**Trip Report**

Kazakhstan

May 28 – 31, June 3 – 5, 2014

TATYANA MARGOLIN & GINA LENTINE

**BACKGROUND**

Kazakhstan remains one of the most solidly authoritarian regimes in the Eurasia region, with its longtime president Nursultan Nazerbayev taking cues from Vladimir Putin’s leadership in Russia for many of his economic and political decisions. On May 28, 2014, Nazerbayev signed the Eurasian Economic Union agreement in concert with Vladimir Putin and President Alexander Lukashenka of Belarus, which effectively brings Kazakhstan even closer to Russia. Nevertheless, Nazerbayev is advanced in age, and it is likely that Kazakhstan will face a major political transition in the next five to seven years.

The Foundation’s strategy is to keep the closing political space as open as possible for civil society.

One concept that is new for 2014, called the Public Policy Initiative, is an effort on the Foundation’s part to mobilize young, democratically-oriented, talented policy analysts in the event that Kazakhstan undergoes a transition in the near future. The Public Policy Initiative, Youth Initiative, and Local Budget Initiative are strong programs that will likely lay good groundwork in the face of transition.

SFK is well-managed and Anton and his staff have open lines of communication and that he does not “micromanage” the programs or his staff. On the other hand, EP staff have previously observed that Anton plays it safe programmatically when he could stand to take more risks. We found the new initiatives to be especially innovative, but this sentiment rang true for some of the programs. The Media Program in particular felt like it could do more in terms of innovation and exploring new ground, particularly in comparison to its vibrant counterpart in Tajikistan, which is arguably a far more difficult environment for journalists.

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**Astana – May 29 – 31, 2014**

**Meeting with** **Anara Ibrayeva, Director of Astana Branch of Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law and NGO “*Kadyr Kasiyet*” [Dignity].**

Key takeaway points:

* KIBHR was Yevgeniy Zhovtis’ organization, which he founded 16 years ago (he is now Director of the Board). The organization focuses primarily on legal aid to families and those under fire; monitoring, with a particular focus on torture and ill-treatment of drug users, prisoners of conscience. They carry out trainings for lawyers on how to use existing legal mechanisms to take cases of human rights abuses (specifically torture) before the procuracy and courts. Anara’s specialty is torture and anti-torture law, so she does a lot of prison-monitoring projects and brings the results of her work to the attention of the ombudsman. She mentioned that her branch cooperates with several of the other branches of the Bureau to conduct prison monitoring and legal aid activities. The Foundation has very few partners in Astana in part because there are not as many active NGOs in Astana as compared with Almaty. This organization is part of SF-Kazakhstan’s fealty to the field of human rights monitoring and documentation, particularly anti-torture cases. Shared priority areas for SF-K and the Bureau include access to justice; increasing independence of legal defenders in Kazakhstan; identifying and attracting a new generation of young Kazakhs as leaders in the human rights movement.
* Human rights issues, judicial challenges, and freedom of information are intertwined in Kazakhstan. Journalists cannot communicate with parliamentarians and other government officials because they lack the legal expertise to do so. A lot of lawyers do not have the professional expertise necessary for litigation. There are also some very clever instruments in place to prevent freedom of speech and sharing of information, including difficult registration policies, harassment, blocking sites, and bribery mechanisms. Another issue is that in some regions of Kazakhstan, very few people approach lawyers for help, so they continue to face ill treatment instead of seeking legal action.
* There is desire to work with LGBT groups, but the issue is that LGBT groups are very much in the closet and the environment is very dangerous for them, much more so than in Moldova, Georgia, or even Ukraine.
* Potential shared priority areas for SF-KZ and the Bureau: access to justice; increasing independence of legal defenders in Kazakhstan; identifying and attracting a new generation of young Kazakhs as leaders in the human rights movement. This ties in with another key aspect of SF-KZ and EP’s strategy, which is supporting local movements addressing concrete, community-based issues rather than broad ideas or values (strategy doc mentions the movement “Let’s Leave Houses to People”).

