

## THE WEAKNESS OF NATIONAL BROADCASTING AS A FACTOR AGAINST NATION-FORMATION IN KYRGYZSTAN

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### Abstract

Since the independence Kyrgyzstan faces problems with sovereignty, which is also manifested in media. The Northern and Southern Kyrgyzstan is separated by mountains and they were open to different influences since ages. Modern developments in infrastructure cleared many factors dividing nations, but it has limited significance in terms of national unity in Kyrgyzstan so far. For Benedict Anderson *print capitalism* is crucial in the establishment of some belonging to a defined territory with administrative borders. Print capitalism had helped the individuals to imagine common links with other individuals within the borders through news covering this territory. Today media is more than just newspapers, and Kyrgyzstan does not only suffer from the lack of nationally distributed newspapers but radio and television channels have also limited coverage. The mountainous geography is a serious hindrance for the national coverage. Different territories of Kyrgyzstan follow broadcasts of different foreign media channels. In Southern Kyrgyzstan - neighboring Uzbekistan - Uzbek channels are being watched by most and in the North generally Russian and Kazakh channels' broadcasts are being watched. The mountainous geography also reinforces local media. This divided territory for media is one of the factors hampering the development of an understanding of belonging to the Kyrgyz Republic and the consolidation of citizenship. The cleavage between the North and the South - divided by mountains - is also reproduced through broadcasts. The study aims to analyze statistical data to investigate radio and television channels followed in different regions of Kyrgyzstan in order to show the regionalization and the impact of foreign media in Kyrgyzstan.

**Keywords:** Kyrgyzstan, National Sovereignty, Media, Construction of Nation-state, Print Capitalism.

### Özet

Bağımsızlık elde edildiğinden beri Kırgızistan egemenlikle ilgili sorunlarla karşılaşmaktadır. Bu, medyanın durumunda da kendini göstermektedir. Kuzey ve Güney Kırgızistan dağlarla birbirinden ayrılmıştır ve bu bölgelerden yüzyıllardır farklı kültürel etkiler altındadır. Altyapı alanındaki çağdaş gelişmeler ulusları bölen pek çok etkeni ortadan kaldırmıştır, ancak Kırgızistan'da ulusal birliğin oluşturulması açısından bunun etkisi şimdilik sınırlı kalmıştır. Benedict Anderson'a göre kapitalist yayıncılık, idari sınırlara sahip, tanımlı bir bölgeye aidiyet yaratılmasında kritik öneme sahiptir. Kapitalist yayıncılık, o bölgeyle ilgili haberler aracılığıyla, bireylerin aynı sınırlar içindeki diğer bireylerle ortak bağlar kurmasına yardımcı olmuştur. Günümüzde medya, sadece basından oluşmanın ötesine geçmiştir ve Kırgızistan'da yalnızca tüm ülkede dağıtımı yapılan gazetelerin eksikliği yaşanmıyor, radyo ve televizyon kanallarının da erişim alanları da kısıtlı. Ülkenin dağlık coğrafyası ulusal yayın önünde engel oluşturmaktadır. Kırgızistan'ın farklı bölgeleri, farklı yabancı medya kanallarının yayınlarını takip ediyor. Özbekistan'a komşu Güney Kırgızistan'da pek çok kişi tarafından Özbek kanalları izleniyor; Kuzey Kırgızistan'da ise, genellikle Rus ve Kazak kanalları izleniyor. Dağlık coğrafya yerel medyayı da etkiliyor. Medyanın bu bölünmüş alanı, Kırgız Cumhuriyeti'ne aidiyet anlayışının gelişmesini ve yurttaşlığın pekişmesini engelleyen etkenlerden biridir. Bu çalışma, Kırgızistan'ın farklı bölgelerinde takip edilen radyo ve televizyon kanalları hakkındaki istatistiksel veriler aracılığıyla, Kırgızistan medyasındaki bölgecilik ve yabancı medyanın etkisini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kırgızistan, Ulusal Egemenlik, Medya, Ulus-devlet İnşası, Kapitalist Yayıncılık.

