
KEY TRENDS IN THE PROTECTION OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS IN KYRGYZSTAN

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The **Legal Prosperity Foundation** is an independent non-commercial organisation that has been working to promote human rights and democratic principles in Kyrgyzstan since 1995. The organization carries out educational programmes, conducts human rights monitoring, interacts with international human rights mechanisms and promotes respect for human rights in the context of legal reforms.

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Summary

This briefing paper highlights key trends in the protection of the freedoms of expression, association and assembly in Kyrgyzstan. It reviews the rights implications of the emergency measures taken by the Kyrgyzstani authorities in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as other recent developments that impede the work of media, journalists and bloggers, threaten civil society space, and limits the rights of protesters in violation of national and international law.

In connection with the Covid-19 pandemic, the Kyrgyzstani authorities introduced emergency measures, including a state of emergency that was in force in the capital Bishkek and several other cities and regions from 25 March to 10 May 2020. These measures negatively affected the protection of the freedoms of expression, association and assembly. For several weeks, journalists were not accredited and granted special permission to move around in the capital and other areas where the state of emergency was in place, which prevented them from effectively carrying out their professional activities at this time of crisis. Lawyers also had trouble with providing legal assistance to clients since they were not exempted from the restrictions on people's movement that applied during the state of emergency. The conduct of rallies, pickets and all other assemblies was fully banned during the state of emergency, and social media users have been threatened with criminal prosecution and made to "publicly apologise" for posting allegedly false information about the pandemic.

In a trend that began prior to the Covid-19 crisis, independent media and journalists have recently come under growing pressure in Kyrgyzstan. In one high-profile case, several leading independent media outlets exposing government corruption are facing defamation lawsuits involving unprecedentedly large claims for damages that threaten their existence. While this case is still pending with court, it has already sent a warning to all media outlets that are critical of the government. Punitive defamation lawsuits initiated by people in power have also been used to target other independent and opposition media outlets. Media resources publishing corruption exposés have been singled out for cyberattacks and investigative journalists have been intimidated and attacked in retaliation for their work. An opposition TV channel was de facto forced to seize its operations last year. Several outspoken bloggers have been charged with "inciting hostility" for exercising their freedom of expression.

Civil society has criticised new draft legislation on NGOs, which the parliament adopted on first reading in March 2020, as an unjustified attempt to step up control of NGOs and warned that it may be used to put pressure on organisations working on issues that do not please the authorities. In a joint appeal, more than 100 Kyrgyzstani NGO leaders called for the withdrawal of the draft legislation, which introduces additional reporting obligations for NGOs on top of those set out by existing legislation.

In a worrying development, civil society groups and activists have been intimidated, attacked and harassed in a number of cases in the past year. The investigations into these incidents have typically not been effective and the perpetrators have not been identified nor held to account. Human rights defender Azimjan Askarov remains behind bars and continues to be denied justice, in violation of the 2016 decision by the UN Human Rights Committee on his case. The current Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced concerns about his health, prompting renewed calls for his release with account of humanitarian aspects.

Under normal circumstances, the country's residents actively exercise their right to freedom of assembly. For example, in late 2019, two large peaceful protests were held in central Bishkek to call for adequate measures

to investigate allegations of government corruption, as well as to protect freedom of expression. Most peaceful protests are allowed to take place without interference. However, in an exception to this, those who had gathered for a march against violence against women in Bishkek on 8 March 2020 were first attacked by unknown perpetrators and thereafter arbitrarily detained and ill-treated by police. The police attempted to justify their measures by calling the march “unsanctioned”, although advance permission for assemblies is not required under national law, and by claiming that they acted to prevent clashes between the participants and their attackers. The police response to the women’s rights march was heavily criticised and a number of the participants filed complaints about unlawful treatment by police, which are currently under investigation.

Shortly before the 8 March event, local authorities sought court bans on all non-official assemblies in the capital until 1 July 2020, citing the need to prevent the spread of the Covid-19. However, the arguments made by local officials in court suggested that the real motive was to prevent the women’s rights march from taking place. In the end, the authorities backed off from this controversial initiative and dropped their requests for such bans. Prior to this, local courts had repeatedly sanctioned blanket bans on holding assemblies in central Bishkek for several weeks at a time, based on vague arguments about the supposed nuisance and threat posed by rallies. This problematic practice runs counter to national and international standards protecting the right to freedom of assembly.

Restrictions on fundamental freedoms related to the Covid-19 pandemic

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, an emergency situation was announced in Kyrgyzstan as of 22 March 2020, and a state of emergency featuring more stringent restrictions was declared in Bishkek and several other cities and regions as of 25 March. As part of the state of emergency, initially in force until 15 April but later prolonged through 10 May, a curfew was introduced and people’s movement was limited with police checkpoints being established. These measures had implications for the protection of the freedoms of expression, association and assembly.

Restrictions on the work of media

The state of emergency declared in Bishkek and other cities and regions resulted in restrictions on the work of media. Media activities were not included among the types of activities deemed critical and thus were not exempted from the curfew and the other restrictions on people’s movement that were introduced as part of the state of emergency. Moreover, on 30 March 2020, the government official overseeing the state of emergency (commandant) in Bishkek announced that journalists would not be granted accreditation to work in the capital during this time. This announcement, which contradicted statements he had initially made, was justified with the need to protect the health of journalists.

Accordingly, media offices had to work remotely and journalists were not able to move around freely to carry out their professional activities. Journalists also reported problems with obtaining information from the authorities on the measures taken in the struggle against Covid-19 since the government briefings organised only provided one-sided information and did not include question and answer sessions, while media inquiries to officials were answered with several days’ delay, if at all. At the same time, the restrictions did not appear to apply equally to state media, with state TV channels, for example, providing footage from hospitals treating Covid-19 patients and from the government briefings on the pandemic.¹

Media and human rights organisations criticised the restrictive media policy during the state of emergency as unlawful and discriminatory.² In a joint appeal, Kyrgyzstani media groups and representatives called on the authorities to enable media outlets to carry out their work and safeguard access to information of public interest during the pandemic.³ In a similar vein, members of the IFEX global network for freedom of expression faulted the authorities for failing “to create the enabling environment necessary for journalists to perform their public function during this crisis”.⁴ When commenting on the situation in Kyrgyzstan, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Désir stressed: “Journalists should be able to report and work during the pandemic without undue limitations”.⁵ In a joint statement issued in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, experts from the UN, the OSCE and the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights said that journalism “serves a crucial function at a moment of public health emergency” and that governments must make “exceptional efforts” to protect the work of journalists and ensure that they have access to information.⁶