**Meeting with** **Zauresh Battalova,** **former senator (1999 – 2005), co-founder of the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DVK) Party, and head of the Public Foundation for Parliamentary Development in Kazakhstan**.

Key takeaways:

* Her party, DVK, was shut down by the government in 2005. She has since created the Public Foundation for Parliamentary Development in Kazakhstan, an NGO based in Astana. The NGO was founded in 2007, and draws extensively from Zauresh’s experiences in parliament.
* Battalova’s organization conducts projects on parliamentary decision-making and holds workshops on parliamentarism and democracy. She tries to bring these issues into a tangible framework by focusing on local issues, including children’s rights, repatriation of migrants, and other local social and economic challenges. She sees social issues as a “foothold into political issues.” Zauresh expressed certainty that even though parliamentarism is not something practiced in the mainstream in Kazakhstan, it will be in the future. The groundwork needs to be laid ahead of the 2015 presidential elections (which she feels could be the beginning of a massive transition in Kazakhstan).
* She recently had a conversation with Anton about a potential project dealing with registration laws and helping NGOs to navigate the repressive nature of the NGO legislation in Kazakhstan.
* The Foundation tends to try to maintain neutrality given the political environment. Battalova’s organization receives funding from a few other international donors, including Counterpart International/USAID, the UN, several Polish donor organizations, and the U.S. Embassy. She worked extensively with NDI with their parliamentary training programs and roundtables until NDI closed down their KZ office a few months ago. Mentioned that she also works with partners in who focus on migration issues/repatriation in Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan.
* Led a collaborative exchange between Polish and Kazakh parliamentarians to share “lessons learned” and best practices. Sees the Polish model as the best fit to what Kazakhstan’s political future can hold. There is a lot of back-and-forth between Zauresh’s org and Polish groups in general (PL is a sizeable donor and partner in Central Asia).

**Meeting with** **Diana Okremova and Gulmira Birzhanova of the NGO “Legal Media Center.”**

Key takeaways:

* Like *Kadyr Kasiyet*, Legal Media Center is a longtime partner of the Foundation in Kazakhstan. They are one of the organization’s strongest partners in Astana, if not in Kazakhstan in general. They are part of the Foundation’s fealty to the field of public interest media. They also work closely with another longtime SF-K partner, *Adil Soz*. LMC works not only in Astana and Almaty, but particularly in Kazakhstan’s regions, where a lot of work is needed. Okremova and Birzhanova have significant expertise in court litigation and leading trainings on professional and ethical reporting, as well as in the area of raising journalists’ awareness about legal limitations to press freedom (including “know your rights”-type trainings for journalists).
* LMC also carries out monitoring of state finances and budgets, i.e. where the money goes and how that affects the media and objective coverage. The major state-sponsored media platforms take money from the Kazakh government and that affects the objectivity of their reporting. LMC’s goal is to bring international media standards into the mainstream, particularly for those who work as journalists in Kazakhstan’s regions. They also mentioned that they work with international networks of journalists throughout the Eurasia region, particularly Ukraine, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.
* This group will be involved in SF-KZ’s priority of improving the quality of local news coverage and protecting journalists’ rights. LMC also works with students, and young people who are aspiring journalists, which overlaps not only with SF-KZ’s media program, but also its Youth Initiative.
* Other donors and partners include: OSF – London Media Program, Internews Kazakhstan, UN branches (including UNICEF and UNESCO), and European donors. Hoping to work with IREX and NED.