### Introduction

It has been more than two decades since the independence of Kyrgyzstan was acquired, but Kyrgyzstan still faces problems with sovereignty, which is manifested in the media as well. The structure of the media is very fragmented in Kyrgyzstan. The national broadcasting of radio-television channels and circulation of newspapers is limited. The fact that North and South Kyrgyzstan are separated by mountains confines the coverage of media, and local media gains ground against the national media. The weakness of creating national media is further hampered by the wide coverage of Uzbek media in the South, Russian and Kazakh media in the North.

The media is one of the sources of creating some perception of togetherness among the citizens of a certain state. Benedict Anderson gave great significance to print media (*print capitalism*) in the establishment of some belonging to a defined territory with

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administrative borders. This is understood as a crucial factor in the foundation of nation-states, because print capitalism had helped the individuals to imagine common links with other individuals within the borders through news covering this territory, which had facilitated with other factors to the formation of a nation. The shared language or dialect supported by the state spreads through newspapers. The discourse and the commonality of issues are also shared through newspapers. They show their audience the borders of their area of interest with "their" politicians, "their" cities, "their" problems etc. So, they create an "imagined community" within the drawn national borders (Anderson, 1991).

In today's world media is more than just newspapers, and Kyrgyzstan does not only suffer from the lack of nationally distributed newspapers but radio and television channels have also limited coverage. This study, thus, will not only give information about the newspapers, but it will also give some information about other sources of information. It will, indeed, focus on television, as television is the main source of information in Kyrgyzstan by far (82.6%). The television channels watched in different regions of Kyrgyzstan clearly demonstrate the impact of foreign media in Kyrgyzstan.

Here the main emphasis is first on the center of the broadcast, whether it is in Kyrgyzstan, Russia or Uzbekistan. Secondly the emphasis is on their national or local popularity. The origin and the language of the programs are on the focus of this study. Although the language and origin of the programs are significant for national sovereignty, it is the subject matter of another study.

Most programs – be it Kyrgyz or Russian – are in Russian language; and most of them are produced in Russia, Turkey, Korea or USA. American, Turkish and Korean movies or television serials are watched globally, and they create common topics to be spoken among a wide community surpassing national borders but also within the national borders. In a way they surpass localities and they create for both global and national citizens of a certain country common subjects for conversation. In Kyrgyzstan Russian language has a similar function, as is still the common language of different ethnic groups.

In Benedict Anderson's example for print capitalism, different countries of Latin America speak Spanish, but what determines their belonging to a different state are the issues shared by citizens through media. Here in the example of Kyrgyzstan the language can be Russian, the programs can be productions of different countries, but the point is whether they can turn to a breeding ground for common topics to be shared by citizens from different localities of the country or from different ethnic groups. They create common subjects to be spoken among citizens different than their local issues. In that sense they surpass local belongings and form a breeding ground for some feeling of togetherness. This can be reinforced by shared political issues or sports in Kyrgyzstan, for which media - and especially news programs - have a unifying function.

### 1. Problems to be Solved in a Multifaceted Country

The Kyrgyz media was established during the Soviet period. The first newspaper is founded in 1923, *Kyrgyz Tuusu* (Kyrgyz flag), which is still published by the state. Kyrgyz television started its first broadcast in 1958. Although Kyrgyz media was born long before the independence in 1991, the borders of the "fatherland" were not only perceived as the Kyrgyz SSR but as part of the USSR.<sup>2</sup>

After the fall of the USSR, the newly independent state of Kyrgyzstan had to rebuild a new nation-state and had to reshape its state apparatus centered in the capital Bishkek – instead of Moscow. There used to be a well-established state apparatus, but it was still a hard task to build an independent state. The main problem was economical, which made the state apparatus dysfunctional. Kyrgyz SSR was financially supported by Moscow, but Russia turned inwards to solve its domestic problems of economic adjustment. Additionally Kyrgyzstan was poor in raw materials, and as a remedy it was transformed to a production center during the Soviet period. The raw materials were coming from other Soviet republics, and they were mainly exported. The end of the Soviet Union was the end of this import-export chain crucial for Kyrgyzstan.

