EFFECTIVE DONOR STRATEGIES TO SUSTAIN FREE MEDIA ENVIRONMENT IN SEMI-AUTHORITARIAN KAZAKHSTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study raises the issues of international media assistance in semi-authoritarian countries by investigating Kazakhstan as a case study. Semi-authoritarian countries are difficult to democratize as they pretend to be willing to democratize the country, and use implicit ways to oppress civil and political freedoms and alternative views. Media interventions that work for democratizing, or post-conflict countries will not necessarily work under semi-authoritarian conditions. At the end of 1990s Kazakhstan transitioned from a democratizing country to a semi-authoritarian one, which brought new challenges to the international media donor community. These challenges include an unfavorable political environment, policy change issues, increasing government control, drawbacks in donors operations, increasing demand for accountability, and ineffective programming. To address these challenges and improve donors strategies, this study provides several strategic and tactical recommendations including: regular analysis of the political environment; engaging non-western countries in media reforming; attracting outside political support; greater donor coordination and more transparency; and improved dialogue and consultations among civil society and media professionals. Programming-wise, it is recommended to concentrate on Internet-based media support, continue with the professionalization of journalists and prioritization of long-term projects, while striking a balance between projects of current needs and long-term institutional capacity building; and gaining public support through media literacy, raising public awareness on media related issues and engaging the wider public in advocacy for freedom of expression.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

RoK – Republic of Kazakhstan

OSCE- Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

OSF – Open Society Foundations

NGO – Non-Governmental organization

GONGO – Government organized NGO

CIMA - Centre for International Media Assistance

EU - European Union

USAID – United States Aid for International Development

OECD - Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

WB – World Bank

DFID - Department for International Development

SIDA- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

ICNL - International Center for Not-for-Profit Law

INTRODUCTION

Along with other countries that had emerged as the Soviet Union collapsed, Kazakhstan proclaimed itself as a democratic country immediately after obtaining independence in 1991. However, since then, little has been done by the Government of Kazakhstan to ensure freedom of expression in the country, which permanently holds the lowest ratings in the Press Freedom Indexes of Freedom House and Reporters without Borders, earning it the title of a 'Not Free' country in terms of freedom of speech. **Freedom of speech** is defined as "the right of people to express their opinions publicly without governmental interference, subject to the laws against libel, incitement to violence or rebellion" (Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary, 2010). The main problems of the Kazakh media sector include a limited number of independent media, restrictive media legislation (criminal prosecution for defamation, lack of proportionality and a ceiling for civil defamation fines, etc.), a non-transparent and monopolized media sector, ongoing violations of journalists' rights, a limited access to information and a notorious lack of political will of the Government to guarantee free media.

Aiming to improve freedom of expression in the country, donors have been supporting an array of activities, namely direct funding to the operational costs of media outlets to improve their reporting, as well as funding NGOs to train journalists and editors on professional reporting, helping liberalize media legislation, monitoring violations of journalists' rights, and building exchange platforms between Kazakhstani media professionals and more progressive countries' experts to share experiences and exchange ideas.

Despite these efforts, the media situation in Kazakhstan is worsening every day. Recent news reports from Kazakhstan indicate that 20 independent and opposition media outlets were closed after being convicted of publishing extremist materials (Azattyk, 2012). The opposition newspaper Respublika is being constantly shut down, at numerous occasions the Committee of National Security raided its office, and many journalists have fled to different countries or resorted to quitting their jobs.

There are several assumptions and reasons why, despite millions of dollars invested, the situation of free and independent media is worsening in Kazakhstan. Among them are the authoritarian government and a lack of political will to allow freedom of speech in the country; increasing governmental control; lack of consolidation among media NGOs; lack of coordination among donors; and lack of appropriate strategies for media assistance within that particular political context.

There have been several recent studies that analyzed the work of international media assistance, which is relatively new area of scholarly attention. **International media assistance** is "economic, technical and financial assistance provided by the international community to build and strengthen independent media" (Kumar, 2006:1). CIMAs reports include studies on the funding of free expression, making media development more effective, and on collaboration in international media assistance. In Kazakhstan donors such as the Soros Foundation - Kazakhstan hire experts and external evaluators to analyze the situation with media funding or, at least, with the effectiveness of their own programs. However, as a rule, those reports are not publicly available. All these abovementioned studies focused on the effectiveness of donor strategies, certain programs and projects, rather than concentrating on the broader issue of the governments' political willingness.

In his "One size does not fit all" (2009), Kumar argued that media assistance should be customized according to the type of the state in which it is given. (Kumar, 2009).

However, he did not touch upon the issues of semi-authoritarian countries, which due to their nature are very difficult to democratize.

Defined as countries that are neither democratic, nor authoritarian, **semi-authoritarian** countries have "ambiguous systems that combine rhetorical acceptance of liberal democracy, the existence of some formal democratic institutions, and respect for a limited sphere of civil and political liberties with essentially illiberal or even authoritarian traits" (Ottaway, 1999). These countries are difficult to democratize as they pretend to be willing to democratize the country and use implicit ways to oppress civil and political freedoms and alternative views.

Often, the media is also seen as an essential instrument to further democratic consolidation and to hold governments accountable (Buckley et al 2010). Taking into account the abovementioned factors, utilizing the example of Kazakhstan, this thesis will look at how international media assistance responds to dynamics in countries that swing from democracies in transition to authoritarianism, and how to ensure that the fruits of their work are not wasted.

Since no one has looked at international media assistance in semi-authoritarian countries, this work would be filling this gap. The research question to be answered in the course of this research is:

How can international media donors adjust their strategies to contribute to a free media environment in semi-authoritarian Kazakhstan?

In the attempt to answer the research question, I am going to look mostly at the political willingness and environment available to sustain media assistance work, rather than at the internal problems and donor-aid recipients' relationship that also strongly influence the overall work of the donors in the country. Although it is tempting to address those issues as well, as I collected an enormous amount of information on them while conducting my

4

research, I am going to deliberately avoid interrogating donor-aid recipients' relationship in order not to veer away from my main focus. This thesis will have practical outcomes and generate several recommendations for donors.

The methodology used in this work includes a literature review and expert interviews. The literature reviewed includes literature on democratic transitions, semi-authoritarian systems, development aid[1] and international media assistance, as well studies on media assistance, and various indexes and monitoring reports. The empirical data was obtained from expert interviews conducted with international donors and aid recipients, both of whom are currently active in Kazakhstan.

The thesis is organized as follows. The first chapter is dedicated to the literature review and consists of several sections: the role of the media in democratization; international media assistance; and the nature of semi-authoritarian states and the challenges of implementing donor assistance and policy change in these countries. The next chapter will describe the methodology used in this research. The empirical part of the thesis has three sections that will analyze Kazakhstan's political context as a semi-authoritarian state, the Kazakh media landscape; and discuss what international donors have done so far. The third chapter will analyze donors' challenges and present recommendations to donors. The concluding part will further discuss these findings and recommendations.

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[1] **Development Aid.** OECD defines it as "flows to countries […] which are 1) provided by public agencies […]; 2) […] aimed at promotion of the economic development; and 3) […] conveys a grant element of at least 25%" (OECD Glossary).

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Role of the media in democratization

It is difficult to overestimate the role of the media in a democratic society. Moreover, democratic society cannot function without media. Media that is free from censorship, self-censorship, and state control, and from all types of pressure plays several important roles, such as informant, watchdog and mediator. Thus the main role and a task of the media is to serve people: by informing the public quickly, objectively and in a comprehensive way - informant role; by keeping authorities accountable - watchdog role; and maintaining effective social and communication bonds between the different groups -mediator role (USAID, 2002: 3).