**Visit to the** **ALZHIR Museum** in Aqmola with Foundation staff (Bota Ayazbayeva, Ainel Kainazarova, Anton Artemyev, and one of our Board Members, Assiya Akisheva). In preparation for our visit in the evening to Art Exhibition “Zhoktau,” which was curated and organized by one of the Foundation’s partners, the SF-KZ Foundation staff and I went to the ALZHIR Museum. ALZHIR was a forced labor camp (part of the GULAG system) that was meant for the wives and children of those deemed “enemies of the people” by Stalin’s secret police, the NKVD.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nazarbayev has spearheaded a national-level examination of Kazakhstan’s experience during the Great Purges. While it would seem that this is part of Nazarbayev’s effort to maintain his popularity, great strides have been made in terms of shedding light on the persecution and purges of Kazakh intelligentsia and others under Stalin.

**Meeting with Kamen Velichkov, Minister Plenipotentiary and Head of Political, Press, and the Information Section of the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Kazakhstan**. I accompanied our Executive Director, Anton Artemeyev, to this meeting. The Delegation of the European Union is an entity with which the Foundation frequently meets when they come to Astana.

* Much of the meeting also focused on the repressive NGO legislation, and how this will make the operating environment in Kazakhstan even more difficult. Registration will be made very complicated for NGOs that do not accept government funding, and there will be high fees as well as judicial pitfalls for such organizations. The EU Delegation has set up a “civil society roadmap” for Kazakhstan in light of this situation. The roadmap has guidelines on various items, including how to fundraise in a closing political space. The main priorities for the EU Delegation this year will be helping NGOs to register, and translating Russian-language guidelines and codices into Kazakh so they are accessible to more people.

**Art Exhibition “*Zhoktau*” at the Palace of Independence** with Anton Artemyev, Ainel Kainazarova, Bota Ayazbayeva, Diana Okremova, Gulnara Birzhanova, and Assiya Akisheva. The exhibition was curated by the Global Art Fund, a partner of SF-KZ. I met Assel Mustafina, the Art Manager, at the exhibition. There were about 65 or 70 people in attendance.

The exhibition was comprised of about ten pieces, some of which were quite moving and evocative of the Kazakh experience during the purges. “*Zhoktau*” means “wailing” in Kazakh, and it is a type of mourning ritual carried out at funerals. In this context, “*Zhoktau*” symbolizes the wailing of those who were affected by the purges, and a nation that mourns for those who were victims of political repression during the 1930s.

**Almaty – June 4, 2014**

**During the all-staff meeting, the staff had the opportunity to ask us any questions and we have promised to get back to them on the following:**

1. What is going on with the Azerbaijan Foundation? It is important for them to know because they hear rumors of it being shut down due to corruption, etc. We should ask Michael to follow up with Anton, who can then share with his staff. Since then, Sabine has shared her trip report with Anton and he was going to update his staff on the status of our work in AZ.

2. They want to receive notices of grants going to KZ – Gina will look into how to add Anton to these notices sent.

3. They would like the opportunity to meet with their counterparts in the region – explore opportunities for regional trainings and discussions on shared frameworks. This is a larger question for EP – is this something we want to/have capacity to facilitate? It is something that they could definitely participate in, especially within the realm of our EU advocacy/engagement, media, transparency, and accountability fields.

4. How are shared frameworks relevant to them?

5. They would like to receive a communications training - follow-up with Rachel Hart and Laura Silber on this.

6. Get in touch with Anton and Aida about Gina’s meeting with IREX on the BOTA Foundation, lessons learned, and what is happening to it (they specifically asked while we were visiting in KZ). A coalition of 20 NGOs emerged after the end of the BOTA project; find out whether the Foundation works with those NGOs and connect Ainur, Saule, and Aizhan (who work on social inclusion, esp. disability rights) to the BOTA staff and IREX. Share results as well with Anna Yan – she works on grand corruption/asset repatriation and said she would be interested to hear more.

