budgets.

**It is recommended:** that the level of rayon journalists' knowledge of delimitation of the state functions and those of local governments, of intergovernmental finance be improved; the level of their knowledge and skills as regard reading, understanding, analysis and easy to perceive coverage of information on budget, which should be related to the needs of citizens residing in a specific locality, be improved; the demand of rayon level journalists of budget information on local budgets be increased; information exchange among media, LGs, rayon NGOs be intensified; information exchange between rayon and republican level media be improved; journalists be provided with tools of oversight of efficiency level of municipal property management and provision of municipal services to meet the interests of the communities.

*Journalists are not able to be critical when assessing budget information as they have a poor understanding of this information and this, in turn, prevents them from disclosing cases of abuse and corruption in the budget area*

- The results of the media-monitoring conducted under this research showed that 683 materials or 99% of the overall number of the materials sounded neutral and only 8 materials (1%) had a negative tone. It is a clear proof of lack of a critical attitude on the part of the journalists when considering budget related issues which, in its turn, stems from lack of budget knowledge, necessary for critical analysis and interpretation of materials. The journalists have a very poor idea of the state structure (for example, they do not see any difference between local state administrations and local governments); they are not aware of the purposes for implementing taxes, what state and public needs they are spent on.

**It is recommended:** given this fact it is recommended that journalists be trained the basics of the state structure, functions of the state, system and principles of their financing; journalists' knowledge on budget and budgetary process be improved; the same is true about their skills as regard reading and understanding budget related information; journalists' skills of analysis of sectoral budget information on specific issues be improved.

*Additional problems related to obtaining, interpreting and providing budget information are encountered by journalists working in the Kyrgyz language.*

- Most journalists work in the Kyrgyz language, but they run into problems when trying to get information in the Kyrgyz language (nearly all the information is developed in the Russian language), when trying to get access to Kyrgyz language information sources.

**It is recommended:** that training materials, adapted and "translated" into the philistine language be produced and widely disseminated in the Kyrgyz language; Kyrgyz language journalists be provided an opportunity to communicate with central level experts in the Kyrgyz language; a glossary of budget related terminology with easy to understand interpretation in the Kyrgyz and Russian languages be issued.

*The genres in which budget information is supplied are very few. Such information is mostly offered in the form of brief news based on official information. No experts' comments are provided.*

- The findings of the media-monitoring conducted under this research have revealed that it is mostly in the news form that information on budget issues has been provided. The rating is mainly the same as regard both sources: news rate first, analytical materials – second and experts' comments – third. The fact that experts' comments are most rarely used to provide budget information is an alarm sign which first of all indicates that there

are no budget experts in the regions. It considerably reduces an opportunity for journalists to provide adequate quality coverage of budget topics.

**It is recommended** that opportunities for journalists to obtain specialists' comments be increased by attracting experts to work with journalists at regional level.

*Journalists do not often apply visual methods to provide information on budget issues.*

- The elements of quantitative information visualization - infographics – are applied very rarely. 65 percent of the interviewed journalists have no idea of infographics and of those who are aware of this method, only eight respondents have confirmed the fact of applying it.

**It is recommended** that special attention be paid to the quality of applying digital information in mass media and to the technology of visualizing quantitative information – infographics.

*Regional journalists have a very heavy load of work and it will be a very strong risk factor in the way of the project success.*

- Most journalists – nearly 68 percent – prepare more than one (up to nine) material a week and it testifies to a rather heavy load of work and a short period for materials to be prepared. This, in turn, lowers the quality of their materials and narrows their chance of doing some analytical work. Economic materials are usually prepared two or three times a month and those on budget issues not oftener than once a month. Moreover, 28 percent of the interviewed journalists have confirmed that it is only once a year that they cover budget topics.

**It is recommended** that one keep from expecting a large number of articles to be prepared by the participants and consider a project result a success provided at least one article is received from 50 percent of the participants.

*Journalists are not well aware of their opportunities of obtaining budget information provided to them by the legislation*

- There is a problem to the effect that journalists do not know the Law “On Access to Information Handled by State Government and Local Government Bodies of the Kyrgyz Republic”, dated December 28, 2006, which clearly states that budget information must not only be available but publicized. In fact, only 40 percent of the journalists have read the law on access to information and a bit more than half of them have read the law on mass media. Herewith eight respondents (23%) did not indicate any of the laws listed by the other respondents.

**It is recommended** that special efforts be taken to train journalists to get aware of the opportunities which are provided to them by the legislation in the area of access to budget information.