Aalberg and Curran have argued that media, as a cornerstone of democracy, makes democracy function in the best way, because it enables citizens to be informed and make responsible choices about public policy and provides checks and balances for those who implement those policies (Aalberg and Curran, 2012). Informed citizenry, in turn, will result in a more participatory citizenry, as citizens will be more likely to participate in politics and public policy in a meaningful way by expressing their attitudes on certain issues and choosing those politicians that they trust (Aalberg and Curran, 2012). This indicates how important the role of media in public policy is.

However, before society is democratized there needs to be decades and decades of efforts devoted to overcoming numerous obstacles along the way. **Democratization** is a long-term process and, as defined by Samarasinghe, it is "a process of political change that moves the political system of any given society towards a system of government that ensures peaceful competitive political participation in an environment that guarantees political and civil liberties" (Samarasinghe, 1994: 14). Democratization consists of three phases – liberalization,

transition, and consolidation, and in each of these phases donors support independent press (Ottaway, 1999).

It is not a surprise that international donors that aim to bring democracy are so keen to establish independent media and support it throughout the whole process of democratization. The media's role in democratizing societies is enormous, because only free and independent media provides citizens with objective information about their world, encourages debate about important issues and fosters informed decisions on everything that is happening in the public life of the country (McConnell and Becker, 2002).

Various authors operate with various terms when it comes to discussing media freedom. The usual terms are freedom of expression, freedom of speech, free and independent media. Rozumilowitz see free media as a "media structure that is free of interference from government, business and dominant social groups [and] is better able to maintain and support the competitive and participative elements that define the concept of democracy and the related process of democratization" (Rozumilowicz in Price et al., 2002: 12). In their "A manifesto for media freedom," Anderson and Thierer defined **media freedom** as the following:

> *For media consumers, it's the freedom to consume whatever information or entertainment we want from whatever sources we choose, without government restricting our choices. For media creators and distributors, it's the freedom to structure their business affairs as they wish in seeking to offer the public an expanding array of media options, for both news and entertainment. And for both consumers and creators, media freedom is being able to speak one's mind without restraint, and without the threat of FCC or FEC bureaucrats telling us what is "fair." (Thierer, 2010).*

Considering the importance of free and independent media both in democracy and in democratizations, donor countries and international organizations identify the reform of media structures in countries that took the path to democracy as one of the most crucial

7

elements in their intervention strategies. Rozumilowicz identifies several stages at which media reform should take place with different strategies and approaches within democratization, each of the stages have their unique focus and need (Rozumilowicz in Price et al., 2002: 18-23):

Pre-transition stage: a preliminary stage before any transition begins.

Primary transition: a political transition which marks the period of a change from authoritarian regime. This is the period when the regime demonstrates its willingness to shift to democracy and establishes new institutions and liberalizes laws (Rozumilowicz in Price et al., 2002: 18-23). This is the most active period for international media donors who can contribute significantly to the country, as the country will be open for international assistance as it looks to other countries' media models, invites media law experts, and builds relationships with progressive countries to establish strong media institutions.

Secondary stage: will depend how the regime decides to evolve after the primary transition has taken place. During this time, three different scenarios are possible: immediate consolidation − when the regime fully accepts new institutions and regulatory framework; authoritarian backlash − when the regime returns back to authoritarianism by either halting the reform process or introducing restrictive regulations; and institutional revision − when the regime adjusts reforms to their interests. If authoritarian backlash occurs, the regime of this country reverts from the transitional stage back to pre-transitional, or authoritarian. This process is characterized by elites capturing institutions, or slipping back to practicing authoritarian legislative norms. At this stage media assistance includes strengthening and fine-tuning the existing institutional frameworks, building capacity of media professionals, and providing platforms to discuss various issues that are posing threats and obstacles for media development and freedom of speech (Rozumilowicz in Price et al., 2002: 18-23).

8

Late or mature stage: may still present threats of slipping back to authoritarianism or may prove to lack some effective reforms, which is why this stage is still of great importance for media reformers. At this stage media professionals are consolidated and larger portions of the community are engaged in free and independent media development (Rozumilowicz in Price et al., 2002: 18-23).

The next section will discuss how this assistance to reform media began and what were the main approaches that donors used so far.

1.2 International media assistance

Understanding the role of the free and independent media in democratizing societies, members of the international donor community have identified the media as an important area towards which they should focus their efforts. This focus increased with the collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Kumar, 2006: 2).

Literature on international media assistance is very limited. The first comprehensive analysis of international media assistance was conducted by Krishna Kumar, who referred to the lack of literature by saying that "there are no books, doctoral theses, or even research articles in professional journals analyzing the subject and the possible effect of media aid" (Kumar, 2006: 10).

Kumar says that extensive media support started in the late 1980s with the aim "to promote democratization and help lay the foundation for transparent and accountable political institutions" with the premise that without free and independent media democracy cannot exist (Kumar, 2006). His analysis assesses the primary motivations, challenges, and stakeholders involved in the media support field since it emerged as a democratization tool.

According to Kumar, by the end of 2003, the amount of funds dispersed to support media assistance programs was between $600 million to $1 billion (Kumar, 2006). A strong willingness to promote democratization, especially after the collapse of the Communist regimes, was not the only underlying cause of media assistance provided by the international community. Many other factors, as well as events in the late 1980s and beginning of 1990s led to the understanding that besides development aid, special attention should be paid to media freedom, as without media freedom, efforts to fight poverty, establish peace or stop corruption were ineffective. The most influential factors and events, besides the fall of the Communist regimes and the subsequent wave of democratic reforms, were the ethnically-framed wars in the Balkans, an information revolution and increasing demands for accountability and transparency, as well as corruption and the threat of terrorism all led to the increased attention of the international donor community (Kumar, 2006: 4-7). Thus a wide array of organizations started to fund programs to build independent media and promote freedom of speech, especially in Eastern Europe and countries of the former Soviet Union. Three types of organizations were involved in grant-making: bilateral donors, such as USAID, DFID, and SIDA; intergovernmental organizations, including UNESCO, OSCE, and the European Commission; and private foundations, such as Open Society Foundation, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Ford Foundation and others (Kumar, 2006: 8-9).

Price et al. identified several obstacles to reaching the goal of independent media. Some of them include: weak economic conditions and the absence of business management skills among media professionals and firms that force them to seek financial support from governments or businesses; harsh media regulation; and the lack of respect for freedom of speech which results in the harassment, imprisonment, or even murder of journalists. (Price et al. 2002: 7). Donors have tried to address those issues by improving journalists' skills, by teaching media managers how to build a sustainable business model in their media outlets,

and by helping individuals and media professionals to create associations and organizations that would represent journalists' rights in the courts.

According to Kumar, international media assistance is a relatively new sector, and since the 1980s it has been a learning process for donors, who have broadened the nature and scope of their assistance through learning together with media outlets and media professionals in each country receiving that aid (Kumar, 2006: 16). Table 1 specifies the problems that donors identified and links them to the programming approaches developed to address those issues.

Table 1. Media Assistance Programs (based on Kumar and Price et al.)