**Meeting with Bota Ayazbayeva, Public Policy initiative**

The Young Fellows Program is one of the key components of the Public Policy Initiative. It is supported in part by the Think Tank Fund in Budapest (Vlad Galushka) and ICPA. The main objective of the program is to lead trainings on policy perspectives and to teach promising young scholars how to write effective analytical papers. As part of this year’s program, there will be a training on how to use data visualization and infographics in order to put together an effective policy presentation (ICPA will lead this training). The application process was competitive, as the program received 49 applications, and the Foundation accepted 11 of them. Some of this year’s proposed topics for research include EU-Kazakhstan relations, religious freedom in Kazakhstan. The majority of the research papers produced are in Russian, but a few are in English or Kazakh. The Program Director, Bota Ayazbayeva, works with several different academic hubs in the UK, Europe, Turkey, and China to share best practices and ideas about improving the program.

* The other major component will be “Dialogue spaces” (on the platform of vlast.kz) – plan on launching an online talk show that presents different points of view on current issues – “Mirniy Dogovor” or “Ekvilibri” are potential names - by the end of June 2014. The show will feature 6 women and 5 men who will discuss salient and relevant topics. This will be loosely based on Gogol TV in Russia. Topics that they are considering exploring:
  + Mental Health
  + Education or health
  + Something very current (for example, Eurasia signing – how it went down, why wasn’t the public involved)
* They want to create a Kazakh language platform - something like Project Syndicate. This is only in the initial stages of discussion.

**Meeting with Ainur Shakenova, Aizhan Oshakbaeva, and Saule Kalikova, Social Inclusion Initiative**

* Palliative care remains a priority; they receive co-funding from Counterpart International for a palliative care program, and some funding from PHP, but there is high demand and not enough funding.
* Social inclusion is the new direction in the strategy. The mantra of the program is “live, study, and work together.” They receive some funding from HRI, particularly on aspects of their program relating to mental health.
  + Two priorities: de-institutionalization and inclusion
  + Working to incorporate system of special ed into the general education system. Believe that schools should reflect makeup of general society – currently very segregated.
  + There are currently 102 “spets-schools” aimed at children who have cerebral palsy, autism, and other mental and physical disabilities.
  + KZ has signed on to all international documents that mandate inclusion and by 2020 70% of schools will be inclusive – supposedly
  + They’re trying to be collaborative with the govt. – just took them on a study tour to Lithuania. None of this can happen without the government buy-in so this collaboration is necessary. They have also conducted comparative studies and research on how this process has been conducted in Armenia and Ukraine. They are already in close contact with their counterparts who work on social inclusion issues in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, although they mentioned that the programs in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are significantly larger than the one in Kazakhstan. They want to take study tours to Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia to concretely see how inclusive education is working (or not working) in those countries.
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**Meeting with Askar Kushkunbaev and Anna Yan, Local Budget Initiative**

* Local governance is getting a lot of attention – soon more autonomy will be given to the local govt. The Local Budget Initiative has put together working groups that address the issue of local taxes and is trying to figure out how to help the public access local funds.
* They have 5 pilots in regions where they’re closely tracking local budgets. They want to develop “non-technical versions” of the local budgets that are comprehensible to everyone, and plan to do this using infographics and data-mapping. They have successfully managed to make contacts inside state and local departments.
* Currently, their only partner is the International Budget Partnership in Washington, DC.
* Anna and Askar are interested and eager to cooperate more with the Foundations in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe (Ukraine and Moldova). One potential area for cooperation is anti-corruption, transparency, and accountability, as there is a lot of overlap and interest in such issues as grand corruption, open data and budgets, natural resources governance, and legal reform.
* Anna runs the transparency and accountability program, which is focused on national-level challenges in Kazakhstan. She used to work with CEP on electricity governance, as well as state-level budgets and corruption issues. In the past, CEP gave a large grant to RWI, which would then send funding to the Foundation for this initiative.
* The electricity program is concentrated in southern Kazakhstan, where there is the most need. They are currently expanding into the east and west of the country. Kristin told them that there won’t be enough money for their initiative to carry it out on the local level – will have to stick with the national level for the time being.
* Last year, Anna attended the PWYP-RWI Conference in Georgia (she sent us her trip report), and this year the conference will be in Kazakhstan. At the conference, civil society organizations that work on EITI issues shared their experiences and best practices.
* Anna has also led trainings in Astana in concert with the Foundation’s partners on budget monitoring and accountability.
* There is a new network that the Foundation has helped to create called the National Budget Network of Kazakhstan. They focus on issues of grand corruption.

