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Kyrgyz advisory body on safety of journalists considering findings of IWPR reports on demise of investigative reporting.

The Kyrgyz ombudsman has said he is considering the inclusion of IWPR reports examining the pressures facing investigative reporters on the agenda of a soon to be created advisory body dealing with the protection of journalists' rights.

IWPR reports about an increase in brutal attacks on reporters have focused attention on the dangers affecting Kyrgyz media community, which have gone underreported in the local press, according to rights activists and media experts.

The reports were **Kyrgyzstan: Concern Over Journalists' Safety**, published in February, and **Kyrgyz Journalism Under Pressure on All Fronts**, published in March.

The reports gave examples of the way reporting has been hit, and brought to the attention of the Kyrgyz ombudsman how investigative journalism is gradually disappearing.

Commenting on the two IWPR articles on the subject, ombudsman Turusunbek Akun said, "IWPR is raising an important issue. Very few media outlets in Kyrgyzstan provide coverage about the problems of the safety of journalists. That is why your articles play a big role in pushing forward the issue of journalists' rights and media freedom."

The new advisory body, the Public Council for the Protection of Journalists, is due to be set up in April by the Institute of the Ombudsman. It will bring together about nine journalists, editors and the heads of media NGOs. It will make recommendations on pressing issues in the Kyrgyz media and hope to attract the attention of law enforcement and other state agencies.

Акун said it would quickly identify topics for discussion.

"The issue of journalistic investigations [which IWPR raised] could be included on the agenda," Akun said.

Referring to murders of Kyrgyz journalists Gennady Pavlyuk (2009), Almaz Tashiev (2009) and Alisher Saipov (2007), which have been linked to their reporting work, Kubar Otorbaev, director of Azattyk Media NGO, said that journalists in Kyrgyzstan are forced to exercise self-censorship.

"Journalistic investigations are on the verge of disappearance," Otorbaev said. He cited a number of reasons behind the trend, including a political situation that does not favour free media; a lack of support from the owners of media outlets for journalists conducting investigations; and a lack of investigative skills.

Otorbaev expressed concern about the way Kyrgyz journalism is developing, "All the indications are that more and more journalists in Kyrgyzstan are opting for light topics. They write press releases or report news that is found in the yellow press."

"They do it to survive," Otorbaev said.

The deputy editor of the newspaper Osh Shamy, Gulzat Gazieva, said reports like IWPR's played an important role in informing the wider public about the state of the Kyrgyz media and the challenges it faces.

Gazieva cited pressure put on Osh Shamy as an example of how local media ignored incidents, "Several times we have published news in our newspaper about our correspondent being beaten up, as well as about a spent bullet casing being sent to our office, but many media outlets have not reported it. They just ignored it."

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE, centre in Bishkek also noted IWPR's contribution to raising the issue of journalists' safety.

"IWPR ... is taking up a message of concern to millions of readers and is prompting society not to ignore the problem of the safety of journalists in Kyrgyzstan," said Burul Usmanalieva, an adviser on media and public relations with the OSCE centre.

The editor in chief of the newspaper Moskovskiy Komsomolets in Kyrgyzstan, Ulugbek Babakulov, also welcomed IWPR's work in attracting attention to the safety of journalists and the state of investigative

journalism.

He said the next steps in providing protection for those who work in the media is for journalists themselves to unite and to spur the authorities to react to attacks against journalists.

Dina Tokbaeva is IWPR's Kyrgyzstan editor.

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