Problems addressed	Programming approaches	Activities
Poor journalistic standards	Professionalization of journalists	Training in journalism
		Ethics training
		Improving curriculum of journalism schools
Inability of the media to sustain its financial independence making them dependent on the Government and other actors.	Promoting economic capability	Training in management and marketing
		In-house consultancies
	Financial support to media outlets	Grants and loans
		Covering institutional expenses (equipment, rent, salaries, stationery, etc.)
Harsh media regulation	Promoting reforms in legislation and regulation	Legal assistance in drafting media laws
		Assistance to establish regulatory bodies
		Assistance to organizations that are engaged in legal support
Violation of journalists' rights, harassment and intimidation of media professionals	Strengthening media NGOs and associations	Assistance to journalists' associations
		Support for NGOs that conduct research and litigation
Media controlled by the state	Transformation of the media, owned by the state	Legal and financial assistance for privatization
		Assistance to transform state-owned media into public service media

Kumar believes that the focus of development approaches should be customized according to the political system and regime of the country. His work "One Size Does Not Fit All" presents different approaches that should be used accordingly in authoritarian, post-conflict and democratizing countries (Kumar, 2009). For example, in war-torn countries donors should concentrate on rehabilitation and restructuring the media sector damaged during the conflict. The assistance may include direct financial support to media outlets, training on covering sensitive ethnic topics, and media monitoring (Kumar, 2009). In democratizing countries, donors can support a myriad of projects to strengthen media furthermore, as there is a political willingness and they are more open to international cooperation. In authoritarian countries the political environment will not allow for the undertaking of the same programs that are permissible in transition countries. Thus, they will have to concentrate on less politically sensitive issues that will not threaten the aid recipients and project implementers, such as professionalization of journalists and institution building. Although this kind of assistance may not bring immediate results, the fruits of this work will be seen in the long-term, serving as a base for future, more direct media interventions (Kumar, 2009).

Democracy aid as an umbrella term for the funding of many diverse democratic reforms, including media reform, has been used distinctly from development aid. Many scholars have questioned both the involvement of development organizations in contributing to democratization and the possibility of these organizations to engage in the democratization process. Referring to the World Bank's aid conditionality[2] requiring borrowing countries to advance good governance, Carlos Santiso says that new approaches aimed to address issues such as corruption and mismanagement, seem to exclusively touch upon the economic side of

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[2] **Conditionality** in the World Bank is defined as "the set of conditions that must be satisfied for the Bank to make disbursements in a development policy operation" (World Bank, 2007).

good governance, but not the political dimension of good governance (Santiso, 2001: 3). He sees the limitations of the World Bank in its founding charters, which prohibit the Bank from involvement in political issues (Santiso, 2001: 4). Another scholar, Catherine Weaver also sees organizational mandates as one of the reasons the Bank takes its apolitical position (Weaver, 2007: 504).

Santiso believes that development organizations, such as the World Bank need "to explicitly address issues of power, politics and democracy" to improve good governance, as democracy and good governance are interlinked and good governance will not be achieved if there is no rule of law, access to information and strengthened public participation (Santiso, 2001). Thus all the support given to developing countries to fight poverty and improve the lives of people may not achieve its intended goals. To achieve that, he recommends the World Bank to review and introduce changes to its founding charter and revisit aid conditionality and demand reforms explicitly connected with democracy (Santiso, 2001). Possibly after these valid criticisms, the World Bank has been and continues to be active in raising the professionalism of journalists, promoting freedom of expression and providing assistance to private media through its International Finance Corporation (Buckley et al, 2008).

To conclude this section, it can be said that media assistance is a relatively new sector that is being revisited by donors each time new challenges arise. Also, although development aid has usually been distinct from the democracy aid, today with the rise of globalization, economic growth and information revolution, media has taken on a new centrality as part of development. Therefore, development donors might decide with increasing numbers to focus some of their efforts on media freedom. The next section will describe why democratization has proven extremely difficult in countries with a unique regime – semi-authoritarian.

13

1.3 Semi-authoritarian countries and challenges of donor assistance.

There are many countries, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union that emerged neither democratic, nor authoritarian. Various political scientists have come up with various terms: semi-authoritarian, formal democracies, illiberal democracies, new authoritarian, semi-democratic, proto-democratic, pseudo-democratic, soft authoritarian or partial democracies (Olcott and Ottaway, 1999; Brooker, 2000; Schatz, 2008; Epstein et al., 2006). They are characterized by having an ambiguous system. On the one hand, though mostly just on paper, these countries have democratic Constitutions, allow opposition parties to exist, hold elections on a regular basis, allow some level of freedom of speech and observance of some human rights; they establish formal democratic institutions, and allow parliaments to function (Olcott and Ottaway, 1999:3). Moreover, these countries allow NGOs to operate and even criticize the government.

In reality these countries use implicit ways of oppressing democracy, by hindering opposition and fair competition for voters, not observing human rights, maintaining the President's party as the ruling party, controlling the media by the government and widely practicing self-censorship (Olcott and Ottaway, 1999). In addition, Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1989) assert that in these countries the outcomes of elections are far from the people's preference – although elections are held, there are restrictions on competition between political parties and elections are not conducted fairly, and although some rights are respected, certain political orientations are limited from expressing themselves (Diamond, Linz and Lipset quoted in Brooker, 2000: 227).

Semi-authoritarian states are neither countries that strive for democracy, as imperfect democracies, nor failed democracies or democracies in transition. As Olcott and Ottaway say these are "carefully constructed and maintained alternative systems" (Olcott and Ottaway,

1999:7). Image making, consisting of media management, propaganda within the country and abroad, and carefully planned actions to demonstrate the pretense of democracy, is one of the characteristics of semi-authoritarian states(Schatz, 2008: 51-54). Others include limits on the transfer of power, weak institutionalization, and implicit limits on civil society (Ottaway, 1999). Semi-authoritarian regimes use various tools both inside the country and outside to build an image of a stable, economically prosperous and democratic country using media, propaganda, and targeted events (Schatz, 2008: 51-54). They attribute all achievements to the incumbent party or President, "stage dramas" to show how wise and fair the President is, blacken alternatives, and use covert ways to suppress media and human rights activists (Schatz, 2008: 51-54).

The above-mentioned characteristics pose several challenges for democratization, mostly because by formally democratizing their states, governments of such countries "mask" problems and hidden issues (Ottaway, 2003). Some of the factors that create additional challenges are:

1) Since countries have established democratic processes, such as working parliaments and elections, this gives the idea that liberalization already took place and they have reached the end of the process (Olcott and Ottaway, 1999:13).

2) Usually this type of regime actually has a high approval rating, especially in multicultural environments. As Olcott and Ottaway attest, "Conditions really do affect citizens' priorities and the way they perceive democracy" (Olcott and Ottaway, 1999:13). Not only does their manipulation of the institutions keep semi-authoritarian regimes alive, but it also gains the approval of the people. They may have significant support from the public, especially if the state is multi-ethnic, multi-religious country, or suffered recent crises. In such situations, people primarily seek security and stability, as Maslow's hierarchy of needs illustrates very well (Maslow, 1943).

15

3) Democracy promoters are usually unable to engage the wider public, which creates an elitism of democratization (Olcott and Ottaway, 1999:13).

4) Donor countries have other interests besides promoting democracy, such as economic relations with these countries and cooperation for security (Olcott and Ottaway, 1999). As long as they are open and friendly to donor countries, and as long as they cooperate with donor countries in terms of security and mutual economic prosperity, donor countries struggle to criticize democracy related issues.

As Ottaway (2003) rightly admits, democratizing semi-authoritarian countries is "a frustrating undertaking, since they are resistant to the arsenal of reform programs on which donor countries usually rely". However, one has to bear in mind that democracy with stability is a long-term objective and, as a process, it may require decades and decades of work.

CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY

The research question posed in this work will be answered on the basis of both theoretical and empirical data obtained throughout this research, as well as the author's work experience. The research methodology used in this work is a review of the literature on democratic transitions, semi-authoritarian systems, development aid and international media assistance; analysis of available data, including studies on media assistance, various indexes and monitoring reports, information available on the websites and annual reports of both donor organizations and aid recipients, and articles in the media. The empirical data was obtained from expert interviews conducted with international donors and aid recipients, both of which are currently active in Kazakhstan.