In mid-April, the president’s office recommended that the officials overseeing the state of emergency reconsider the issue of accreditation of the media.⁷ On 20 April, the commandant’s office in Bishkek finally announced that it would start accrediting journalists wishing to carry out their work during the state of emergency.⁸ At the end of April, it was announced that media outlets would be allowed to resume their operations as of 11 May and, thus, re-open their offices.⁹

The work of lawyers obstructed

The work of lawyers was also not included in the activities that were exempted from the restrictions on people’s movement that applied during the state of emergency in Bishkek and other regions. As a result, lawyers experienced difficulties in providing legal assistance to clients. Kyrgyzstan’s Bar Association (Advokatura) appealed to the General Prosecutor to address this issue and to ensure that lawyers are able to carry out their work without hindrance.¹⁰ The NGO Coalition against Torture also expressed concerns that restrictions on the freedom of movement of lawyers may mean that citizens are unable to access qualified legal assistance in a timely manner. The Coalition urged the Minister of Justice to take adequate measures to safeguard the activities of the bar and to regulate the provision of legal assistance in the context of the coronavirus pandemic.¹¹

On 28 April 2020, Prime Minister Muhammetkalyi Abylgaziev finally gave assurances that lawyers would be allowed to move around and resume their work as of 1 May. As a result, the Bar Association announced that it would start operating fully again as of this date.¹²

Social media users intimidated

Following the introduction of emergency measures, the State Committee on National Security (SCNS) regularly started informing media about measures taken against social media users accused of disseminating allegedly false information in relation to the pandemic. According to these reports, the SCNS typically detained such individuals, held “preventive” discussions with them, threatened them with criminal prosecution and released them after they publicly “apologised” and “repented”. While many of those targeted apparently were accused of disseminating incorrect information about the spread of Covid-19 in different parts of Kyrgyzstan, some of them had highlighted problems relating to the pandemic at hospitals or other health care facilities.¹³

The SCNS’ measures were criticised by both lawmakers and civil society. A group of media experts stated that the SCNS is misleading people if it is forcing them to apologise, suggesting that they may otherwise be held

criminally responsible. The experts pointed out that Criminal Code article 344, often cited by the SCNS in this context does not cover the dissemination of unsubstantiated information through the internet but specifically concerns falsely reporting a crime to law enforcement authorities. They also emphasised that national law does not provide for any penalty in the form of “public apology and repentance”, noting that people might only voluntarily choose to apologise and repent and that these acts do not have any legal implications. The media experts concluded that law enforcement authorities have the right to take measures to prevent misinformation about the Covid-19 pandemic but such efforts must not violate fundamental rights.¹⁴

At the beginning of April, a new provision was introduced to Kyrgyzstan’s Code of Violations (article 82-2) providing for fines to punish the dissemination of “false information” that “violates public order and the peace of mind of citizens” in areas of the country where an emergency situation, a state of emergency or martial law has been declared.¹⁵ This provision, the implementation of which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior rather than the SCNS, has been criticised for its vague wording. For example, an expert from the Media Policy Institute concluded that it fails to set out clear criteria for determining whether these types of violations have taken place and that it lacks an element of “intent”.¹⁶ Members of the IFEX global network for freedom of expression warned that the new provision risks restricting freedom of expressions “through arbitrary enforcement due to overly broad and imprecise language”.¹⁷

While voicing concern about attempts to intimidate and censor the speech of social media users, representatives of the media community have stressed that the most effective strategy for the Kyrgyzstani authorities to prevent the spread of misinformation about Covid-19 is to promote access to verified, up-to-date information about the pandemic and the measures taken in response to it. A key aspect of such a strategy is to cooperate with both state and non-state, independent media.

Assemblies banned

National legislation safeguards freedom of peaceful assembly in accordance with international standards. However, the state of emergency declared in the capital Bishkek and several other cities and regions in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in a temporary ban on assemblies. Thus, in accordance with the decree signed by President Jeenbekov, all protests, demonstrations, rallies, pickets, strikes and other assemblies were banned during the state of emergency that went into effect as of 25 March.¹⁸ Moreover, on 30 March, Kyrgyzstan informed the UN Secretary General about its derogation from article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which protects the right to freedom of peaceful assembly.¹⁹

While many states have limited the freedom of assembly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the UN Human Rights Committee has stressed that states should not resort to derogation under the ICCPR “when they can attain their public health (...) objectives through invoking the possibility to restrict certain rights”, such as article 21 in accordance with the provisions of the Covenant.²⁰ When derogating from their ICCPR obligations, states fully suspend the rights in question, while restrictions are a less far-reaching measure. However, both types of limitations are exceptional in nature and must meet strict requirements set out by international law. The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association has pointed out that states’ responses to Covid-19 “should not halt” these rights, saying that it “is inadmissible to declare blanket restrictions” without exemptions being made, for example, for civil society actors, trade unions, and journalists covering the crisis.²¹

Thus, the steps taken by the Kyrgyzstani authorities to derogate from ICCPR article 21 and fully suspend the right to freedom of assembly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic are problematic.

Recommendations to the authorities of Kyrgyzstan

- Allow all media, including independent and opposition media and journalists to carry out their work without hindrance in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Ensure that social media users are not arbitrarily detained, threatened with criminal liability or pressured to publicly apologise for posting information relating to the current pandemic.
- Revise article 82-2, recently introduced to the Code of Violations to ensure that its wording meets requirements of legal clarity and predictability and that it does not lend itself to implementation restricting free speech in violation of national and international standards.
- Enable lawyers to implement their mandate and provide legal assistance to clients without hindrance in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Ensure that any measures taken to restrict fundamental rights in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic are fully consistent with Kyrgyzstan's international human rights obligations, including the strict requirements for derogations and limitations of rights set out by the ICCPR.

The work of media, journalists and bloggers

High-profile defamation case against media

A recent investigation conducted by Radio *Azattyk* and the *Kloop* news site together with the global Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCPR), revealed systematic corruption within Kyrgyzstan's Customs Service. The investigation, which was published on 21 November 2019²², alleged that an underground cargo empire had funnelled massive bribes to custom service officials. Over two dozen journalists from the three organisations worked for months on the investigation with some of them reportedly facing threats and surveillance. In addition, a major source of the investigation was murdered in Istanbul on 10 November 2019. These developments gave rise to serious security concerns, based on which the names of the journalists involved in the investigation were not made public.

