



May 28, 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO: Andre Mendes, Interim Chief Executive Officer and Director, Broadcasting Board of Governors

FROM: Mark Mayfield, Acting Assistant Inspector General for Inspections, Office of Inspector General

SUBJECT: Limited-Scope Review, Broadcasting Board of Governors Operations in Astana, Kazakhstan, ISP-IB-15-22

Executive Summary

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) found no significant issues that would warrant a recommendation in its limited-scope inspection of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Kazakh news bureau. The primary issues that emerged in this review were journalists' concerns over challenging working conditions and personal safety.

Purpose, Scope and, Methodology

The purpose of the limited-scope review was to focus in the following areas: 1) raise work place and security issues to the level of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) senior management's attention; 2) determine how the inspected entity is implementing BBG's strategic goals through its programming and addressing OIG-identified management challenges; 3) identify use of social media platforms; and 4) review the coordination among the inspected entity, U.S. embassy, and Voice of America (when appropriate).

The review took place in Almaty between October 14 and 17, 2014, in connection with the inspection of Embassy Astana, which took place between October 2 and 28, 2014. The inspector conducted survey work in Washington, D.C., in September 2014. The inspector focused on interviews with the bureau chief and journalists in Astana, as well as with embassy public affairs employees. The inspector also conducted a telephone interview with the RFE/RL Kazakh news bureau chief in Prague, where the RFE/RL main office is located.

This review was conducted in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation, as issued in 2012 by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, and the Inspector's Handbook, as issued by OIG.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Programming

The RFE/RL Kazakh news bureau is known in Kazakhstan as "Radio Azattyq." The news bureau in Almaty has a staff of 36 contractors, most of whom work from an office in that city.

In accordance with BBG's strategic plan for 2012–2016, goal #5, *Rationalize Program Delivery*, the news bureau is aligning the delivery of program content with how consumers now access such programming. The news bureau delivers its programming through the Internet. This activity is an example of how the news bureau is supporting the strategic goal.

The Kazakh news bureau dropped its radio broadcasts in July 2012, because of weak signal reception in the country and low ratings, according to BBG briefing materials provided to the inspection team. BBG also noted that it planned to conduct audience research in FY 2015, contingent on funding, to analyze the media market and gauge receptivity to RFE/RL media products. At the time of the inspection, RFE/RL was considering television programming in Kazakhstan.

Challenging Working Conditions

The U.S. Department of State's 2013 annual human rights report described that the Government of Kazakhstan harasses and intimidates journalists. In 2014, Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom around the world, reported that the Government of Kazakhstan "severely restricts" freedom of the press. Also, Reporters Without Borders, a nonprofit organization focused on freedom of information, noted the Government of Kazakhstan's repressive regulations on Internet access. Kazakhstan's Web site was blocked on two occasions in 2014.

Security and Relationship with U.S. Embassy

Journalists from the news bureau, along with RFE/RL headquarters staff in Prague, and BBG personnel in Washington confirmed that the Government of Kazakhstan uses intimidation to stop their work. In May 2014, a Kazakh news bureau journalist was arrested while covering a meeting of activists in a suburb outside the capital and was detained for 4 days. He was charged with hooliganism but did not serve additional prison time. Although acts of intimidation have not prevented the news bureau from carrying out its reporting, they present an ongoing challenge to BBG's efforts as described in its 5-year strategic plan, goal #6, *Combat Internet Censorship and Jamming*.

Contact with the U.S. consulate general in Almaty is regular. Consulate general staff and journalists both reported that relations are cordial. Consulate General Almaty and Embassy Astana follow reports of intimidation and harassment of RFE/RL journalists.

Robert Torres, Broadcasting Board of Governors Coordinator in the Office of Inspections, is available to discuss with you this memorandum report if you have any questions. He can be reached at 703-284-~~(b) (6)~~ or email ~~(b) (6)~~@state.gov.