The donors interviewed include the Soros Foundation – Kazakhstan, USAID Office in Central Asia, the Open Society Foundations, and Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The NGOs interviewed include the North-Kazakhstan Media Centre, MediaNet, National Association of Broadcasters, and Internews – Kazakhstan. Additionally, a former director of Freedom House in Kazakhstan, who has previously served as a director of a media NGO and has just started a new media outlet, was interviewed. All interviews were conducted in April and May of 2013 in Almaty, Kazakhstan where most of the donors and NGOs are located. There were several organizations that author of this thesis was unable to meet with. They either moved to the new capital city Astana, which is 1.5 hours away by flight from Almaty, or were impossible to be reached. Embassies were out of reach for the same reason.

While the selection of donors was somewhat straightforward, due to the limited number of donors, not all of them found time for an interview. The selection of the abovementioned NGOs was based on the following criteria: length of operations in the

country and the diverse scope of donors they worked with. Unfortunately, the leading media NGO – Adil Soz – was hard to reach, as its Director was away in Poland and Costa-Rica at the time author was in Kazakhstan, and the request to answer questions by email was ignored.

The empirical research conducted had several restrictions, but mainly, the study's scope was restricted by the inability of the author to conduct interviews at the embassies and some organizations which relocated from Almaty to Astana. Additionally, it was not possible to find any information on the strategies of donor organizations, nor it was possible to find precise data on how much funding was allocated to sustain media freedoms and what were the past projects. Only some donor organizations published some information on their websites or in annual reports; the rest had very limited information. As some of the respondents wanted to remain anonymous, I will refer to their positions and not names when quoting these respondents.

When it comes to figures, the author was unable to extract exact information about the funds allocated by international donors since they began activity in the country. Firstly, transparent reports on those donors which suspended their activities in the country are unavailable. Secondly, not all donors were open about their budgets and how much was invested up to date. Thirdly, even if they were open to discussing their budgets, it was not possible to ascertain the exact amount of media funding allocated for two reasons: most of the organizations offer funding from multiple pockets, or as in the case of Friedrich Ebert Foundation, they have no separate budget lines or programs, that would give a clear picture of how much was spent or the annual amount used to support freedom of expression.

CHAPTER 3. KAZAKHSTAN AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ASSISTANCE

3.1. Kazakhstan's political context

Kazakhstan is characterized by many political scientists as a semi-authoritarian country. Among them are Alex Nice who notes that, "eighteen years after independence, Kazakhstan is still a semi-authoritarian state with limited freedom of speech and assembly" (Nice, 2009). Olcott and Ottaway list Kazakhstan as one of the countries, along with Azerbaijan, that remains a semi-authoritarian country, in which "former Communist bosses[3] transformed themselves into elected presidents, but in reality remain strongmen whose power is barely checked with weak democratic institutions" (Olcott and Ottaway, 1999:3). Brooker also lists Kazakhstan, along with other Central Asian states as semi-democratic, whose incumbent has been in power since independence in 1991 (Brooker, 2000: 254-255).

Analyzing Kazakhstan according to Olcon's and Ottaway's characteristics, it can be observed that Kazakhstan fulfills the criteria of semi-authoritarian states:

Transfer of power is limited

Although elections are being held on a regularly basis, all elections in Kazakhstan have been criticized by the OSCE and independent observers for being unfair. The last 2011 presidential election was held less than a year after the adoption of legislative and constitutional amendments that removed legal provisions that would have prevented President Nazarbayev from running again (McDonough, 2013: 6). Opposition parties exist, although they continuously experience problems with registration, re-registration, and various

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[3] Kazakhstan's President, Nursultan Nazarbayev was First Secretary of the Kazakh Communist party during the Soviet times.

transformations. Some of the alternatives parties include the Communist Party, Green Party "Rukhaniyat", Alga and Ak Jol. However, the dominant role in the party system is played by the ruling President's party "Nur Otan" (Bnews.kz).

Weak institutionalization

In 2010, a law titled "Leader of the Nation" came into force. The law gives the first and the only President of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev, the capacity to have a say in policy-making after his retirement, the right to intervene in domestic, foreign and security policy and to be able to influence the decisions of the Constitutional and Security Councils (Law on Leader of the Nation, 2010). The law also provides enhanced immunity to the President, which means that he cannot be brought to court for any actions committed while he was President, and makes it a criminal offence to publicly insult Nazarbayev. The law also guarantees that he and his close family members will keep the property they acquired while he was President (Law on Leader of the Nation, 2010).

Implicit restriction on the work of civil society

In terms of civil society, official statistics report that the number of registered NGOs is around 12785, including those that are not operating anymore (Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan's Report, 2011). Most NGOs operate in the social protection sphere, dealing with orphans, people with disabilities, education, or the environment; while NGOs that contribute to political development and promote human rights are few and far between. The Kazakh Government tries to control the work of NGOs by organizing GONGOs [4] and supporting civil society's innocuous activities. The Government began to fund NGOs in 2003, when the funding from the state budget (state and local) made up 11 million tenge, and it has since

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[4] GONGO – Government organized NGO (Koschützke, 1994: 39)

reached 4.7 billion tenge[5] in 2012. Most state grants support propaganda projects, such as the promotion of the President's message to the Nation, and explaining other government policies (Vremya.kz, 2013).

Usage of propaganda ad image of democracy

Kazakhstan has become increasingly focused on image-building, which is one of the characteristics of a semi-authoritarian country. All achievements of Kazakhstan are credited as ideas and achievements of President Nazarbayev. "Staging dramas" is common, to show how wise and fair the President is - it became common practice for members of Parliament to prepare draconian changes to legislation, only to have the President makes those laws more liberal; thus presenting an image of a liberal leader. Kazakhstan also uses implicit ways to suppress media and human rights activists: fewer physical attacks on journalists and human rights activists, but more intimidation and harassment.

Another major tool is hosting various political events that attract international attention and attract various politicians and world decision-makers. Kazakhstan's Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010 was seen by many at home and abroad as a possible tool to improve the prospects of democratization, although the decision to award this chairmanship was quite controversial. However, Kazakhstan failed to meet the expectations of its foreign counterparts and failed to respond to all commitments announced by its Foreign Minister Tazhin. Among those four commitments, Kazakhstan promised unprecedented amendments to Kazakh media legislation[6] (Nice, 2009). Despite those commitments, just before taking over the OSCE Chairmanship, Kazakhstan adopted the so-called "Internet Law", which treats all the material on the web as mass media and therefore liable to the types of harsh legal

punishments to which traditional media are subject (Duishebaeva, 2012). As Alex Nice rightly foresaw, Kazakhstan used its chairmanship as a prestige and image-building event, while the Government had no interest in pursuing the democratic reforms that were promised from the high tribunals (Nice, 2009). The OSCE Chairmanship has become another triumph of Kazakhstan, showing to the world how non-democratic regimes can chair organization with democratic goals, at the same time disregarding international hopes and expectations.

3.2 Kazakhstani media landscape

Kazakhstan has always held the lowest ratings in the Press Freedom Indexes of both Freedom House and Reporters without Borders, labeled as a 'Not Free' country in terms of freedom of speech (Freedom House Index, Freedom House; Press Freedom Index, Reporters without Borders). The main problems of the media sector include a limited number of independent media, restrictive media legislation (criminal prosecution for defamation, lack of proportionality and a ceiling for civil defamation fines, etc.), a non-transparent and monopolized media sector, ongoing violations of journalists' rights, a limited access to information and a lack of political will of the Government to guarantee free media.