The toll of financial problems was hardened by the fact that Kyrgyzstan was a mountainous country. The mountainous geography was and still is a serious hindrance for the construction of a widespread communication infrastructure, which would help to broaden the coverage of media. More than 90% of the territory's altitude is above 1,500 meters (<http://www.president.kg>). Two thirds of Tian Shan Mountains are in Kyrgyzstan. There are two peaks above 7,000 meters, 25 peaks over 4,000 meters (Osmonov, 2006, p. 26), and more than 2,000 rivers cut through valleys (Osmonov, 2006, p. 83), which creates various separated zones for the people. In the past this had created a fragmented society. This fact hardens the realization of communication's mission to create a feeling of togetherness as citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The most significant social cleavage, which has to be surmounted, is the difference between the Northern and Southern Kyrgyzstan, which is an outcome of the geographical separation created by the Tian Shan Mountains. The North and South of the country was generally separated in history or they were only united by loose alliances. The North and South were open to different influences as well. Before the Russian occupation after 1864 the people the Northern Kyrgyzstan were generally nomadic organized in clans and tribes. The South, on the other hand, was under the influence of the settled Fergana Valley also generally nomadic and organized in different clans and tribes. Before the Russians, the South was under the control of the Fergana-based Kokand Khanate. Although

<sup>2</sup> Especially for the old people – Russian or Kyrgyz – Soviet past is still remembered as proud years, when they perceived themselves as citizens of a superpower with a mission to change the world for the better.

the Kyrgyz in South were also nomadic, they were in contact with the settlements on the Fergana Valley. As a result their culture was more influenced by scriptural, urbanized Islam, whereas in the North pre-Islamic traditions were still effective. Kyrgyzstan was united during the time of the USSR as Kyrgyz SSR, and it was connected by a network of transportation and communication infrastructure. Modern developments in infrastructure cleared many factors dividing people, but still it had its limits to overcome age-old differences in just some decades.

The infrastructural and communicational infrastructure, modernization and urbanization brought two segments of the Kyrgyz community together, but they did not end the differences between regions. The cleavage between the North and South is still socially and politically manifested. In the South the dialect is slightly different and there are some vocabulary differences. The dressing is also more conservative in the South, as a result of their deeper historical relationship with Islam in the settlements. This differentiation is indeed normal, unless it does not interrupt the formation of citizenship.

In addition to the differences between the Northern and Southern Kyrgyz, the existence of other ethnic groups is also a significant source of this multifaceted society. The cities in the South, Osh and Jalalabad, are on the fringes of the Fergana Valley. The bigger part of the valley is in Uzbekistan, and the valley has predominantly Uzbek population. The Kyrgyzstani cities of Osh and Jalalabad have also a big Uzbek population. 47.9% of the population of Osh city is Kyrgyz and 44.2% is Uzbek. In the Osh region around Osh city 68.7% is Kyrgyz, 28% Uzbek. In the neighboring Jalalabad region 71.8% is Kyrgyz and 24.8% Uzbek. In the other Southern region, Batken, 76.5% is Kyrgyz and 14.7% Uzbek (<http://www.stat.kg/stat/files/tematika/демограф/Кыргызстан%20в%20цифрах/демо6.pdf>).

In the North Kyrgyz are in majority again, but here the second ethnic group is the Russians. In Bishkek 66.2% is Kyrgyz and 23% Russian. In the Northern region of Chui around Bishkek 59.1% is Kyrgyz and 20.8% Russian. In another Northern region, Yssyk-Kul, 86.2% is Kyrgyz and 8% Russian (<http://www.stat.kg/stat/files/tematika/демограф/Кыргызстан%20в%20цифрах/демо6.pdf>).

In the North recent cities, including the capital Bishkek, were established or formed after the coming of the Russian. The city culture in the North, consequently, is shaped under the influence of Russian, i.e. Western, standards. In contrast with the urban culture of the North, the urban culture of the South is shaped before the coming of the Russians under the influence of Islamic civilization, which was represented by the Uzbeks and Tajiks.

The differentiation was reduced during the Soviet period with the help of the Soviet state apparatus for centralization. Administrative changes were made to organize the Kyrgyz SSR centered in Bishkek (then Frunze). These changes were, however, not sufficient. After the independence the infrastructural investments were sought to be realized. The road connecting the North and South was finished in 2005-2006 (Shimomura 2008, p. 4). But still the differences in culture remain influencing political choices. The first president of Kyrgyzstan Askar Akayev was from the North. The second President Kurmanbek Bakiyev was from the South. They were both severely criticized for nepotism and corruption, of which their regional affiliates were condemned to be beneficiaries. The misuse of power by presidents reinforced the division of interest groups by region.