The publication of the investigation attracted a lot of attention. A key figure featured in the probe, former Customs Service Deputy Head Raimbek Matraimov and members of his family subsequently filed defamation lawsuits against Radio *Azattyk* and *Kloop*, a journalist working with the former outlet, as well as 24.kg, one of news outlets that covered the investigation findings. The plaintiffs requested over 60 million Som (around 700 000 EUR²³) in compensation for alleged moral damages. They also requested the bank accounts of the defendants to be frozen pending the consideration of the case.²⁴ On 10 December 2019, Bishkek's Sverdlov District Court ruled in favour of this second request.²⁵

The news about the defamation lawsuits, the excessive damages sought by Matraimov and his relatives, as well as the court's order to freeze the bank accounts of the media outlets and the journalist caused an outcry both in Kyrgyzstan and abroad. In response to this, the plaintiffs asked the district court to repeal the decision to freeze the bank accounts of the defendants, which it did on 13 December 2019.²⁶ However, Matraimov and his co-claimants did not withdraw their defamation lawsuits.

On 20 January 2020, Sverdlov District Court in Bishkek began hearing the merits of the case. Soon after the start of the proceedings, the court announced that the claimants had dropped their request for material compensation against the 24.kg news agency since it published a retraction in relation to an article it had previously published about the corruption investigation.²⁷ At the same time, the claimants persisted with their requests in relation to the other defendants, and are demanding damages totalling 22,5 million Som (about 290,000 EUR) from Radio *Azattyk*, 12,5 million Som (about 145,000 EUR) from *Kloop*, and 10 million Som (about 116,000 EUR) from journalist Ali Toktakunov, who works with *Kloop*. The legal process continues, but was put on hold during the state of emergency declared in Bishkek as of 25 March.

Media watchdogs and experts have denounced the actions taken against media in this case and the huge damages sought. For example, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Désir stated: “Disproportionate damages in civil defamation cases have a chilling effect on media freedom. It may bring about the closure of outlets and endanger media pluralism. I call for respect for journalists who reported on this case, including investigative journalists, who play a key role in press freedom and democracy.”²⁸ The Media Development Centre, a Kyrgyzstani NGO, expressed alarm at “open pressure on media through the court system” and warned that this may cause “unprecedented damage” to the “mission of the media” and result in a “serious rollback from democracy”.²⁹ Reporters without Borders called on the court to dismiss the lawsuits, saying: “It is absurd that the journalists at *Azattyk* and *Kloop* are being sued in connection with their investigative reporting, which served the public interest and galvanized Kyrgyz civil society in its entirety”. The organisation also urged the Kyrgyzstani authorities to “do whatever is necessary to guarantee the safety of the journalists working on the story.”³⁰ In a similar vein, Civil Rights Defenders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and IPHR called on the Kyrgyzstani authorities to “take all steps provided under the national law” to guarantee protection to the journalists who have exposed high-level government corruption, as well as to those who have called for investigations into these allegations.³¹

While the size of the damages claimed by the plaintiffs in this high-profile case is unprecedented, it is not the only case where current and former government officials and decision-makers have sought substantial damages from media because of articles they consider to be defamatory. In the past year, there has been a number of such cases, in which local courts often have ruled in favour of the plaintiffs, thereby delivering serious blows to the media outlets affected and sending a warning to other media outlets.³²

DDoS attacks on media

In another development related to the media investigation into high-level government corruption described above, a number of Kyrgyzstani websites were subjected to concerted DDoS attacks on 17 December 2019.³³ The attacks, which restricted access to the targeted sites, began shortly after they published an investigative report produced by Factcheck.kg about the luxurious lifestyle of the wife of Raimbek Matraimov – as already mentioned, a key figure in the earlier corruption investigation. The Factcheck.kg report was based on information posted on the social media accounts of Matraimov’s wife, and looked at how this information contrasted with the ex-official’s officially declared income. In addition to Factcheck.kg, the sites targeted by attacks included those of *Kloop*, *Kaktus Media*, *vb.kg*, *knews.kg*, *Economist.kg* and others that reposted the report. IT experts assessed the attacks as an “unprecedentedly harsh”.³⁴ On 19 December, Member of Parliament Dastan Bekeshev called on the law enforcement authorities to investigate these DDoS attacks on media. However, the Ministry of Internal Affairs stated that no investigation would be opened since the media resources affected had not filed complaints with the police.³⁵

Physical attacks on journalists

Journalists have also repeatedly been subjected to intimidation and attacks in relation to their journalistic activities. In two recent cases of particular concern, journalists involved in efforts to investigate corruption allegations against former top customs official Raimbek Matraimov and his associates were subjected to physical assaults:

On 9 January 2020, three unknown perpetrators assaulted Bolot Temirov, chief editor of Factcheck.kg, outside the office of this media outlet in central Bishkek. According to Temirov, the three men approached him from behind, hit him on the head and kicked him repeatedly after he fell to the ground. When neighbours and passers-by came to Temirov's assistance, the perpetrators ran off, grabbing the journalist's phone that he had dropped during the assault.³⁶ As a result of the attack, Temirov suffered a concussion and bruising.³⁷ He deemed that the assault was an attempt to intimidate him because of his journalistic work.³⁸ The Independent Journalist Union of Kyrgyzstan also said that it considers the attack to be related to Temirov's professional activities.³⁹ Factcheck.kg has repeatedly published investigative reports about government corruption and attracted particular attention when posting a report about the lavish lifestyle of Raimbek Matraimov in mid-December 2019. As described above, following the publication of that report, Factcheck.kg and several other sites that reposted the report were subjected to invasive cyberattacks.

Among others, the Committee for the Protection of Journalists and OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Désir condemned the attack on Temirov and called for a prompt and thorough investigation into it.⁴⁰ President Jeenbekov's press secretary also expressed regret about the attack and said that he hoped that the police would respond quickly and find the perpetrators.⁴¹ On 14 January 2020, the police arrested four men suspected of involvement in the attack on charges of robbery.⁴² The trial was initially set to start in early March, but according to the journalist, it was subsequently postponed for an undetermined period of time, apparently because of the Covid-19 state of emergency. Temirov also said that the suspects in the case had initially confessed to carrying out the assault on the order of an unnamed client, but later withdrew their confessions, saying they had made them under duress.⁴³

In another case, Aibek Kulchumanov, a correspondent for Radio *Azattyk* was assaulted in the city of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan on 28 September 2019 when he was working on a report for this service and filming material with the help of a drone.⁴⁴ According to Kulchumanov, several well-built young men approached him, hit him and took his video recording equipment, the remote control for his drone, his mobile phone, as well as his personal documents and car keys. He said that his attackers asked him "who had ordered" investigative reports into Raimbek Matraimov.⁴⁵ A medical examination of the journalist following the attack found that he had suffered injuries to his back.⁴⁶ Radio *Azattyk* condemned the assault on its journalist as an "attack on freedom of expression" and demanded a thorough investigation into it,⁴⁷ a call that was echoed by others.⁴⁸ OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Désir said: "Such an attack and intimidation against a media worker is unacceptable."⁴⁹

In response to a complaint filed by Kulchumanov, the police opened an investigation into the incident, under a Criminal Code provision on robbery. According to a press release issued by the police shortly after the attack, the individuals "who took Kulchumanov's video recording equipment" had been identified.⁵⁰ However, the police also told Kulchumanov that two complaints had been filed against him: one of them alleged that he had intruded on private property, while the other one was submitted by a local resident who claimed that Kulchumanov's drone had fallen on him and injured him.⁵¹ As of early May 2020, there was no further information about the investigation into the attack on the journalist or the complaints submitted against him.