Kazakhstan has ratified important international documents that guarantee freedom of speech, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Kazakh Constitution guarantees free speech and the right to impart information by all means that are not prohibited by law (Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan). Nevertheless, Kazakhstan heavily regulates the entire media sector through several laws, including the Law on Mass Media, the Law on Communications, the brand-new Broadcasting Law and the so-called "Internet Law". Furthermore, the Criminal Code, the Civil Code and the Administrative Code also influence the work of media organizations and journalists (Duishebaeva, 2012).

22

Television still remains the most accessible platform for news, representing a formally plural, but in reality the most controlled sector of the media (OSF Report, 2013). Public television is non-existent and the current digitalization process will most likely scare away most of the independent TV stations (Interview with Zhaksybayeva). The print sector is also dominated by state-owned media outlets. Opposition newspapers constantly fear closure, as most of them are closed when convicted of publishing extremist materials (Azattyk, 2012). Both television and the print sector receive increasing amounts of funds from the Government to implement information policy. Media outlets promoting President Nazarbayev's Message to the Nation, the President's Strategy, and entertainment received the largest portion of state funding in 2011. And in 2012, a ten times larger amount of $154 million was planned to subsidize the state TV stations, "Khabar", "Kazakhstan", and "Mir", constituting 89% of the total budgeted amount (Annual plan of state procurement).

The internet remains a relatively free space that provides diverse news reports and, so far, is not significantly controlled by the Government (OSF Report, 2013). However, the chilling effect that was created by the adoption of the "Internet Law" silenced or made extremely cautious many outspoken journalists and bloggers, and provoked an increased level of moderation on their websites. Besides this legislative pressure, the Government uses various types of technical censorship to certain websites, including DDOS-attacks and blockings (Freedom House, 2012).

3.3 International media assistance targeting Kazakhstan

In the early years of independence, Kazakhstan was quite open to foreign partners and their engagement programs in economic reform, civil society development and the search for solutions to social and environmental problems. The political and civil components in their activity over time became less welcomed by Kazakh authorities, who in 2008 decided to

23

regulate the activities of foreign and international foundations, particularly their grant-making.

The so–called "color revolutions" that took place in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, as well as in Ukraine and Georgia only added fuel to the fire. Although the Kazakh government did not directly initiate any restrictions, there were individual statements on behalf of Members of Parliament or community leaders that called for restricting the work of foreign donors in Kazakhstan.

Thus, for instance, a member of Parliament, the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan (KNPC) Vladislav Kosarev, said that any non-governmental non-profit organization receiving funding from abroad shall be closed (The Time newspaper, 2012). In July 2012, the Russian State Duma passed a bill obliging NGOs funded from abroad to register as "foreign agents" (ICNL, 2013). Kosarev proposed even tougher regulations in Kazakhstan, saying that "such organizations are not necessary in our country, because, in fact, the work they carry out is not innocuous. Even monitoring of the state of society - in fact, is it not intelligence activities?" (The Time newspaper, 2012).

Another statement came in April 2013 from the Chairman of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan (known as a GONGO), Nurlan Yermibetov, who said frankly that NGOs should not be funded by foreign donors. Yerimbetov, who has served on the Board of the Soros Foundation- Kazakhstan, called international donor assistance "hypocrisy and double game" (Tengrinews, 2013) and said: "I am against it (foreign funding), because no one will give money just for nothing. Today they support freedom of speech, and tomorrow they will support legalization of the same-sex marriage and homosexuality and then pedophiles "(Tengrinews   2,   2013).

24

The donors interviewed expressed different opinions on Yerimbetov's statement, most of them saying that it was his personal opinion and it should not be taken seriously. Others said it may signal future restrictions from the Government of Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, none of the donors said it would directly influence their strategies or policies. However, many NGOs became worried about Yerimbetov's statement. As a representative of Internews said, this might be an instruction from the above and they want to see how donors and civil society will react (NGO Representative). Another respondent referred to Yerimbetov's statement as something that is not serious, but something that may exacerbate the precariousness of NGOs which already lack stable funding and support to voice their opinions because of the extreme caution of donors (Interview with Abramov).

International media assistance comes from various sources, and the main actors are USAID, Open Society Foundations, OSCE, Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan, the Delegation of European Commission, and Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The abovementioned donors have local offices in the country and, thus, are usually well-informed about the political situation and social issues in the country. There are donors which operate from outside, such as the Open Society Foundations Media Program (although they work in close cooperation with Soros Foundation – Kazakhstan, as they share one network).

Table 2. Donors' activities in Kazakhstan

The compiled information on donor activities is incomplete, as it was difficult to find comprehensive information on donors' websites or annual reports. Part of the material was collected from the organizations' websites, annual reports, while some came from interviews, and some from media articles.

Programming activities/ Donors	Soros Foundation Kazakhstan	Friedrich Ebert Foundation	USAID	OSCE[7]	Delegation of European Commission[8]	Open Society Foundations
YEAR	1996	1993	1995	1995	No data available	1997
Separate program	Yes - Media Support Program	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Separate person who oversees media development	Yes – Media Program Coordinator	Yes, but oversees other programs as well	Yes – Senior Media and Civil Society Specialist	Yes – National Political Officer	Yes, but oversees other programs as well	Yes
Professionalization of journalists	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Promoting economic capability			✓			
Financial support to media outlets (TV)	✓		✓			
Financial support to media outlets (print)						
Financial support to media outlets (internet)	✓		✓			
Promoting legislation reforms (advocacy events)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Promoting legislation reforms (legal analysis, research)	✓		✓	✓		✓
Research in media related issues	✓					✓
Strengthening media NGOs and associations	✓		✓			✓
Monitoring of the media situation and violation of						✓

journalists' rights						
Legal assistance to media (litigation, legal consultations)						✓
Public awareness raising projects	✓					
Travel grants	✓			✓		
Support media issues discussion platforms		✓		✓		✓

As we can see from the table, monitoring of media freedom abuses and provision of legal support to the media is supported only by the Open Society Foundations, although this is one of the biggest problems in Kazakhstan. Furthermore, among these donors, OSF, USAID, and SFK have been the only donors to provide core institutional support (rent, utilities, equipment, and salaries to non-project staff, travels, and learning) to media NGOs.

CHAPTER 4. DONORS' CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Media assistance can be looked at as a triangle where one corner is the political environment and political will, the second corner is international media donors and the third corner represents the civil society that works in the country to implement media reforms (See Figure 1 below). As noted in the introduction, despite the abundance of information on donor-aid recipients relations, this thesis will deliberately avoid that relationship in the triangle, but will concentrate on the relationship between the existing political will and international media donors.

Figure 1: Triangle of Media Assistance

In Kazakhstan, donors face various challenges while promoting freedom of speech. In the interviews that were held with donors and aid recipients, several key challenges were identified: political environment is getting less and less conducive to media development; advocacy efforts are not bringing sufficient results; and government control is increasing through social contracting to NGOs and media. Aid recipients additionally voiced the following: lack of donor coordination in the country; lack of understanding of the media sector's issues and media organizations; and lack of innovative strategies to help NGOs sustain their work. They also pointed to a lack of donors' transparency; increased

28

accountability demands alongside a lack of feedback in the monitoring of their projects; and preferential treatment. Donors, in turn, voiced the problems of a lack of NGOs skills in project management, advocacy, fundraising, lack of monitoring and evaluation of their projects, and inability to diversify their funding, thus relying on one or two donors, and competition for grants, thus lack of consolidation. Thus, the challenges can be grouped into three broad categories: unfavorable political environment; backwards in donors' operations; and shortcomings of programming approaches.