**Meeting with Saule Mamayeva, Youth Initiative**

The program has three goals:

* + Engaging youth in issues that are important to civil society (social, economic, etc.), and translating social and economic justice issues into topics that youth care about.
  + The professionalization of youth, in particular training them to lead advocacy campaigns
  + Using new technology and art as tools for innovation and sharing messages of advocacy and social change.
* The Foundation works with youth through their partner organizations, and they focus in particular on rural youth who speak Kazakh. They rely heavily on their partners to help with this work. The Foundation works in 8 regions of Kazakhstan.
* There used to be a Youth Partnership in Tajikistan with which Saule worked, but it no longer exists. The Foundation also takes part in the Youth Action Fund, which focuses on migrants’ rights and migrant youth.
* Saule is looking for more expertise, especially speakers who can come to Kazakhstan and talk about youth issues. Saule mentioned that she’s particularly looking at the Georgian experience for inspiration. She also brought up the importance of mobilizing youth ahead of the possibility of a major political transition.

**Lunch meeting with** **Yevgeny Zhovtis, former Director of the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights, renowned activist, former Chairman of the Board of the Bota Foundation.** Anton Artemyev also took part in the luncheon. Zhovtis is a longtime partner and former Board Member of the Foundation, as well as a key civil society leader in Kazakhstan.

* Zhovtis discussed how economic liberalization has taken place in Kazakhstan far more quickly than political liberalization. Nevertheless, Nazarbayev maintains a monopoly on economic resources and, more importantly, the middle class (much in the same way that Putin does in Russia). Nazarbayev’s decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union is an example of this. Thus, while there is little political space and room for engagement, there is a perceived stability. Zhovtis called it a very “Soviet mentality,” and also mentioned the pervasive lack of political and social engagement among the younger generation.
* Zhovtis also mentioned that in Kazakhstan, the concept of “keeping the flame alive” is very important in the interim, particularly in light of the potential transition that may occur in Kazakhstan in the next few years. It is also important that civil society translate concepts of democracy and human rights into concrete, relatable terms so a new generation of activists can engage with issues, and not just ideas. Zhovtis said that the Arab Spring might not happen in Kazakhstan, but rather its own variant will take place.
* The middle class in Kazakhstan is very strong, which wasn’t the case in 1989. On the other hand, in 1989 there was a lot more engagement in “revolution,” particularly regarding issues of economic, social, and political rights. A “de-Sovietization” has been occurring since 1989, and it is particularly strong in the Baltics, Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, but not so much in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Central Asia. But taking away all of these rosy illusions, it’s clear why civil society has not been able to move forward and push their agenda. The younger generation is not as engaged in activism, and a lot of activists leave the country or fall silent if they are not physically liquidated first. There is also no political opposition, as they have been banned and/or liquidated.
* In Kazakhstan in particular, there has been a massive degradation of the intelligentsia, which contributes to the complacency of the middle class and thus the propagation of the system.
* Zhovtis mentioned that the possibilities for transition are the following: in one case, there might be a power vertical situation where the successor will be pre-selected. In the other case, there will be a vacuum into which other actors can step in. This will be an “historic moment” for Kazakhstan, and kind of parallel to what Russia experienced in the 1990s.
* According to Zhovtis, Nazarbayev is not a Karimov or a Lukashenko. He reacts strongly to any threats against him, but largely he craves stability over absolute power. That’s why the type of system in Kazakhstan is more of a “soft authoritarianism.” This is better than the environment in Russia. KIBHR, Zhovtis’ organization, has faced harassment but has never been co-opted by the government. Most of the leading Russian NGOs have been shut down, silenced, or co-opted.
* There is a lot of pessimism surrounding the situation in Russia, especially on the part of the West. Also, there is a cumulative effect of repression and communism (lack of property rights, deep culture of bribery and entrenched corruption, etc.) on the population that is taking a lot of time to move away from. This is also true for Kazakhstan, but Zhovtis is hopeful that change will take place in Kazakhstan.

