



June 12, 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 Dushanbe, Tajikistan, ISP-IB-15-24

Executive Summary

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

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 coordination among the inspected entity, U.S. embassy, and Voice of America (when appropriate).

The review took place in Dushanbe between October 29 and November 14, 2014, in connection with the inspection of Embassy Dushanbe. The inspector conducted survey work in Washington, DC, in September 2014. The inspector focused on interviews with the bureau chief and journalists in Dushanbe as well as with embassy public affairs employees. The inspector also conducted a telephone interview with the RFE/RL Tajik 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 and Social Media

The Tajik news bureau is based in Dushanbe and has a staff of 18 contractors. The Tajik news bureau is known in Tajikistan as "Ozodi," which means liberty in Tajik. 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 news bureau produces programs for its Web site in both Tajik and Russian.

The news bureau has a radio presence but no affiliate television programming. In BBG briefing materials provided to OIG prior the inspection, BBG 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. RFE/RL was considering a television program, following a model developed in the Baltics in response to events in Ukraine. At the time of the inspection, RFE/RL had not finalized this plan. Tajik Government restrictions on broadcasters will complicate that endeavor.

Challenging Working Conditions and Salary Issues

The U.S. Department of State's 2013 annual human rights report described "significant and repeated pressure by the government on media outlets," and said that "the government controlled most broadcasting transmission facilities." In 2013, it began erratically and unpredictably blocking the Tajik news bureau Web sites. In 2014, Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom around the world, reported that "journalists face harassment and intimidation, and the penal code criminalizes defamation." RFE/RL journalists noted that the Government of Tajikistan excludes them from events that are nominally open to the press and refuses to respond to routine requests for information about government activities.

The Government of Tajikistan blocks Internet access. In 2014, Reporters Without Borders, a nonprofit organization focused on freedom of information, reported that the Government of Tajikistan blocked YouTube and some Google access. These actions present a challenge to BBG's efforts to achieve its 5-year strategic plan goal #6, *Combating Internet Censorship and Jamming*.

Tajik news bureau employees work under challenging conditions. The journalists' main concern was the difficulty of obtaining information from and gaining access to government officials. In addition, BBG briefing materials noted that these journalists "frequently face interrogations and intimidation." In 2013, the Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs complicated the accreditation process for Tajik news bureau journalists.

Journalists also noted that they have the necessary resources to conduct their work but have low salaries because of inflation. They had expressed this concern to RFE/RL leadership in Prague. The inspector did not review whether RFE/RL has addressed this particular concern.

Security and Relationship with U.S. Embassy

RFE/RL journalists reported that they are not worried for their physical safety. Contact with Embassy Dushanbe is infrequent, but the embassy follows reports of intimidation and

harassment of journalists and has intervened with the Tajik Government to protest blockage of the Web site.

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.