Criminal cases against bloggers

Several cases in which social media bloggers are currently facing criminal charges have given rise to free speech concerns. The charges against the bloggers have been brought under Criminal Code article 313, a broadly worded provision that prohibits “inciting racial, ethnic, national, religious and inter-regional hostility” and provides for a penalty of up to ten years in prison.

Aftandil Zhorobekov, administrator of the Facebook page *Bespredel KG* (“Lawlessness in Kyrgyzstan”), was detained in Bishkek on charges of inciting inter-regional hostility on 24 November 2019. He was initially placed in a pre-trial detention facility; however, on 5 December, he was transferred to house arrest.⁵² According to a press release issued by the SCNS, Zhorobekov had disseminated “knowingly false and provocative information discrediting the current authorities”. The press release also stated that by calling for “disobedience” and “mass protests” in his posts, he had “divided” the users of his Facebook page into “opposing groups” and “provoked mutual insulting comments”, which “ultimately” incited “feelings of hatred” and “inter-regional discord”.⁵³ Screenshots from Zhorobekov’s Facebook page that the SCNS shared to demonstrate the basis for the charges included posts the blogger had made about political figures in the country, as well as comments made by visitors to his site, some of which were offensive and hostile in nature.

Experts from the Kyrgyzstani Civil Society Initiative for Internet Policies criticised the case against Zhorobekov, saying that he was being made a scapegoat for the actions of others who had commented under his posts and, thereby, expressed their own thoughts. They emphasised that social media hosts should only be held responsible for the content of their own posts, not for the comments of site visitors. The experts also pointed out that the Criminal Code provision on “inciting hostility” does not prohibit criticism of the authorities and that such an interpretation runs counter to the constitution and international human rights standards.⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch called on the Kyrgyzstani authorities to drop the charges against Zhorobekov, saying: “His arrest sets a dangerous precedent that anyone could be held criminally liable for criticizing public figures, or for the offending speech of others.”⁵⁵

In another case, Elmirbek Sydymanov, who manages a popular Instagram account under the nickname Sydyman, was detained in Bishkek on 17 February 2020 on charges of inciting inter-regional hostility.⁵⁶ He was also initially held in a pre-trial detention facility but was transferred to house arrest on 27 February.⁵⁷ The charges against Sydymanov are related to a live Instagram broadcast in which he expressed negative views about the dialect swear words used by visitors to his site from southern Kyrgyzstan, saying that those who live there therefore are “not developed” and that he “does not like” them. He later apologised for his statements. Experts from the Media Policy Institute noted that the blogger was, in essence, speaking about who were swearing “more correctly” below his posts and concluded that this is “silly” but not prohibited speech. They experts said that a sentence of five to ten years in prison, which is foreseen by the criminal code provision under which the blogger is facing charges, would be an “inhumane” penalty in a case like this.⁵⁸

As of the beginning of May 2020, the investigation in the cases against the two bloggers were still under way.

Seizure of TV-channel associated with former president

On 9 August 2019, special police forces burst into the headquarters of the *Aprél* (April) TV channel in Bishkek, demanded that all employees leave and sealed off the office, thereby de-facto forcing the TV channel to end its broadcasting. According to the authorities, the measure was based on a court decision sanctioning the

seizure of former President Atambayev's assets following his arrest on corruption and other charges the day before.⁵⁹ The ex-president is one of the co-founders of *Aprél* TV and its premises are located in the Media Forum building belonging to him.⁶⁰ On 15 August 2019, a local court rejected a complaint filed by the TV channel against the police action.⁶¹

The Department of Information and Mass Communication at the Ministry of Culture insisted that *Aprél* TV was seized as property belonging to an individual suspected of serious crimes and had nothing to do with the nature of the channel's journalist activities or its criticism of the current government.⁶² However, in a joint statement⁶³, more than a dozen Kyrgyzstani media associations, outlets and experts protested against the measure taken against *Aprél* TV, saying it was "excessive and unjustified" since the TV channel had not been charged with any crimes. They also warned that the suspension of the channel's broadcasting undermined previous achievements with respect to media freedom and pluralism in Kyrgyzstan. They called on the relevant authorities to allow the channel to resume its broadcasting. Among others, Reporters Without Borders and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Harlem Désir also expressed concern about the de-facto closure of the *Aprél* TV channel and urged the Kyrgyzstani authorities to protect media pluralism.⁶⁴ As of early May 2020, *Aprél* TV had not been able to resume its operations.

Recommendations to the authorities of Kyrgyzstan

- Take appropriate measures to prevent that defamation lawsuits are used as tool of retaliation against media and journalists who investigate and criticise the actions of those in power, including by calling on public officials and ex-officials to refrain from such steps and by establishing an upper limit for the amount of damages that can be awarded in any case.
- When examining defamation lawsuits against media and journalists, the courts should ensure that no one is penalised in violation of the strict requirements with respect to permissible restrictions on the right to freedom of expression and that any damages awarded are reasonable and proportionate.
- Thoroughly and impartially investigate all cases of intimidation and attacks against journalists, including the assaults on Bolot Temirov and Aibek Kulchumanov with account of how these assaults were related to the journalistic activities of those targeted and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.
- Uphold freedom of expression on the internet, investigate cyberattacks targeting media; and ensure that social media hosts are not arrested, prosecuted or convicted for exercising their right to freedom of expression as protected by national and international law.
- Ensure that opposition and independent media outlets are not arbitrarily denied the right to operate.

Operating space for civil society and human rights defenders

Concerns about new draft NGO legislation

The parliament adopted new draft legislation on NGOs⁶⁵, initiated by several members of parliament, on first reading on 4 March 2020. The draft law provides for amendments to existing legislation regulating NGOs and introduces new reporting obligations for them, in particular with respect to their finances. The parliament passed the draft law, although it had been widely criticised by both civil society as an unjustified attempt to step up control of NGOs.