## Assessment methodology

A comprehensive approach was applied to assess the needs of the three key groups: journalists, editors and media owners. Three tools were applied to do the assessment:

- Interviewing journalists
- Interviewing editors and media owners
- Media content analysis (media monitoring).

### Interviewing journalists

Representatives of different categories of media were interviewed to get some understanding of journalists' capacity – journalists working in traditional and new media in the Russian and Kyrgyz languages.

The interview was conducted by category:

- Journalists working in the national media in Bishkek and writing about budget and public finance issues (TV, radio, newspapers, websites),
- Journalists from Bishkek, Osh and regional media, specializing in local news and wishing to improve their knowledge of public finance issues,
- Bishkek, Osh, region media journalists writing about the economy (business, primarily), who may be potentially interested in professional development and are willing to improve their knowledge of public finance issues – particularly in the area of fiscal policy,
- Journalists of oblast level having no experience in the area of the economy, public finance, but interested in improving their knowledge in this sphere,
- Internet information agency journalists particularly interested in infographics and interactive media, who may become pioneers promoting new models of providing budget information,
- New media representatives (bloggers, social networks, information portals, etc.), who may prove efficient in their niche after they have improved their competence as regard public finance issues

The overall number of the journalists who were interviewed is 35 and they represent all the regions of the country. The interviewing based on a questionnaire was held by phone and during face-to-face meetings. The questionnaire was compiled with the help of writing journalists and was put to an evaluation test. After the test the questionnaire was translated into the Kyrgyz language to interview the respondents in the language they feel more comfortable about. The questions included in this questionnaire were grouped by category: 1) information on a respondent, education, language he/she works in, job-related experience; 2) self-assessment of knowledge of economics, budget issues, fiscal policy, public finance, right of access to information, government transparency; 3) information on the system of management in mass media, who checks information/articles, who takes editorial decisions, how the time is distributed when developing materials, who takes a decision as regard material content and some information on the media the respondents are employed in.

The interview was conducted by a specialist who was trained for the purpose and had a good idea of the target audience.

The data was entered in the database for their further processing, analysis and effective use analysis to put together a report on “needs assessment”.

### Interviewing government representatives, editors and media owners

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Having analyzed the journalists' questionnaires the Institute of Development Policy conducted interviews of the Ministry of Finance representatives, editors and owners of the media employing the interviewed journalists. The interviews were held after a scenario which was developed for the purpose and included open end questions. The answers were put down both manually and with the help of a notebook. The questions were focused on:

- process of taking decisions on checking and issuing materials on economic and public finance topics;
- problems related to providing official opinions (state or client), which differ from the popular opinions;
- role of external participants and special interests;
- opinion regarding public interest to budget and public finance topics;
- financial problems related to conducting in-depth research;
- awareness and opinions regarding legislation on freedom of information and initiatives in the area of budget transparency.

### **Media monitoring (content analysis)**

**The main goal of media monitoring** is to cause as many cases of mentioning budget topics in mass media of the Kyrgyz Republic as possible.

According to the technical specifications the objects of monitoring were **52 mass media**, of which 30 were print media, 6 – TV and radio companies, 16 – Internet resources. During the monitoring **48 mass media** mentioned the key words of the monitoring: printed media – 27, TV companies – 6, Internet resources – 15. The following print media – the central newspaper of “Uchur” and regional papers of “Osh Echo”, “Talas Turmushu”, as well as the site of [www.issyk-kulpress.kg](http://www.issyk-kulpress.kg) have failed to publish any budget related materials over the monitoring period.

The monitoring assessed the quantity and evaluated the tone of the cases of budget information coverage in the mass media – both related to the republican budget and local budgets of the country. The monitoring key words and set expressions are as follows:

- state budget
- republican budget
- consolidated budget
- budget deficit
- budget surplus
- republican level budgeting process
- tax returns
- share of welfare expenditures
- share of ministry expenditures
- sectoral development strategy
- budget policy
- local budget
- local level budgeting process
- categorical grant
- equalization grant
- intergovernmental finance
- public budget hearing
- budget execution report
- misuse of public funds
- tax policy or monetary policy

### **Desk research**

The “Needs Assessment” Report is based on the findings of the interviewing and media monitoring. In addition, the results of the “Facts of Economic Journalism Condition in the Kyrgyz Republic” research were applied when putting together this report. The results of the content analysis of the Kyrgyz Republic print media were compared to those of Kazakhstan, Russia and USA<sup>2</sup>. This research was arranged by the Press Club of the Kyrgyz Stock Exchange and Institute of Development Policy on their own initiative and did not receive any additional funding. It was focused on obtaining quantitative data to be able to reveal some objective indicators characteristic of the level of economic media and supply of economic information by mass media in the four countries – Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation and USA.