They are followed by two presidents from the North. After Bakiyev was overthrown, the governor of Southern city Osh was sought to be removed from his position, but the transitional government with mainly Northerners was not able to remove him. After three years he is still on duty, and he continues to resist orders of the capital. In addition to that leading political parties in the North and in the South are different. This cultural cleavage, its representation and reproduction in political sphere are among the manifestations of the weakness of a perception as citizens of one country with shared problems and search for solutions indifferent to regionalism.

### 1. The Media in Kyrgyzstan

It is a significant problem in terms of Anderson's print capitalism that newspapers in Kyrgyzstan are not widely distributed covering all villages in the country. In addition to that there is no daily newspaper. They are published five days a week at most. Their format is tabloid, and because of their period they are like journals. They used to be generally Russian, but in recent years Kyrgyz newspapers are more widespread. They can be bought at kiosks, but newspaper readership is very low. Newspapers are rarely seen in households or offices.

Online newspapers, news agencies and blogs are more frequently followed to reach the news, especially among the young population of Kyrgyzstan. According to "Internet World Statistics" there were 2,194,400 internet users in Kyrgyzstan as of 30 June 2012, which corresponds to 39.9% of the total population (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm>).<sup>3</sup> This figure does not include the users of new mobile phones with internet access and visitors of numerous internet cafes, where people can also connect to news on internet.

The problem with the period and distribution of newspapers makes internet a valuable source of information. Kabar.kg, Aki-press.org and 24.kg are well-known Kyrgyz news agencies with frequently news entries. Kabar.kg is a semi-independent, state-owned

<sup>3</sup> The world average of internet users is 34.3%, in Turkey 45.7%.

news agency publishing news on its web site in Russian, Kyrgyz, English and Turkish. Akipress.org is a private news agency publishing news on its web site in Russian, Kyrgyz, English and Uzbek. 24.kg is also a private news agency publishing news on its web site in Russian, English and Kyrgyz. These news agencies fulfill in a way the role of daily newspapers.

In addition to them, there are thousands of blogs to be found on the internet, and blogs and forums are influential as sources of information as well. Especially the forum pages of diesel.elcat.kg, kloop.kg and namba.kg with news and blogs are very instrumental for getting news. Kloop is an interesting project took off after the overthrow of the president in 2005. It is a webpage especially designed for independent journalists and students. Although it is organized as blog pages for young, freelance journalists, it is a prestigious source of information and their members are accredited in the parliament. The insider views and discussions on the forums and blogs are critical sources for creating a perception for citizenship. Internet trivializes spatial differences and people from different regions or ethnic groups come together and discuss common interests – generally in Russian. They are not only related to political problems and solutions, but discussions about movies, music or places also help to the creation of togetherness. This interactive, new environment is perhaps as functional as newspapers once were.

Another source of communication is radio. Nearly all of the radio channels are local. The popular radio channels broadcast popular music, generally in Russian. The most popular radio channel is “Kyrgyzstan Obondoru” (12%), followed by “EvropaPlyus” (10.5%), both of which are owned by the same person in Kyrgyzstan. “EvropaPlyus” is actually part of a Russian radio channel with the same name. Some of the broadcasts are directly transmitted from the original Russian channel. “Kyrgyzstan Obondoru” is its Kyrgyz version with announcements in Kyrgyz. The third radio channel is Ming Kyal FM (6.6%) (Kyrgyzstan, Issledovaniye, povedeniya i vospriyatiya media auditorii 2012 g.), which is owned by the state as part of the Public Teleradio Broadcasting Company together with other four radio channels (MingKyal FM). Its broadcast covers five of seven regions in Kyrgyzstan with local broadcasts (except Talas and Naryn) (<http://www.odnoklassniki.ru/group/56287880085567>).