**Almaty – June 5, 2014**

**Meeting with coalition of human rights activists who work closely with the Foundation. Coalition members included** **Roza Akylbekova, Executive Director of the Kazakhstan International Bureau of Human Rights; Freedom House; Friedrich Ebert Foundation; and Article 19.** Anton Artemyev and Aida Aidarkulova, Director of Programs, moderated the meeting.

Key takeaways:

* Participants discussed the Dialogue Platform on the Human Dimension, which was created by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In response to Anton’s question about the effectiveness of the Platform, Roza said that 150 recommendations have been made by the DP members but only 60 of them were accepted “for consideration.” At the same time, DP convened a few working groups from among its members, and one of them is specifically on the implementation of recommendations. Yevgeniy Zhovtis and Aigul Solovyova (who is an MP), have joined that working group. Other working groups are on legislation, human rights, and the supremacy of law. The next DP meeting is scheduled to take place on July 27th, and there will be another one in September – likely addressing the National Action Plan.
* At the meeting, Roza discussed the importance of having 2-3 NGOs participate in the Kazakh government’s upcoming presentation before the UN Council on Human Rights. A delegation of NGOs from Kazakhstan will present an overview of the present situation in Kazakhstan at a conference in Geneva. Members of the delegation include the following (the organizations financing their trip are in parenthesis):
  + Yevgeniy Zhovtis (KIBHR) – freedom of association, freedom of religion, the events in Zhanaozen
  + Zhemis Turmagambetova (Freedom House) – the right to life
  + Tamara Kaleeva (Article 19) – freedom of speech and expression
  + Tatyana Chernobil (Friedrich Ebert Foundation) – anti-torture initiatives
  + Zauresh Battalova (SF-KZ) – social inclusion and rights
  + Zulfiya Baysakova (Freedom House) – women’s rights
  + Elvira Batlina (SF-KZ) – children’s rights
  + Kirill Osin (Friedrich Ebert Foundation) – environmental rights
  + SF-KZ will also send two young human rights defenders to discuss youth issues: Gulmira Birzhanova of the Legal Media Center and Nikolay Tarar from KIBHR.

**Meeting with Aizhan Oshakbayeva, Program Coordinator for Human Rights**

* One of the main things the program is addressing is developing the potential of grassroots movements through advocacy trainings, workshops, and discussion groups. There are a lot of small quasi-organizations who are mobilized around various issues, i.e. environmental issues, lack of access to housing, refusal of paid maternity leave, but these activists often don’t know how to run an organization, share information about their respective issue, defend their rights, or engage with local authorities.
* The Foundation has a program with HRI (HRI co-funds it) on defending human rights. They led three trainings on elements of human rights (i.e., what are human rights? What are international norms and standards? How do you defend your rights before the law? etc.). They also co-sponsor the advocacy trainings. Every fall, the Foundation holds a “Human Rights School” for youth (ages 18 – 35).
* The Foundation offers training in English, and emphasizes that knowing English is important in the field of human rights, particularly when it comes to building contacts and networks internationally. Aizhan mentioned that they emphasize this out in KZ regions in particular
* In the past, Aizhan mentioned that the Foundation has brought its partners who work on human rights issues together with the Tajik Foundation’s partners who work on similar issues.