## Data on Target Audience

### Data on journalists

The overall number of the interviewed journalists is 35, of them 20 are females and 15 are males. It confirms the assumption of the experts on economic journalism of the KSE Press Club to the effect that Kyrgyzstan’s economic journalism has a “female face”: “There are very few men among economic journalists, who are yet very few. But two or three decades ago, this profession was believed to be that of men only. There was a wide spread opinion that men would do a better job telling or writing about brick production, gold mining, cotton producer problems, housing construction, road building. But, now, it is mostly the softer sex representatives who undertake this difficult task<sup>3</sup>”.

Media representatives from all the regions of Kyrgyzstan, including its largest cities of Bishkek and Osh, took part in the research. The geographic structure of the respondents is demonstrated below.

**Table 1. Geographic coverage of respondents**

Регион	Число ответов	%
Batken Oblast	2	
Issyk-Kul Oblast	3	5,71
Jalal-Abad Oblast	6	8,57
Naryn Oblast	7	17,1
Talas Oblast	6	20
Osh Oblast	4	17,1
Chui Oblast	2	11,4
Bishkek	3	5,71
Osh	2	8,57

The majority of the respondents are representatives of print media – 24 people or about 65% of the interviewed.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://press.kse.kg/ru/publications/?id=173>

<sup>3</sup> Financial Topic in Mass Media. Manual for Journalists and Senior Students of Journalism Departments. “Economic Journalism” Series edited by N. Dobretsova. B., 2011.

Diagram 1. Respondents' place of employment, in percentage



Print media (newspaper)

TV

Radio

New media

The majority of the interviewed media representatives have a regular job in one of the mass media – 80 percent of the interviewed, 17 percent – work in several media at the same time and about three percent (1 person) are independent journalists (freelancers). Nearly half the respondents – about 49 percent – may be considered experienced journalists as they have been working in mass media for more than 10 years. There are also quite a few journalists who have been working in the sphere of media from three up to ten years – more than 25 percent. Another 25 percent have been working in this capacity for less than three years. (Table 2).

Table 2. Years of work in mass media

Срок	Число ответов	%
Up to 1 year	3	8,57
From 1 to 3 years	6	17,1
From 3 to 5 years	4	11,4
From 5 to 10 years	5	14,3
11 - 15 years	4	11,4
16 - 20 years	3	8,57
More than 20 years	10	28,6

### Data on Mass Media

37 mass media have been surveyed, most of them are print media (Table 3).

Table 3. Structure of surveyed mass media

Вид СМИ	Число ответов	%
Newspaper	24	64,9
Journal	0	0
TV	7	18,9
Radio	2	5,41
Internet - blog	0	0
Internet – social network	2	5,41
Other (information agencies)	2	5,41

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### List of interviewed journalists, owners and editors of mass media outlets, Kyrgyzstan