Lawyers from the Adilet Legal Clinic, a prominent Kyrgyzstani NGO, assessed the compliance of the draft legislation with the constitution and international human rights standards and found it problematic in several respects. They pointed out that it duplicates reporting requirements set out under existing legislation and that is discriminatory in that it applies only to certain types of non-commercial organisations. They also concluded that there is a risk that the new provisions may be used to “put pressure on the non-commercial sector because of its active position in public life”. The experts stressed that this risk is enhanced because of the lack of transparency and the political dependence of state institutions.⁶⁶

In a joint appeal,⁶⁷ more than 100 Kyrgyzstani NGO leaders called for the draft legislation to be withdrawn, saying it contradicts the country’s constitution and international obligations and will have a negative impact on NGOs. The signatories stressed that existing legislation already requires NGOs to report about their activities and finances to different state bodies and grants authorities wide powers to oversee the compliance of NGOs with relevant legal requirements and to initiate sanctions in response to violations.

The head of Adilet, Cholpon Djakupova also warned that a provision of the draft legislation, which requires NGOs to submit information about their programmes for publication on the Ministry of Justice website may endanger organisations working on sensitive issues such as the protection of LGBT members by attracting unwanted attention to their work.⁶⁸ There are widespread negative attitudes toward LGBT communities and those who defend their rights in Kyrgyzstan and some movements have taken an aggressive stance against these groups.

Before the parliament voted on the draft legislation, Ombudsperson Tokon Mamytov also called on the initiators to withdraw it, referring to the conclusions of Adilet about its inconsistency with the constitution.⁶⁹

In order for the draft law to be finally adopted, the parliament must pass it on two more readings. As of the beginning of May, the second hearing of the draft legislation had yet to be scheduled.

Previously, in May 2016, Kyrgyzstan’s parliament rejected a controversial NGO draft law on third reading. That draft law, which drew heavily on the corresponding Russian law, required NGOs to adopt the label of “foreign agents” if they receive foreign funding and engage in broadly defined “political activities”. It also granted authorities new, broad powers to interfere in the internal affairs of NGOs. The rejection of the draft law was a victory for civil society, which had campaigned against it since it was first introduced. While the current draft legislation does not contain such draconian and stigmatising provisions as the “foreign agents” law, it reflects similar attempts to single out NGOs for closer control and oversight than other legal subjects, in particular in view of their funding sources.

Intimidation and harassment of civil society groups

In a number of cases in the past year, civil society groups, their representatives and individual activists have been intimidated, attacked and harassed in relation to their civic engagement. It is of particular concern that the investigations into these incidents have typically not been effective and the perpetrators have not been found nor held to account.

Threats against human rights defenders speaking out on corruption and free speech violations

Human rights lawyer and director of the Bishkek-based law firm Precedent, Nurbek Toktakunov reported receiving threats after calling on the authorities to investigate the allegations made in the recent journalist

investigation on high-level government corruption (see more in the chapter on the work of media) and publicly criticised the way this investigation was being handled. He was first threatened on social media, and later over the phone.⁷⁰ According to Toktakunov, on 18 December 2019, when he was on his way to a rally to protest against corruption and demand free speech, he received a phone call from an unknown man, who told him that “they had already warned him”, that “that’s enough rallies” and that he should “calm down”.⁷¹

Human rights defender Dinara Oshurakhunova, another active participant in two rallies against corruption and for free speech held in late 2019, also reported receiving threats. She wrote on Twitter that an unknown man called her ahead of the 18 December rally and warned her not to “make a fuss”. When she asked who he was, the caller said “what’s the difference?” and hung up. When the activist tried calling back, she was informed that no such number exists.⁷²

Toktakunov and Oshurakhunova filed complaints with the police about the threats they received and the police opened investigations under Criminal Code article 145 (which penalizes threats to use force). As of the beginning of May 2020, the investigations were still under way.

In a joint statement issued on 20 December 2019, Civil Rights Defenders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and IPHR expressed concern about the threats against the two human rights defenders. The NGOs called on the Kyrgyzstani authorities to ensure their protection.⁷³

Discussion about NGO draft legislation interrupted

On 29 January 2020, the Adilet Legal Clinic organised a meeting for NGO representatives in Bishkek to discuss the new draft legislation on NGOs (described above). A group of unknown people arrived at the hotel where the event was being held, but were not allowed to enter since they had not registered for the event and were unable to say which NGOs they represented. Later, however, several of them forced their way into the hotel lobby where the meeting was taking place, interrupting the concluding remarks of Adilet head Cholpon Djakupova. The intruders claimed that their rights had been “violated” since they were not allowed to participate in the discussion and stated that they supported the draft legislation.⁷⁴ Based on a complaint from Djakupova, police opened an investigation on “hooliganism” into the incident.⁷⁵ As of the beginning of May 2020, the investigation was still under way.

Participants in public discussion event intimidated

On 13 February 2020, unknown perpetrators interrupted a public event organised by several Bishkek-based civil society activists in the city of Osh to discuss the social and political situation in the country. According to one of the organisers, Ulan Usein, a group of young men entered the meeting venue just as the event was about to start, demanded that those present leave and told the audience that it was “an LGBT meeting”. Usein reported that one of the young men also attempted to take his mobile phone away and yelled that he and the other organisers should be “kicked out” of the city. As the meeting participants left, the young men stopped them, wrote down their personal details and threatened them with “problems”. Police officers present also told Usein to leave.⁷⁶ Based on press and social media information about the incident, which caused a public outcry, local law enforcement authorities initiated an investigation.⁷⁷ As of early May 2020, there had been no further news about the investigation.

Aggressive intervention during Coalition against Torture meeting

On 23 May 2019, a group of unidentified individuals who introduced themselves as members of the Youth Patriotic Movement burst into an event organised in Bishkek by Kyrgyzstan’s Coalition against Torture, which

unites NGOs and activists working on the prevention and eradication of torture and ill-treatment. These individuals, holding cameras and voice recorders, aggressively demanded an end to the event, which was a working meeting for lawyers and attorneys with the participation of international experts. Front Line Defenders said that it believed that the attack was “solely motivated by the peaceful and legitimate human rights work of the Coalition, and aimed at intimidating and harassing human rights organisations working on torture and ill-treatment”.⁷⁸ Meeting participants filmed the incident and the organisers filed a complaint with the police. However, a year later, the perpetrators have yet to be found and brought to justice.

Fire in the office of human rights NGO

On 6 April 2019, there was a fire in the office of Spektr – a member of the NGO Coalition against Torture - in the city of Karakol in eastern Kyrgyzstan. According to representatives of the organization, the office appeared to have been searched prior to the fire and they believed that the office had been deliberately set on fire. While no one was injured in the fire, it destroyed valuable documents belonging to Spektr. While police opened an investigation into the fire, they have yet to determine the cause of it.