4.1 Unfavorable political environment

1. Political environment is getting less and less conducive to media development

All respondents, except for one organization, admitted that the political environment has worsened. As one NGO representative said, the most democratic years were the early nineties (1991-1992 the golden years of media development in Kazkahstan). The end of the nineties saw the first attempts to restrict media legislation, with the situation becoming worse and worse since then. As Abramov of Vlast.kz said, the situation is ambiguous: *"You cannot compare us and Uzbekistan: we can criticize the government, and politicians, however, we know very well where the limits are; if you go beyond them, you will have serious problems"*.

Responding to the question about Yerimbetov's statement, Abramov warned that it may lead to a worsening of the situation, saying that "*donors who are cowardly and cautious will get even more scared and will reconsider their policies...and as a result this may influence donors funding and worsen the situation of NGOs which do not have stable funding and do not have support to voice their opinions*" (Interview with Abramov). He and other aid recipients, with only one exception, noted that donors became very cautious and now are focusing more on social rather than political topics, avoiding sensitive and human rights topics. This has had an impact on the work of NGOs overall, as the knowledge that they have

29

no support has made it more difficult for them to speak out and express their opinions, and bravely outspoken NGOs are rapidly disappearing. The media sector might not be an exception, according to these NGOs.

Recommendations:

International media donors **should analyze the political situation** on a regular basis, identify where they can work and thus adjust their strategies accordingly. Taking into account the semi-authoritarian nature of Kazakhstan, donors should be aware of the challenges of donor assistance and policy change in this type of country. External donors should particularly take into account the pitfalls of semi-authoritarian countries. Based on Kumar's typology in his "One Size Does not Fit All", I would place Kazakhstan between a democratizing and authoritarian country. This means that donors should not push for immediate results, and work more on projects that will bring results in the long-term.

Kumar recommends **engaging non-western countries in democracy building** (Kumar, 2006: 162). This will help alleviate the official and public perception that the USA and other western democracies have their biased stake in the country and are manipulating the people. Moreover, experts from neighboring countries may have a better understanding of regional issues (Kumar, 2006: 162). This approach may also eliminate the problem of policy transfer when certain policies are blindly transferred to another do not work, as the "learning is contingent upon differences" (Bauer, 2010). As Kumar asserted, "One size does not fit all" and what approach is good for western democracies may not be as good for democratizing, or semi-authoritarian countries (Kumar, 2006).

To ensure that media assistance efforts bring results, donors and media reformers **should also try to attract outside political support**, such as diplomatic pressure by the embassies of donor countries (Kumar, 2009: 32). However, in countries like Kazakhstan,

other interests such as economic and security may outweigh the importance of criticizing countries that are not permitting freedom of expression (McDonough, 2013:1). In this case, donors should advocate that the actors among themselves urge both donor countries, as well as development organizations, such as the World Bank, which is not active in supporting freedom of speech, to consider that economic stability and security will not be possible without rule of law and free-flowing, accessible information. This relationship between democracy and economic development has been Mancur Olson's central point in his "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development" where he says that rule of law, independent judiciary, and freedom of speech are essential to ensure individual property rights (Olson, 1993: 572). In addition, Kumar asserts that since the World Bank and similar development organizations are generally perceived as apolitical, they may be in a better position to promote media development (Kumar, 2009: 10).

At the same time, in such situations, donors should find a way to provide more support for human rights and freedom of speech organizations so as to combat efforts to silence their voices.

2. Policy change issues

Although the government sometimes involves civil society in public policy, participating in such working groups on legislation is merely decorative. It has always been a struggle for civil society actors to get into the Councils, Committees, and working groups. Besides, although civil society representatives are allowed into those Committees, their voices are rarely heard.

> *"NGOs play a decorative role in the work of working groups. It is very convenient for them to invite us or let us be in the working groups or committees. This allows them to justify their decisions and bring legitimacy to their actions. Government officials say they developed these legal provisions together with these or that NGOs so that no one would be able to say that civil society was not involved"* (NGO Representative).

It is obvious that this participation is a mere formality. Usually Committees or working groups consist of 20-25 people, and only two or three of them are civil society representatives, which means they are significantly underrepresented and cannot influence committees' decisions. Another trick is to invite representatives of GONGOs and thus pretend that civil society's voice is heard.

Participation of civil society representatives is even articulated in some laws. For example, according to the Broadcasting Law, a special Commission on Broadcasters will be formed to review proposals from the broadcasters to get slots in the multiplex (Broadcasting Law). In reality, no one knows how the Commission was formed. The Commission is composed of twenty three members: two NGO representatives, five GONGO representatives, two members of the Parliament and fourteen government officials (Internews.kz). This list demonstrates an imbalance of pro-governmental and independent representatives, and the voices of the two NGO representatives can barely influence the decision.

Recommendations:

Donors **should be aware that change will not occur** in the short run. Kazakhstan, as all Central Asian countries, has its own historical peculiarities that limit the democratization process. As Bosin wrote, several factors have influenced US democracy assistance with outcomes lower than expectations as compared to other countries in the former Soviet Union: deep economic crisis after the collapse of the Soviet Union; burdensome authoritarian history, which was stronger than in Eastern Europe; Kazakhstan has never been an independent country before, so there was no tradition of public policy outside the Communist system; and a very strong personification of state power, which continued with new leaders "being drawn from the old Communist elite" (Bosin, 2012).

Taking into account increasing accountability demands, donors may be tempted to prefer projects that bring immediate results or can provide some sort of measurable outcome. Unlike other programs that bring visible and instant results due to the political willingness or support from the public, the media development sector is more complex and work may be less rewarding and results less tangible or measurable. That means that both donors and aid recipients should not expect instant results and should have modest expectations. This peculiarity of the media development sector should be well communicated both within aid recipients and donors.

Besides, Kumar recommends that donors should attempt **to strike a balance in addressing current needs and building viable institutions** that will outlay a good platform for future reforms (Kumar, 2006: 159). Training and technical assistance is viewed by Kumar as the "current need" type of assistance, while institution building is necessary to make sure that the efforts of media assistance stay in the country (Kumar, 2006: 159-160).

One of the donors which worked as a policy-broker in previous years admitted that their new strategy will be "working for the future" through education and raising awareness among the general public. They chose this option since the policy broker role did not fully meet expectations, nor result in good outcomes during its implementation (Donors representative). Thus, in semi-authoritarian countries, those that agree to reforms out of image-building reasons, donors and media reformers should not have high expectations.

3. Government control is increasing through social contracting and GONGOs

The Government has become very strategic, as some aid recipients noted. Not only does it create GONGOs that are then pretending that they are voicing public opinion, but the Government also provides a serious amount of state funding to media outlets. Both the television and print sectors, even the non-state controlled entities among them, have started to

receive increasing amounts of subsidies from the Government, especially following the economic crisis that left many media outlets desperate for funding.

Recommendation:

While there is less that donors can do with GONGOs, except for being highly selective and carefully identifying NGOs that are not affiliated with the Government, they can still do substantial work in ensuring media outlets' financial independence from the state. For this, donors should support programs aimed to increase media sustainability, by offering training and on-site residencies on media management, fundraising, as well as internet marketing. Since the media is now moving towards more internet-based platforms, and each media outlet already has a website and a social network presence, internet marketing and crowdfunding techniques could be useful.

4.2 Donors operations

1. Donor coordination and competition among donors

The lack of donor coordination in the country was also an issue voiced by several media experts and some aid recipients. It was reported that donors rarely coordinate their efforts, which may lead to the duplication of projects (two projects on media research with the same objectives and covering the same regions) and supporting those organizations which are not professionalized enough to adequately implement projects (e.g. The Delegation of European Commission gave a grant to Kazakhstan Criminology Association (KCA) for a project aimed at improving media legislation, although KCA did not have relevant experience in the field). Several respondents said that donors push them to be united and demonstrate an impact, while they themselves are disintegrated and compete with each other.