List of journalists			
1	Madina Satymbaeva	Newspaper "For Coal"	Batken oblast
2	Berdishev Mamajan	KNIA "Kabar"	Batken oblast
3	Kasymaliev Zarlyk	"Issyk-Kol kabarlary"	Issyk-kul oblast
4	Grekalov Igor Valerevich	Vesti IK	Issyk-kul oblast
5	Aman Junusbekov	IK oblgov TRK	Issyk-kul oblast
6	Khairullaev Takhirjan	"Jalolobod Tongi"	Jalalabad oblast
7	Niyazbekova Aigerim	JTK	Jalalabad oblast
8	Munarbek Jorgomov	JTK	Jalalabad oblast
9	Erkingul Nurdumamatova	JTK	Jalalabad oblast
10	Anarkhan Janybaeva	Zaman-Kyrgyzstan, Kabar	Jalalabad oblast
11	Zirek Asanova	Newspaper "Akyikat"	Jalalabad oblast
12	Sharshieva Kachkyn	Newspaper "Tenir-Too"	Naryn oblast
13	Musuralieva Nazgul	Newspaper "Tenir-Too"	Naryn oblast
14	Jumabaev Kubanychbek	"Дыйкандар уну"	Naryn oblast
15	Esenalieva Klara	"Tenir-Too"	Naryn oblast
16	Kumondor Usuptegin	"Kyrgyz Tuucu", "Zaman-Kyrgyzstan", "Кыргыз Туусу", "Barakelde"	Naryn oblast
17	Abdyldaeva Makhabat	"Tenir-Too"	Naryn oblast
18	Atyrkul Baiterekova	Naryn oblast TRK	Naryn oblast
19	Jakypnek Tulegenov	Talas turmushu	Talas oblast
20	Chabdarova Burmagul Toktogulovna	Talas TRK	Talas oblast
21	Aitikeyev Mirbek	Radio "Azattyk"	Talas oblast
22	Malabekov Esenbek	"Alibi", "Daban", "Janbagyt "	Talas oblast
23	Raiymkanova Syrgak	Newspaper "Manas Ordo"	Talas oblast
24	Anarbakova Nasipa	Newspaper "Daban"	Talas oblast
25	Masimkan Tursumbekova	Newspaper of Osh onlast "Osh janyrygy"	Osh oblast
26	Gulbara Kenjeeva	OTRK(South subbranch)	Osh oblast
27	Viktor Nikodimovich Zilinga	Public-politic newspaper of oblast "Ekho Osha" agency oblgovadmin	Osh oblast
28	Joroeva Kanykei	Rainewspaper "Ozgon nuru"	Osh oblast
29	Rizvan Ismailova	"Erkin Too" South subdepartment	Osh oblast
30	Gafarova Svetlana	"Ekho Osha"	Osh
31	Osina Elena Vladimirovna	"My town- Tokmok"	Chui oblast
32	Igor Skafanov	"Alamedinskii vestnik"	Chui oblast
33	Maksim Coi	"Vechernii Bishkek"	Bishkek
34	Meerim Mambetova	"ChNT""NBT" ltd	Bishkek
35	Dudka Irina	IA "Issyk-kul oblast and Naryn oblast.kg"	Bishkek

<b>List of editors and owners of Mass Media outlets</b>		
Kozybek Imankulov	Head editor, “Talas turmushu”	Talas oblast
Umetov Ermek asanovich	General Director, Talas oblast government TRK	Talas oblast
Mira Seidikerimova	Owner and editor, newspaper “Daban”	Talas oblast
Bazarkulova Kuttumidin Derbishalievich	General Director, Jalal-Abad TRK	Jalal-Abad oblast
Akjolova Meimanbu	Head editor, “Jalalabad unu”	Jalal-Abad oblast
Stambek Samidin	Head editor, newspaper “Dil”	Jalal-Abad
Anashov Joldoshbai	Head editor, region newspaper “Ozgon nuru”	Uzgen
Kanatbekuulu Talantbek	Producer, “Ata-Jurt”, “El TR” OTRK	Osh
Basanova Zinakan	Editor, “Fergana Akipress”	Osh
Nurdin Almaz	1 <sup>st</sup> sub of head editor, newspaper “Osh Janyrygy”	Osh oblast
Syuita Sourbaeva Onolbekovna	Owner and general director, TRK “Osh TV”	Osh oblast
Volskaya Valentina	Head editor, “For coal”	Batken oblast
Mamatkerimov Tokur	Head editor, Kadamjai regional newspaper “El Jarchysy”	Batken oblast
Pravoslavnova Lyudmila Vladimirovna	Head editor, regional newspaper “Vesti of Issyk-kul”	Issyk-Kul oblast
Kalybek Taitikeev	Head editor, Issyk-kul oblast governmental TV –radio company	Issyk-Kul oblast
Narzullaeva Zumrad	Editor, “Karakol truth”	Issyk-Kul oblast
Egemberdiev Abdyjapar	Head editor, newspaper “Issyk-kol kabarlary”	Issyk-Kul oblast
Toktoev Temirlan	1 <sup>st</sup> sub head editor, newspaper “Tenir-Too”	Naryn oblast
Sadykkazieva Japargul	Sub head editor, “Naryn oblast TRK”	Naryn oblast
Ibraeva Jarkyn	Owner and editor, “Naryn.kg”	Naryn oblast
Tuzov Aleksandr	Owner/ 1 <sup>st</sup> sub head director, “Vechernii Bishkek”	Bishkek
Sakybaeva Asker Duishenalievna	Head editor, newspaper “Jany-Agym”	Bishkek
Orunbekov Bakytbek Orunbekovich	Head editor, newspaper “Kyrgyz Tuucu”	Bishkek