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A New Course of Action for Journalism

A media NGO activist designs a plan to strengthen Kazakh media



Zhanna Prashkevich (first from left) at the International Visitors Center, Philadelphia, PA. Photo: ACCELS

An NGO leader uses her skills gained during a USAID study tour to expand university curriculum for future journalists.

Media outlets in Kazakhstan face a variety of challenges including outdated education and training programs, legal restrictions, self-censorship, harassment, and government control. Freedom House's Freedom of the Press report 2008 characterized the media in Kazakhstan as "not free".

A young specialist at a non-profit in Pavlodar, northern Kazakhstan has set to change the situation using ideas she gathered in a USAID-sponsored U.S. study tour. "When I visited universities and mass media outlets in the United States, the idea how to professionalize the Kazakh media came to mind," says Zhanna Prashkevich, a head of a department of a non-profit organization Desenta.

Zhanna Prashkevich has been working at Desenta on press coverage for Pavlodar Region NGOs. In December 2007, she became one of ten representatives from the Kazakh media NGOs that traveled to Philadelphia for a study program on capacity-building for media NGOs. The USAID

Community Connections program organized this study program to familiarize Kazakh specialists with the American approaches to the management, public outreach, and transparency of operations of media NGOs. Zhanna was impressed by the professionalism of the U.S. journalists and their level of expertise in the subject areas that they cover.

She felt that outdated journalism education was a key problem in Kazakhstan, and upon return from the study tour, designed a project to improve the situation. The 2-year project, entitled "the Development of Regional Independent Mass Media through the Development of Professional Journalism in Kazakhstan," aimed to expand the range of courses taught to the journalism students. "I met with Kazakhstan Media NGOs to present my project proposal, which was enthusiastically supported," says Zhanna. She secured cooperation from nine local media NGOs for her project, and in 2008, received a 250,000 Euro grant by the European Commission to implement it.

The project plans to design at least ten new courses on subjects currently not taught to the journalism students - such as business, rights protection, Internet journalism, and new media. The courses will then be piloted by eight universities. Zhanna believes that this initiative will generate interest among the future media professionals and help strengthen the media in her country.