Several donors, on other hand, say that they meet to coordinate their efforts on a regular basis, although not officially. Usually donor coordination is implemented among the program managers who oversee media development issues in their organizations. They discuss their priorities, latest trends and problems, and projects that were funded. The meetings are usually initiated by those who are more proactive, and donors admitted that coordination is almost entirely dependent on such a person, since these meetings are not institutionalized. One donor organization admitted that it never participated in any kind of coordination. One of the donors said that it is not necessary to formalize donors meeting, as it would be a waste of time, and they can always discuss issues on an ad-hoc basis.

However, NGO representatives voiced that they expect donors to collaborate not only in terms of information sharing and co-funding some projects, but also by consolidating their efforts during advocacy, bringing international expertise from their global networks, and making joint statements more openly and bravely.

Recommendations:

Although it may be viewed by donors as time-consuming and useless effort, donors should pursue more consolidation and better coordination. As quoted in Dean (2012) "donor coordination provides synergy and cost-effectiveness, prevents duplication, and allows for a division of labor according to capacities" (Dean, 2012: 6). Donors can collaborate in many different ways. They could share information about current problems and trends and updates on current media issues, share information on strategies and approaches they use in Kazakhstan and best practices from their counterparts in other countries; and update each other about the funds they allocated to avoid duplication of projects.

Each of the donors has its own strengths. SFK's strength is in flexibility of grant-making, lack of bureaucracy and links to international networks and experts; USAID's

strength is in long-term planning and larger amounts of funds; OSCE is a mandate organization, and Kazakhstan, as a participating country, tends to listen to OSCE and be more open to their recommendation. Thus by collaborating, donors could better engage in advocacy and other media development efforts.

Co-funding is another coordination mechanism, which allows donors to achieve cost-effectiveness of their programs by co-funding certain programs that otherwise would be difficult to fund by a single donor.

Finally, donors should coordinate their efforts not only locally, but also at the international level, involving their parent organizations. This worked well during the OSCE Chairmanship of Kazakhstan, when many organizations engaged in international advocacy with their offices in Washington D.C., Vienna and London. Their voices were heard at high-level international meetings, which were attended by Kazakh officials, and where they at least pretended to listen. This type of collaboration should be done not merely on an ad-hoc basis, but constantly and on a long-term basis.

With regards to the open criticism and direct statements that civil society expects from donors, improved communication and dialogue is needed between donors and NGOs. NGOs expect donors to be more vocal about the situation, especially when media outlets are being closed or websites are being blocked. However, some donors find excuses not to intervene like this, referring to their mandates and policies. Besides, donors agree on the fact that local organizations should be in charge and have the capacity to express their positions regarding media situation, because when donors eventually leave the country there should remain local capacity to address those issues.

1. Not all donors understand the media sectors' problems

Another problem is that donors often do not know the real problems of the sector. Many donor programs are guided by the priorities of their 'parent' offices or by their own understanding of the situation in the country. Assessment of the potential areas and consultation with actual representatives of the media sector is extremely rare in this area. Only three donors (SFK, OSF and USAID) were reported to have consulted civil society before actually developing new strategies and programs. NGOs are therefore forced to "customize" the application (and, in fact, work) under an imaginary goal without addressing the real needs of the media community, which, in turn, prohibits them from realizing their mission.

Recommendations:

International media donors **should try to consult with the media sector** on a regular basis, identify where they can work and thus adjust their strategies accordingly. Donors should implement a more demand-driven approach, rather than supply-driven. For that, they should consult with their grantees and media experts; and conduct needs assessments.

2. Not all donors are transparent

Another issue was voiced by aid recipients, who said that some donors, and particulary the way they make grantmaking decisions, are not transparent. They named the absence of information on donors' website (or even, absence of websites); uncertainty about their criteria of evaluating projects; and lack of information on projects they funded. Although all of the donors interviewed were transparent in terms of their activities, projects they support and partners they work with, not all of them could offer the same transparency and access to

information to aid recipients and general public about how they make decisions on funding projects.

Recommendations:

It is recommended to donors to enhance the transparency of their activities in the country, staff members, partners they work with, programs they fund, and criteria for evaluation. This will not only show their professionalism, commitment to openness and accountability, especially while these programs demand openness and accountability from the governments, but will also make them more secure and alleviate the government's and public perception that they are manipulating people or extracting secret state information.

3. Increasing demands for accountability of foreign aid

The global trend towards more results-oriented work has influenced media development sector as well. Obama's call for greater accountability of foreign aid[9] and the global economic crisis made donors stricter about spending and reporting results. As Nelson writes, this requires donors, foundations and NGOs to show concrete results and "this can be frustrating to freedom of expression organizations" given the difficulty of measuring freedom of expression work (Nelson, 2011: 22). In Kazakhstan, as some NGO respondents said, this has resulted in more short-term projects and projects that bring visible outcomes, such as public events, where one can report the number of government officials attended and number of media covered by this event. At the same time this shifted the funding away from important and less visible projects, such as monitoring of freedom of expression, research, analysis and litigation.

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[9] Obama seeks accountability on foreign aid. September 23, 2010. By Christi Parsons and Paul Richter, Los Angeles Times. Retrieved from: http://articles.latimes.com/2010/sep/23/world/la-fg-obama-poverty-20100923

Although monitoring and evaluation is an important part of project management, some aid recipients said it was implemented randomly and ineffectively. "Even if some donors carry out monitoring and evaluation, their results are not communicated and we do not know what should be improved", says an NGO Representative.

Recommendations:

Donors should undoubtedly implement monitoring, evaluation and performance measurement of the projects they fund in order to see trends, identify gaps and improve programs both during implementation and for future projects. However, it should be taken into account that measuring freedom of expression is a difficult endeavor, and demanding quantitative indicators of the results does not seem to be the best idea. In the case of projects that bring intangible results, evaluating projects successes or failures using qualitative indicators seems to be the best strategy.

4.3 Programming approaches

In terms of programming, both donors and aid recipients identified several issues: abundance of short-term projects and lack of long-term funding; capacity building projects has been downsized, although donors still list it in their portfolios; more attention is given to reforming media regulation through holding various events (roundtables, conferences, public hearings, etc.) and less to monitor media freedom abuses. Another issue is that NGOs are dependent on donors' funding and do not seek alternative sources of funding; and the inability of NGOs and donors to engage the wider public in freedom of speech issues, i.e. elitism of the topic.

Recommendations:

International media assistance experts believe it is not possible to develop free and independent media focusing on one area only; it requires "multiprolonged efforts, affecting different aspects and facets of the media sector" (Kumar, 2006: 30). The combination of all above listed programs and approaches will most likely lead to more sustainable and viable results, by complementing each other. Taking into account the current trends and donors' portfolio, several tactical steps are recommended:

1. **Support Internet-based initiatives**

Media experts refer to the internet as a more or less free space that will "remain the freest space for public debate and is likely to grow in prominence as a news source" (OSF Report, 2013: 107). Taking into account the growth of new technologies and increase of internet penetration, donors should consider more support to independent online media outlets. In this case, priority should be given to platforms that are based on open-sourcing. The support might be in offering management and internet marketing training.

2. **Gain public support**

Public support is important in many ways: it may draw the attention of the Government and they will no longer be able to ignore these issues, by dismissing freedom of expression as problem affecting only a small group of people; it will mobilize new ideas, and more talented people to contribute to media development; and may be an additional source of funding if NGOs can skillfully adjust use crowdfunding and other fundraising techniques. Projects supported could be media literacy courses in universities and schools, and attractive public awareness projects, using both traditional and new media, such as documentaries, public service announcements, and TV debates and shows.