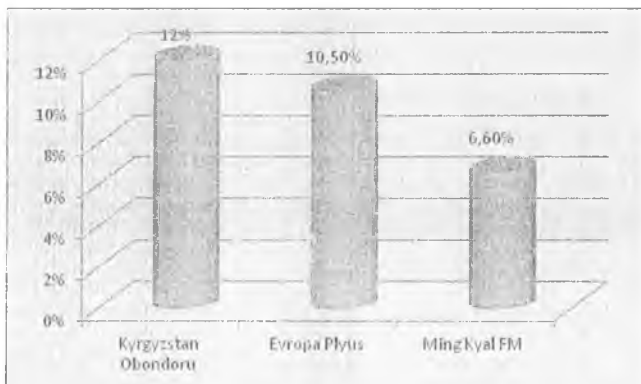


Table 1: Top Three Radio Channels in Kyrgyzstan (2012) (Kyrgyzstan, Issledovaniye, povedeniya i vospriyatiya media auditorii 2012 g., “Kyrgyzstan, Dolyaradioproslushivaniya, 2011-2012 gg”).

The mountainous geography of Kyrgyzstan creates problems in covering the whole territory. Even the national channel is not able to cover two regions. Higher places and most valleys are also outside the coverage of radio broadcasts. The two leading radio channels' relation to Russia is another fact weakening the national broadcast in Kyrgyzstan. For the listeners Moscow and Russian popular culture are the focal points.

The most popular medium in Kyrgyzstan is by far television. The main source of information for 82.6% of the population in Kyrgyzstan is television (2012). It is followed by radio (5.9%), internet (5.8%), friends and family (3.3%), and newspapers and journals (2.1%) (Kyrgyzstan, Issledovaniye, povedeniya i vospriyatiya media auditorii 2012 g., “Istochniki informatsii”). Also in terms of evaluation as the “most important source of information” it is by far the first medium, but the order changes with internet (7.3%), radio (4.7%), newspapers and journals (2.3%), friends and family (2.3%). The list of “most reliable source of information” is also the same with slightly different figures (2012) (Kyrgyzstan, Issledovaniye, povedeniya i vospriyatiya media auditorii 2012 g., “Samiy vazhnyyamiy nadezhnyy istochnik informatsii”).

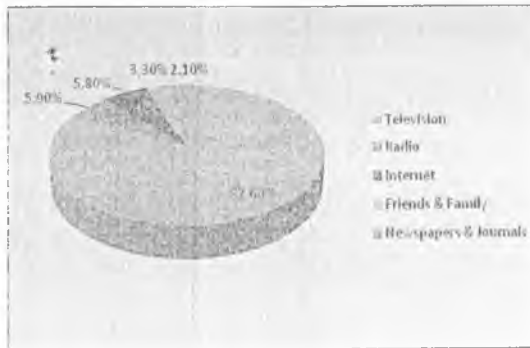


Table 2: Sources of Information in Kyrgyzstan (2012) (*Kyrgyzstan, Issledovaniye, povedeniyaivospriyatiya media auditorii 2012 g., "Samiy vazhniy samiy nadezhniy istochnik informatsii"*).

In the sphere of television broadcasts the fragmented structure of the media is also reflected. The leading channel is KTR, which is the television channel of the Public Teleradio Broadcasting Company owned by the state. The media indicator is, however, at only 20.3%. It is followed by ORT (19.7%), which is the Public Russian Television owned by the government of Russia. The third is EL TR (11.2%), which is also a public Kyrgyz television channel, but it is centered in the Southern Kyrgyzstan. The fourth is also a television channel watched in the South, 7 Kanal (4.9%). They are followed by NTS/NTV television channels combined broadcast. NTS transmits the Russian television channel NTV's broadcasts in Kyrgyzstan. Actually the leading category in the list is "the others" with 20.9% (*Kyrgyzstan, Issledovaniye, povedeniyaivospriyatiya media auditorii 2012 g., "Kyrgyzstan, Media indikatoriydya TV, 2011-2012 gg., Samiy vazhniy samiy nadezhniy istochnik informatsii"*).<sup>4</sup> This relatively high proportion represents clearly the fragmented structure of television in Kyrgyzstan. Namely, 1,579,579 people in Kyrgyzstan watch different television channels than the 11 main television channels in Kyrgyzstan. Those are mainly local television channels, which cannot enter the list of channels watched by the general audience.