Attack on picnic organised by group defending women's and LGBTI rights

On 1 May 2019, a large group of young men intimidated and harassed activists from the 8/365 movement (an initiative uniting feminist, women's rights, LGBTI groups and activists) who had gathered for a picnic in Bishkek to celebrate the May holiday. The young men included members of the *Kyrk Choro* movement, which is infamous for its intolerance to feminists and the LGBTI community. They threatened, followed and insulted the 8/365 activists and threw eggs and paint at them and bystanders, including children. Police officers present at the scene failed to intervene to protect the 8/365 activists, despite repeated requests.⁷⁹ The 8/365 activists subsequently filed a complaint with the police about the incident, requesting that it be investigated as hooliganism. The activists also appealed to President Jeenbekov to ensure a full and impartial investigation into the rights violations, as well as the inaction of police during the incident on 1 May.⁸⁰

While police opened an investigation based on the complaint from the 8/365 activists, the individuals who intimidated and harassed the activists have not been identified and held to account. The 8/365 activists were informed, however, that the Ethics Commission of the Bishkek City Police Department made a decision on 7 June 2019 to reprove the police colonel, who was in charge of the police officers present during the 1 May incident. According to the Committee's decision, the colonel violated the police rules of conduct, which set out that it is unacceptable for police officers to show indifference, inaction and passivity with respect to preventing and curtailing violations of the law. The Ethics Commission also stated that similar violations of the police rules must not be allowed to take place again. No further action was taken against the police colonel or other police officers present during the incident.

Human rights defender Azimjan Askarov remains behind bars

Elderly, ailing human rights defender Azimjan Askarov continues to serve a life sentence for his alleged role in the inter-ethnic violence that took place in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010. Askarov's defence has repeatedly filed appeals in his case, seeking justice for the defender and implementation of the March 2016 UN Human Right Committee decision, which found that Kyrgyzstan's authorities had violated the defender's rights under the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and that he should be immediately released and his conviction quashed.

Last year, Askarov turned to court with a request to reconsider his sentence under the provisions of Kyrgyzstan's new Criminal Code, which entered into force as of January 2019. However, on 30 July 2019, Chui Regional Court rejected the defender's request. On 2 December 2019, the Supreme Court reviewed an appeal filed by Askarov's defence against the July ruling. Although the Supreme Court partially ruled in favour of the defence and reduced the sentence imposed against Askarov under some of the Criminal Code provisions under which he was convicted, it nevertheless upheld the life sentence handed to him following the unfair 2010 trial.⁸¹

A final, so-called cassation appeal by Askarov's defence to the Supreme Court on his sentence was heard on 13 May 2020. Ahead of this hearing, new calls were made to grant the defender justice and ensure compliance with the 2016 decision of the UN Human Rights Committee.⁸² Newly appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders Mary Lawlor called for "a proper review" of Askarov's appeal in accordance with fair trial safeguards and for "his immediate release", noting that the "UN's many communications to have Mr Askarov's case quashed have been ignored by the Kyrgyzstani authorities".⁸³ However, the Supreme Court again failed to take due account of the views of the Human Rights Committee and upheld Askarov's sentence unchanged, a ruling that was regretted, among others, by the EU.⁸⁴ It was of further concern that, as reported by the Bir Duino Human Rights Movement, police and court officials failed to take adequate measures to respond when aggressive groups present hurled threats and insults at the defence both in- and outside the courtroom. According to the NGO, monitors from civil society, international organisations, the diplomatic community and media were also selectively denied access to the trial.⁸⁵

In another, separate development, Askarov filed a lawsuit against the Kyrgyzstani government because of its failure to implement the UN Human Rights Committee decision in his case and, thus, to comply with its international human rights obligations.⁸⁶ Bishkek's Inter-district Court was initially due to hear the lawsuit on 30 March 2020, but the hearing was postponed to 11 May in connection with the Covid-19 state of emergency.⁸⁷ However, when Askarov's representatives arrived for the hearing on 11 May, the judge informed them that the inter-district court had been abolished as of 8 May, and thus would not be able to consider the lawsuit, which would instead be transferred to another court. The Bir Duino human rights movement said it was "bewildering" that the court had not informed Askarov's representatives about this turn of event earlier.⁸⁸

The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced concerns about the health and well-being of Askarov in prison. In a joint letter sent to President Jeenbekov on 31 March 2020, nine European and international human rights and press freedom organizations – including IPHR – called upon his government to protect Askarov's health at this time, ensure that the defender has access to appropriate hygiene, screening and medical assistance, and to urgently release him. The signatories noted that Askarov is at risk of being disproportionately affected by the virus given his advanced age and his poor health, including cardiac and respiratory problems, for which he has not received adequate medical attention.⁸⁹ UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders Mary Lawlor also expressed concern about "the toll that dismal prison conditions and solitary confinement have had on Mr Askarov's health, and the increased risk that COVID-19 poses to incarcerated elder prisoners like him with underlying health conditions."⁹⁰ Similarly, the EU has noted that the defender's age and poor health "expose him to significant risks in the global coronavirus pandemic."⁹¹

Recommendations to the authorities of Kyrgyzstan

- Take due account of the views of civil society on the draft legislation on NGOs currently under consideration and ensure that any additional oversight and reporting obligations introduced for

NGOs are necessary, proportionate and fully consistent with the requirements of national and international law.

- Protect civil society groups and activists against intimidation and harassment and ensure that all reported cases involving such treatment (including those detailed above) are thoroughly and impartially investigated and that those responsible are held to account.
- Protect the health of Azimjan Askarov at this time of the Covid-19 pandemic, ensure that he access to appropriate medical attention and assistance and urgently release him in accordance with the decision issued by the UN Human Rights Committee on his case.

Legislation and practice on peaceful assemblies

Practice of holding assemblies

National law protects the right of citizens to hold peaceful assemblies, in accordance with international standards. The Law on Peaceful Assemblies⁹² only requires the organisers of assemblies to notify the authorities, not to request permission for assemblies and obliges the authorities to facilitate and protect both planned and spontaneous peaceful gatherings.

Residents also actively exercise their freedom of assembly, staging protests on various social, economic and political issues. Recent months have seen, among others, two large peaceful protests in central Bishkek where the participants called for adequate measures to investigate allegations of government corruption, as well as to protect freedom of expression. These rallies were held in response to the publication of the media investigation of corruption within the Customs Service in November 2018, as well as the subsequent defamation lawsuits brought against the media outlets concerned (see more in the chapter on the work of media). Each of the two protests, held on 26 November and 18 December 2019, respectively, was estimated to have gathered around 1000 participants, including civil society activists, human rights defenders, journalists, public figures and others.⁹³

Participants in women's rights march attacked, forcibly detained and penalised

Most peaceful protests take place without interference in Kyrgyzstan. However, there have been some exceptions. Most recently, those who had gathered for a women's rights march in Bishkek on International Women's Day on 8 March 2020 were first attacked by unknown perpetrators and then detained and ill-treated by police.