3. **Continue building the capacity of journalists and monitoring of media freedom abuses**

Capacity building is a long-term investment; even if it does not show immediate results. Moreover, these kinds of projects have a multiplier effect: not only trained journalists will improve their skills, but their counterparts and younger colleagues are more likely to inherit skills and experience through learning and joint work (Kumar, 2009). If it is too expensive to offer this type of assistance, then donors, as well as aid recipients may consider offering not free, but rather cost-shared trainings. This will be more cost-efficient, but will also motivate trainees to participate more actively in the training and optimally put to use lessons from the training. Another approach to improving professionalization is working with academia, through reforming university curriculum; providing academic fellowships for university professors; updating university literature; and especially introducing courses that are practically non-existent: media management, and property rights.

Monitoring media freedom abuses is important because it documents violations and serves as an important basis for any analysis. In an environment where defamation is criminalized, offering legal support to independent journalists by providing legal consultation and representing them in court is essential. To make monitoring more cost-effective, NGOs should employ different tactics. Instead of a traditional network of correspondents in each region, crowdsourcing techniques could be used.

4. **Support long –term projects**

If there are any advocacy efforts against laws that impose restrictions, as soon as those laws are signed, advocates (civil society) tend to forget about the issue, and donors tend to stop funding that campaign. Many policy related campaigns are long-term initiatives, and

funding just one event or training will not produce any change. The support should go throughout the whole process.

I would like to conclude this chapter by a short, but meaningful recommendation from Marie Struthers of OSF who said that today in Kazakhstan "flexibility, a commitment to the long-term, and commitment to excellence in standards and to risk are necessary" (Interview with Marie Struthers).

CONCLUSION

This study raised the issues of international media assistance in semi-authoritarian countries by investigating Kazakhstan as a case study. Semi-authoritarian countries are difficult to democratize as they pretend to be willing to democratize the country, and use implicit ways to oppress civil and political freedoms and alternative views. Media interventions that work for democratizing, or post-conflict countries will not necessarily work in semi-authoritarian conditions. This work aimed to look at how international media donors should adjust their strategies to sustain a free media environment in semi-authoritarian countries, like Kazakhstan. To address these challenges and improve donors' strategies, donors, aid recipients and media expert's opinions were analyzed. Besides, available literature on international media assistance was analyzed and the author brought her experience from four years of work in the promotion of freed speech and media development.

To identify challenges that donors face today in Kazakhstan, qualitative research was conducted. Donors and aid recipients were interviewed. The research revealed that donors face following challenges:

- political environment is becoming more restrictive, restricting the NGOs, donors and media activities in an implicit way;
- advocacy efforts are not bringing sufficient results, even though the policy process formally allows for the engagement of civil society;
- government control is increasing through state contracting to GONGOs and loyal media;
- insufficient donor coordination, low transparency, and poor understanding of media sector's issues;

43

- increasing demand for accountability of foreign aids leading to ineffective programming (funding short-term projects, such as one-off events, and downsizing financing activities that are less visible: legal support for media and monitoring of media freedom abuses).

This study provides several strategic and tactical recommendations including:

- regular analysis of the political environment;
- engaging non-western countries in media reforming;
- attracting outside political support;
- advocating for the support of freedom of expression among development organizations;
- building modest expectation regarding instant results;
- striking a balance between addressing current needs and building viable institutions;
- increasing independent media sustainability;
- enhancing donor coordination and transparency;
- improving dialogue and consultations among civil society and media professionals;
- prioritizing qualitative indicators to quantitative ones while monitoring, evaluating and measuring performance;
- combining various programming approaches;
- concentrating on Internet-based media support;
- continuing professionalization of journalists and monitoring of media freedom abuses while making the most use of new technologies;
- prioritizing long-term projects;

- and gaining public support through media literacy, raising public awareness on media related issues and engaging the wider public in advocacy for freedom of expression.

These recommendations might be useful for donors that are both operating in the country and donors that provide funding from outside in planning their long-term strategies and identifying tactical steps in a country, which propagates democracy on paper while demonstrating limited political will for freedom of expression.

During the research, other interesting details emerged regarding donors and aid-recipients relationships, lack of consolidation among media NGOs, competition among donors and competition for funding among NGOs, and the problem of resource dependency. The discussion of these issues was not the purpose of this study, although interrogating them in future research would contribute to the study of international media assistance.

ANNEX 1

LIST OF RESPONDENTS

1. **Maria Stefurak**, USAID, Senior Media and Civil Society Specialist
2. **Anton Artemyev**, Soros Foundation – Kazakhstan, Chair of the Executive Council
3. **Dariya Tsyrenzhapova**, Soros Foundation – Kazakhstan, Media Program Coordinator
4. **Marie Struthers,** Open Society Foundations (London, UK)
5. **Elvira Pak**, Friedrich Ebert Foundation
6. **Alexey Yusupov**, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Head of the Representative Office
7. **Sholpan Zhaksybayeva**, National Association of Broadcasters, Director
8. **Marzhan Elshibayeva**, Internews – Kazakhstan, Director
9. **Igor Bratssev**, MediaNet, Director
10. **Diana Okremova**, North Kazakhstan Legal Media Centre, Director
11. **Gulmira Birzhanova**, North Kazakhstan Legal Media Centre, Lawyer
12. **Vyacheslav Abramov**, Vlast.kz, Founder, Editor-in-chief, former Director of Freedom House

ANNEX 2

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (DONORS)

Operations:

About your organization:

1. Since when (year) has your organization been active in the media assistance field in Kazakhstan?

2. What is the total amount of funding has been allocated to Kazakhstan?

Strategy development:

3. What was the initial strategy? What areas were supported :

   a) direct funding for media outlets (production grants);
   b) legislation change;
   c) capacity building of media workers;
   d) litigation and legal support to media;
   e) training journalists;
   f) Other _____

4. What are the main priorities today?

5. Do you evaluate the political and economic situation in Kazakhstan? How often do you evaluate the situation?

a) Annually
b) With regular interval
c) After certain internal and upon external events

6. Who participates in strategy development (the Board, Management, program managers)?

7. What is the role of other stakeholders in strategy development and priorities identification (NGOs, media experts, media outlets, political scientists, local foundations, other donors)?

Project management:

8. How much is your organization involved in the implementation of the project? Or is it just limited to grant-making?

9. Do you monitor projects and how do you evaluate projects?

Donor coordination:

10. How do you evaluate donor coordination (do you know what other donors are doing? Do you meet with them? How often?)

11. How do you cooperate – e.g. avoid the duplication of activities, consolidated efforts, pressure on the Government and advocacy?

■■■

12. What is the overall aim: is it about building sustainable alternative media or keeping at least some sort of pluralism?

13. Do you believe that the political context is favorable to achieve your aims in Kazakhstan?

14. Do you think your objectives correspond to the local situation?

15. What strategy/approach would you recommend when the political environment is not welcoming?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (AID RECIPIENTS)

Operations:

1. Since when (year) has your organization been active in the media assistance field?

2. What is the total amount of funding received?

3. What is your organization's expertise?

4. What are your main sources of funding? In percentage, what is the share of foreign donors support?

5. How do you apply for grants - proactively (proposing their projects) or reactively (responding to the announced calls for proposals)?

Donors work evaluation:

6. Do donors consult with your organization when formulating their strategies?

7. Do donors monitor and evaluate your projects? How often? Do you get feedback from them?

Recommendations

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