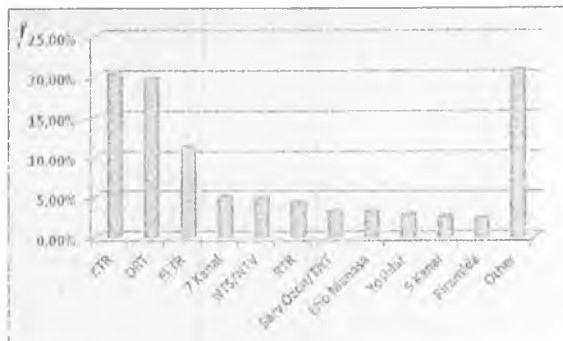


Table 3: Media Indicator in Kyrgyzstan for TV (2012) (*Kyrgyzstan, Issledovaniye, povedeniyaivospriyatiya media auditorii 2012 g., "Kyrgyzstan, Media indikatoriydya TV, 2011-2012 gg., Samiy vazhniy samiy nadezhniy istochnik informatsii"*).

Television, which is the most influential medium in Kyrgyzstan, represents the undeniable fragmented structure of the media in Kyrgyzstan. Although the leading channel is the state run national channel it is below the total percentage of local and minor television channels. Additionally the close second channel is Russian television channel. An Uzbek channel has also entered the list on the ninth place (Yoshlar, 2.8%), which is not low considering the fact that it is only watched in the South. Taking into account that the third and fourth channels are also Southern channels, and fifth is a Russian channel, the national Kyrgyz television broadcasting is very limited.

The differentiation between the Northern and Southern television channels becomes more obvious, if we compare the

<sup>4</sup> The figures in this paragraph are from the same source. The explanations are based upon interviews made in Kyrgyzstan in May-June 2013.

channels watched in Bishkek and Osh.

In Bishkek the leading channel is Russian Federation's state channel ORT with 29.8%. It is followed by NTS/NTV, which also broadcasts programs of another Russian channel, NTV, with 9.7%. The next channel also broadcasts programs of the Russian television channel TNT with 8.4%. Kyrgyz public television KTR has a share of only 7.7%. It is followed by a private Kyrgyz television channel EhoManasa. Also in Bishkek the category for "other" television channels has a big share of 17.8% (*Kyrgyzstan, Issledovaniye, povedeniyaivospriyatiya media auditorii 2012 g.*, "Kyrgyzstan, Media indikatorydlya TV, 2011-2012 gg., Samiyvazhniyisamiynadezhniyistochnikinformatsii").

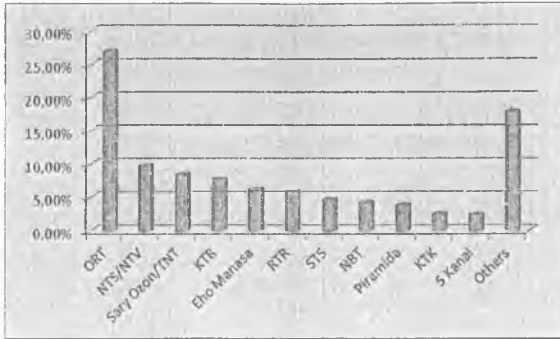


Table 4: Media Indicator in Bishkek for TV (2012) (*Kyrgyzstan, Issledovaniye, povedeniyaivospriyatiya media auditorii 2012 g.*, "Kyrgyzstan, Media indikatorydlya TV, 2011-2012 gg., Samiyvazhniyisamiynadezhniyistochnikinformatsii").

The table is different than the one for the general audience of Kyrgyzstan. Despite the fact that one fifth of the total population is living in Bishkek, there is a clear differentiation. In the table of Kyrgyzstan the leading television channel is KTR, which is only the fourth in Bishkek. The third television channel EL TV, which is also a public Kyrgyz channel has no place among the leading eleven channels in Bishkek, as is the public channel for the South, just like the fourth channel, 7 Kanal, of the general table, which is a private channel again watched only in the South. Russian television channels, such as ORT, NTS/NTV, RTR, 5Kanal are represented in both lists.

In the Southern city of Osh, which is officially acknowledged as the "capital of the South", the list is as follows: ORT 25.3%, KTR 16.2%, EL TR 12.8%, Yoshlar 7.2%, 5 Kanal 6.8%, UZ TV 5%, 7 Kanal 3.2%, Piramida 3.1%, Bashat 2.9%, RTR 2.4%, Keremet TV 2.2%, Others 5.5% (*Kyrgyzstan, Issledovaniye, povedeniyaivospriyatiya media auditorii 2012 g.*, "Kyrgyzstan, Media indikatorydlya TV, 2011-2012 gg., Samiyvazhniyisamiynadezhniyistochnikinformatsii").