The Feminale and 8/365 movements had initiated the 8 March event to draw attention to domestic violence, forced marriages and other forms violence against women and girls, which remain serious problems in Kyrgyzstan. A group of men, many wearing masks, attacked participants as they were about to begin the march. The men threw eggs at them, destroyed their banners and posters and physically assaulted them. After police arrived, the crowd dispersed. However, instead of seeking out the attackers, police detained march participants, forcibly placed them on a bus and took them to a local police station. A total of some 70 people, mostly women were detained. Some of them reported being subjected to physical abuse by police. The detainees were not informed about the grounds for their detention and were not granted access to legal assistance. Representatives of the Ombudsman's office were also not initially allowed to visit the detainees.

After being held for several hours, all detainees were released, most of them without charge. However, some of the organisers of the march were penalised.

According to a press release issued by the police department of the Sverdlovsk district of Bishkek,⁹⁴ six of the march participants and five other individuals “who disturbed public order” were fined for disobeying the lawful orders of police. The police called the women’s rights march “an unsanctioned rally”, saying it had “not been properly agreed” with local authorities and that the organisers had failed to inform police about the rally so that they could ensure public safety, which resulted in “provocations” and “violations of public order”. The press release also claimed that the police intervention on 8 March had been aimed at “preventing an escalation” of a “brawl” between the rally participants and another “group of people”. It was troubling that police depicted the women’s rights march as “unsanctioned”, although national law does not require the organisers of assemblies to obtain “permission” by authorities, and that they attempted to put equal blame on the event participants and those who attacked them. Only days before the march, local authorities had sought to prevent it from taking place by requesting court bans on all non-official assemblies in the city until 1 July 2020. However, the authorities eventually backed off on those requests and the march was held in the Sverdlovsk district of the capital where a request for a ban was withdrawn from court on the eve of the event (see more below).

The police response to the women’s rights march attracted wide media attention and was heavily criticised by national and international human rights NGOs.⁹⁵ Members of parliament also voiced concern and asked for measures to hold accountable the law enforcement officials responsible for violations.⁹⁶ A number of the detained protesters filed complaints about unlawful treatment by the Sverdlovsk district police. These complaints are under investigation and, at the time of writing, there was no further information about the progress of the investigations.

However, on 10 April 2020, it was announced that, following a complaint filed by the Ombudsman’s office, two police officers would be reprimanded for preventing representatives of this office from visiting those detained during the 8 March event.⁹⁷

Court blanket bans on assemblies

As part of a problematic pattern, on several occasions in the past year, local courts have issued decisions prohibiting peaceful assemblies in central areas of Bishkek for several weeks at a time. These court decisions have been issued in response to requests made by local authorities based on vague arguments about the supposed threats caused by assemblies, such as that protesters “shout and make noise” and “disturb the peace and quiet” of local residents, that rallies cause “traffic congestions”, and that assemblies pose a risk because of “increasing expressions of religious extremism” in the world.⁹⁸ The decisions have not met the requirements for permissible restrictions on peaceful assemblies set out by national and international law, according to which restrictions are only allowed for reasons of protecting national security, public order, health or morals, or the rights and freedoms of others, and any restrictions must be necessary and proportionate to these objectives. Typically, the court blanket bans on assemblies have also applied only to non-official events, reflecting a discriminatory approach.

Most recently, on 4 March 2020, the Bishkek city administration issued a decree ordering the heads of administrative districts of the capital to take measures restricting the conduct of assemblies in the city until 1 July 2020 for the stated purpose of preventing the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The decree was issued three

weeks before the state of emergency was declared in the capital in connection with Covid-19 and was unrelated to that measure. In accordance with the decree, the city's district administrations filed requests with local courts to ban all assemblies on the territories of these districts for the relevant period, with the exception of events organised by local and state authorities. The fact that exceptions were made for official events raised questions about the supposed objective of preventing large gatherings of people where Covid-19 could easily spread. The bans were initiated only days before the 8 March event against violence against women was scheduled to take place and, in court, local officials also made arguments suggesting that the bans were in fact aimed at stopping this event. Among others, officials said that no calls for "non-traditional sexual relations" should be allowed.⁹⁹ Last year, an International Women's Day march held in support of equal rights and opportunities resulted in controversy and an outpour of negative reactions on social media as some participants carried posters with slogans in support of LGBT rights. Some lawmakers dubbed that event a "gay parade".¹⁰⁰

On 6 March 2020, the city authorities announced that they were dropping the requests for court bans on assemblies.¹⁰¹ The same day, a request to ban assemblies submitted to Sverdlovsk District Court, which had not yet been considered, was withdrawn.¹⁰² The women's rights march on 8 March was held in this district of the capital. On 9 March, Bishkek's prosecutor authorities appealed against the court bans that already had been issued by other district courts.¹⁰³ This was the first time that court-sanctioned blanket bans on assemblies have been rescinded in Kyrgyzstan.

Recommendations to the authorities of Kyrgyzstan

- Ensure that any restrictions imposed on the conduct of assemblies are consistent with the requirements of national and international law and refrain from seeking and imposing blanket bans on the conduct of assemblies based on vague and broad arguments that are inconsistent with these requirements.
- Carry out prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all allegations of violations of the rights of participants in the women's rights march on 8 March 2020, including allegations of arbitrary detentions, the use of excessive force, and denial of access to legal assistance and hold the officials responsible for violations to account.

¹ See more in <http://media.kg/publications/obzor-po-narusheniyam-konstitucionnyh-prav-grazhdan-na-dostup-k-informaczi-i-svobodu-slova-a-takzhe-prav-zhurnalistov-i-smi-v-period-chrezvychnogo-polozheniya-v-kyrgyzstane/>;

https://24.kg/obschestvo/149640_mediasoobschestvo_trebuets_otnbspkomendanta_almazbeka_orozalieva_akkreditatsii_smi/

² <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/30524730.html>

³ <http://media.kg/news/zayavlenie-media-soobshhestva-prezidentu-kr-premer-ministru-kr-toraga-zhk-kr/>

⁴ <https://ifex.org/government-of-kyrgyzstan-curbs-freedom-of-expression-and-access-to-information-amid-covid-19/>

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https://twitter.com/OSCE_RFoM/status/1251162343335055360?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1251162343335055360&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2F24.kg%2Fobschestvo%2F150470_lishenie_smi_akkreditatsii_vovremya_chp_n_eopravdannoe_ogranichenie%2F

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⁷ https://24.kg/vlast/150075_rejim_chpvkyrgyzstane_jurnalistam_vse-taki_obeschayut_vydat_akkreditatsiyu/

⁸ <http://media.kg/news/komendatura-bishkeka-nachala-akkreditacziyu-smi-v-rezhime-chp/>

⁹ <https://24.kg/vlast/151401/>

¹⁰ <http://advokatura.kg/news/pismo-v-generalnuyu-prokuraturu-kyrgyzskoy-respubliki-otpravleno-elektronnoy-pochtoy>

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- ¹² <http://www.advokatura.kg/news/apparat-advokatury-kyrgyzskoy-respubliki-nachinaet-svoyu-rabotu-s-1-maya-2020-g>
- ¹³ See, for example, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan_coronavirus_media_fake_news_2020/30526074.html
- ¹⁴ See <https://www.facebook.com/media/kg/photos/a.256785961325614/1145146292489572/?type=3&theater>, and also <https://kloop.kg/blog/2020/04/16/stati-kotoroj-net-gknb-vvodit-lyudej-v-zabluzhdenie-otlavlivaya-ih-za-zavedomo-lozhnye-soobshheniya/>
- ¹⁵ See <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/112024?cl=ru-ru>
- ¹⁶ <http://media.kg/news/kommentarii-mediapredstavatelya-akmata-alagusheva-k-popravkam-v-koдексы/>
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- ¹⁸ <http://kabar.kg/news/chp-v-kyrgyzstane-cto-eto-znachit-i-kakie-mery-budut-priniaty/>
- ¹⁹ <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/CN/2020/CN.129.2020-Eng.pdf>
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- ²¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25788&LangID=E>
- ²² <https://www.occrp.org/en/plunder-and-patronage/>
- ²³ The EUR equivalents quoted here and below in the text are based on the exchange rates provided at oanda.com on 11 May 2020.
- ²⁴ <https://ru.sputnik.kg/society/20191212/1046495963/kyrgyzstan-matrimov-semya-sud-oshskij-oblastnoj-sud.html>
- ²⁵ <https://ru.sputnik.kg/society/20191212/1046495963/kyrgyzstan-matrimov-semya-sud-oshskij-oblastnoj-sud.html>
- ²⁶ <https://ru.sputnik.kg/incidents/20191213/1046507352/kyrgyzstan-smi-reshenie-sud-arest-snyatie.html>
- ²⁷ https://24.kg/obschestvo/141970_iski-matrimoviyih-protiv-smi-yurist-obnbspotkaze-otnbspmaterialnyih-pretenziy-knbs24kg/
- ²⁸ <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/442180>
- ²⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/1995092810629708/photos/a.2028937397245249/2993205180818461/?type=3&theater>
- ³⁰ <https://rsf.org/en/news/absurd-lawsuit-against-media-outlets-over-corruption-expose-kyrgyzstan>
- ³¹ <https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Kyrgyzstan.-Statement.-Final-12.20.19.pdf>
- ³² For recent examples of such defamation lawsuits, please see the following update prepared by IPHR and LPF: <https://www.iphronline.org/kyrgyzstan-corruption-findings-result-in-pressure-on-media-intimidation-of-activists-and-civil-society-protests.html>
- ³³ https://24.kg/obschestvo/138261_hakerskoy_atake_podvergliis_saytyi_spublikatsiey_otratak_jenyi-matrimova/
- ³⁴ https://24.kg/obschestvo/138376_tratyi_jenyi-matrimova_IT-spetsialisty_obespredsedentnoy_DDos-atake_nasmi/
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- ³⁹ <https://24.kg/obschestvo/139974/>
- ⁴⁰ <https://cpj.org/2020/01/investigative-journalist-bolot-temirov-assaulted-i.php>, https://twitter.com/OSCE_RFoM/status/1215602551678296065
- ⁴¹ https://24.kg/obschestvo/139966_press-sekretar_prezidenta_prokommentirovala_napadenie_nabolota_temirova/
- ⁴² https://kaktus.media/doc/404118_miliciia_zaderjala_chetveryh_podozrevaemyh_v_izbienii_bolota_temirova_foto.html
- ⁴³ <https://vesti.kg/proisshestiya/item/69238-bolot-temirov-slushanie-po-moemu-delu-perenesli-na-neopredelennyj-srok.html>
- ⁴⁴ <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/30198657.html>
- ⁴⁵ <https://www.rferl.org/Watchdog/2019/10/1>
- ⁴⁶ <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/30198657.html>
- ⁴⁷ <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan-azattyk/30191017.html>
- ⁴⁸ See appeal by Media Development Centre, a Kyrgyzstani NGO: <http://medialaw.kg/2019/10/01/obrashhenie-tsentr-media-razvitiya-na-napadenie-zhurnalista-radio-azattyk/>
- ⁴⁹ https://twitter.com/OSCE_RFoM/status/1178661551588495360
- ⁵⁰ <https://ru.reporter.kg/napadenie-na-operatora-azattyka-cto-govoriat-grazhdane-otobravshie-videoapparaturu/>
- ⁵¹ <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/30198657.html>
- ⁵² <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/30294644.html/>; https://24.kg/obschestvo/137073_blogger_aftandil_jorobekov_otpuschen_pod_domashniy_arest/
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- ⁵⁹ <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/aprel-atambaev-tv-kyrgyzstan/30101940.html>
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⁶¹ <https://24.kg/obschestvo/126595/>

⁶² <https://www.vb.kg/380676>

⁶³ <http://journalist.kg/news/obrashhenie-media-soobshhestva-k-prezidentu-kr/>

⁶⁴ <https://rsf.org/en/news/kyrgyz-tv-channels-forced-closure-deals-blow-media-pluralism>, <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/427904>

⁶⁵ <http://kenesh.kg/ru/article/show/6241/na-obshtestvennoe-obsuzhdenie-s-31-dekabrya-2019-goda-vinositsya-proekt-zakona-kirgizskoy-respubliki-o-vnesenii-izmeneniy-v-nekotorie-zakonodatelnye-akti-kirgizskoy-respubliki-zakoni-kirgizskoy-respubliki-okenommercheskih-organizatsiyah-o-gosudarstvennoy-registratsii-yuridicheskikh-lits-filialov-predstavitelstv>

⁶⁶ <http://www.adilet.kg/ru/news/full/394>

⁶⁷ https://kaktus.media/doc/404062_nko_prosiat_otozvat_zakonoproekt_obiazyvaushiy_ih_dopolnitelno_otchityvatsia_o_rashodah.html

⁶⁸ <https://24.kg/obschestvo/141917/>

⁶⁹ <https://24.kg/obschestvo/141929/>

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