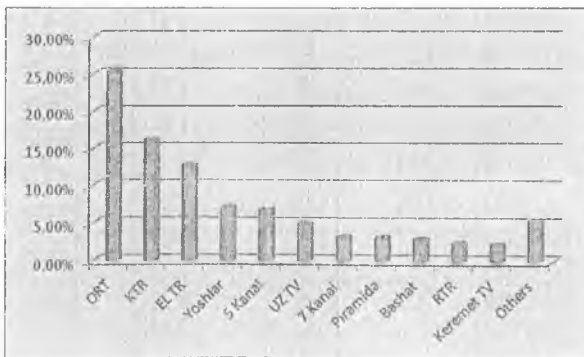


Table 5: Media Indicator in Bishkek for TV (2012) (*Kyrgyzstan, Issledovaniye, povedeniyaivospriyatiya media auditorii 2012 g.*, "Kyrgyzstan, Media indikatorydlya TV, 2011-2012 gg., Samiyvazhniyisamiynadezhniyistochnikinformatsii")

Also in Osh the leading television channel is the Russian Federation's channel one. It is followed by two Kyrgyz public channels. The second KTR is the national channel; the third EL TR is the public channel for the South. They are followed by an Uzbek channel broadcasting from Uzbekistan. It is a state channel for youth. The fifth is a Russian channel, which was also on the list of Bishkek. It is followed by the Uzbek public channel, UZ TV. The next, 7 Kanal, is a private Southern channel. In the interviews it was argued that it is owned by the leader of the Atajurt Party, which is the main opposition party. Its stronghold is in the South, and they are generally in conflict with the President Atambayev, a Northerner. Although it is one of the proofs of democratic government in Kyrgyzstan, the politics based on regionalism can become a factor for instability.

This table is also different than the table of general audience in Kyrgyzstan. This fact shows that in other regions of Kyrgyzstan other channels enjoy wide popularity. Kyrgyz public television channel KTR is the leading channel in Kyrgyzstan, because it can be watched in a wider territory, and it is the only television channel on this list, which can be watched in some villages away from the city. Still it does not cover all parts of Kyrgyzstan as mentioned above.

The reason of watching Russian channels is related to the quality of their programs, quality and wide coverage of their transmission and the general knowledge of Russian as the first or second language. For the variety of ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan the common language is Russian. 94.4% of the Kyrgyz older than 15 declared their second language as Russian, and 0.1% of the Kyrgyz declared it as their first language. The percentage is among the Uzbeks 49.2%. In total in Kyrgyzstan 83.6% of the population acknowledged Russian as their second language. If the Russian population (8%) with Russian as their first language is added to that, the share of Russian-speakers exceeds 90% (<http://www.stat.kg/stat.files/tematika/демограф/Кыргызстан%20в%20цифрах/демо9.pdf>).

The Kyrgyz language, on the other hand, is declared by 48.9% of the Uzbeks and 36.1% of the Russians as their second language. In the total population Kyrgyz is declared by 10.2% as the second language (<http://www.stat.kg/stat.files/tematika/демограф/Кыргызстан%20в%20цифрах/демо9.pdf>). Even with the addition of native Kyrgyz-speakers it is below the Russian language. Therefore not only Russian channels can be watched and understood by the majority of the population, but also channels in Kyrgyzstan have to produce programs in Russian. They are even willing to produce programs in Russian to reach a wider audience, which pushed the state to force regulations for Kyrgyz language programs.

According to interviews the Kyrgyz public television channel is generally watched for the news, but also in this sphere of programs local channels are more popular, especially in the South. The reason for that is the interest of the general public in local news. In the news local channels broadcast minor but local events related to the people or places their audience knows. The politics in the capital is less important for the local people, as they consider it irrelevant in their daily life. It can be an outcome of the Soviet period, when the ordinary people had no influence on the politics. The continuity of this apathy to politics is interesting for Kyrgyzstan, because of the fact that the people of Kyrgyzstan had successfully overthrown two corrupt and authoritarian presidents.

At times other than news-hour the audience prefers to watch television serials in other television channels. For these serials in the Southern Kyrgyzstan - neighboring Uzbekistan - Uzbek channels are being watched by most and in the North generally Russian and Kazakh channels' broadcasts are being watched. Those are generally Turkish and Korean television serials. Recently Kyrgyz public television channel also broadcasts a Turkish television serial, which increased its popularity. Next year other Turkish television serials are planned to be shown on national Kyrgyz television channel with sponsorship, which will further increase their popularity.

In addition to television serials new movies are very popular. They are mainly watched on Russian television channels. Copyright laws are not effective in Russia, and Russian television channels freely show recent movies. There is also a local television channel in the South (Batken region), which shows recent Hollywood movies on pirated CD's dubbed in Russian, which increases its popularity. This is one of the examples, how local channels increase their audience and fragment the national indicators.

The influence of foreign media is also manifested in cable televisions. There are two significant cable television companies. The main Kyrgyz cable television Ala-Tv has 70 channels on its optimum package. Only six of them are from Kyrgyzstan, while most of them are in Russian. 58 channels are Russian channels, three English (CNN, Fashion Channel and a music channel), one Kazakh, one Indian and one Ukrainian ([http://alatv.kg/tsiifrovoe\\_tv/paket\\_optimalnyj](http://alatv.kg/tsiifrovoe_tv/paket_optimalnyj)). Some of the Russian channels are actually US channels broadcasting in Russian; some of the Russian channels show latest Hollywood movies (without commercial rights). During the Soviet period Russian was the language to contact the world - in addition to being the interethnic language. Today Russian still maintains this status in media.

The situation with the other cable television company Aknet is similar. It has eight Kyrgyz channels out of 81 Television channels on its broadest package. There is a Turkish, Indian, Tatar, Belorussian channel as well, but most of the channels are Russian (<http://www.aknet.kg/files/channel/family.html>).

## Conclusion

The geographically divided territory created a fragmented society in the past. It was further strengthened with the migration of different ethnic groups to Kyrgyzstan. This fragmentation is also manifested in the media. This geographical feature is the main fac-

tor for the weakness of nation-wide coverage of the media. It also hampers the development of an understanding of citizenship to the recent nation-state. The cleavage between the North and the South is also reproduced through local media. Additionally mountains build barriers for the national broadcasts. The cities in South lie on a valley (Fergana) open to Uzbekistan, and in the North they lie on valleys open to Kazakhstan. Apart from the problem with the coverage of Kyrgyz media, these valleys have better access to the media of neighboring countries. Because of the fact that wide majority of the population is living on these valleys, most of the population enjoys high-quality access to foreign media. It was determined that this reached to a level that some think that their president the Russian President Putin or Uzbek President Karimov.<sup>5</sup> This failure should not be exaggerated but it is also true that many people follow Russian, Uzbek or Kazakh channels more than Kyrgyz channels.

A result of watching news on Russian channels was manifested at the overthrow of President Bakiyev (2010). Although Bakiyev had sought to apply sanctions to suppress the Kyrgyz media, he could not stop Russian broadcasting, when they started to show files about Bakiyev's corrupt affairs. In this global world the access to Russian channels and Russian knowledge affects the sovereignty of the Kyrgyz state in a useful way. It showed, however, the influence of foreign media at its most.

It seems that the reinforcement of communication infrastructure is very crucial for Kyrgyzstan. The state faces many tasks to build an independent and sustainable Kyrgyzstan. Media is one of the factors creating some belonging for the citizens to a common land, shared problems and quest for solution. The society as a unified body with differences and in plurality can be achieved through media. Kyrgyzstan has covered a long way until founding a pluralistic, democratic political structure with division of power, which suits well to the multifaceted society of Kyrgyzstan. Together with the pluralistic and representative democratic system media can help to the representation of different ideas and expectations but under the common roof of the Kyrgyz Republic.

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<sup>5</sup> The false information about the president of Kyrgyzstan is a common example told by the citizens of Kyrgyzstan. It is related to an interview on the Kyrgyz television, when a boy from Kyrgyzstan named the Uzbek president as his - Kyrgyzstan's - president.