**Meeting with** **Dariya Tsyrenzhapova, Program Coordinator for Media and Freedom of Information**

* One major media challenge in Kazakhstan is countering the narrative propagated by the state. The state has a ton of money for media and simply orders the media to print and broadcast stories that they want. According to Dariya, the Nazarbayev government sponsors 41 million tenge worth of media propaganda (that’s $264 million). Virtually all editorials demonstrate a favorable view of Nazarbayev and the 2050 modernization project. International news platforms have had a difficult time registering in Kazakhstan (BBC was cited as one example). The media program works on internal communications, as well as developing other independent channels/alternative platforms for information. AOKAZ is the state media monopoly. The Foundation’s Media Program works on internal communications, as well as developing other independent channels and alternative platforms for information.
* One of their primary partners is Adil Soz, who conducts cross-border media-monitoring programs. Internews KZ is another partner, and they are still able to work within the country.
* Another major issue is that websites are commonly blocked. The media program addresses this issue, as well as strategic litigation relevant to defending journalists.
* The Kazakhstan media program’s work this year will focus on the reform of media laws. They hope to form a working group around the issue in cooperation with the OSF Media Program based in London. Currently, the program has a partner who leads a working group of lawyers who work specifically on media laws in Kazakhstan.
  + Diana Okremova of the NGO “Legal Media Center” (met in Astana)
  + Okremova is one of the leaders of the Foundation’s I-Media trainings as well.
  + Support правовой медиа центр - they monitor govt tenders
* Law on TV and radio: the government will be covering costs of digital switchover. Also permitted creation of private multiplexes. There are lots of discussions happening concerning the digital switchover, but it has been delayed. The government originally wanted to force international TV stations to register offices here but didn't do it. They organized working groups for the past four years and it did yield some results (see reference above). Did a presentation of their study on the digital switchover and 120 people attended the presentation. The drawback: the discussion wasn't very wide, more limited to specialists.
* The Foundation requested info from lots of agencies and ministries on their media budgets - collected raw data and it is now searchable online. Now they want to try to fix the tender system - currently the government put out tenders to “improve positivity of population toward government reforms (SF-KZ works with LMC on this effort).”
* Mapping of digital media: how structural elements and aspects (limits of frequencies for example) can influence survivability of independent media
* Give infrastructure grants: there are regional media platforms that need to be trained and given an infrastructural grant (build a grant, etc.), so helping them create an online presence
* She thinks that small media grants can make a huge difference - and most importantly people from the regions and not just Almaty taking place. They are placing an emphasis on the regions. People have no faith in the state and political system.

**Next steps:**

**International/EU Advocacy:**

* There could be opportunity for cooperation with the Delegation of the EU within EP’s advocacy pillar (particularly any projects that address EU engagement and advocacy). The NGO legislation will continue to make the operating environment in Kazakhstan difficult, and OSF is well-positioned to use its advocacy arm to call attention to this issue on the international level.
* Follow up with Anton about the Foundation’s potential EU advocacy and engagement activities, and ask whether the Delegation of the EU will fit into any of those initiatives. Get in touch with Viorel to include joint EP and Foundation engagement with this organization into the workplan for 2015.

**Human Rights - Cores:**

* The Foundation continues to carry out strong work in partnership with *Kadyr Kasiyet*. The next step would be to follow up with the members of the grant making team on EP who work on human rights and anti-torture to make sure that they are aware of Anara Ibrayeva’s work and that any projects tied in with the concept of “Human Rights: Core Support” they propose do not overlap with the work that the Foundation is already supporting. Further, since both *Kadyr Kasiyet* and the Foundation are working with small grassroots initiatives such as “*Let’s Leave the Houses to People*” and “*For Fair Maternity Leave*,” we need to ensure that EP’s projects do not duplicate the good work the Foundation and its partners are already doing. This is a conversation to have with Ana.
* Aizhan mentioned that the Human Rights Program at the Foundation is doing a lot to build the capacity of activists who work on local or grassroots human rights issues. Put Aizhan in touch with Ana to ensure that EP is complementing the work that the Foundation is already carrying out, since the very same topic is presented as part of EP’s “Human Rights: Cores” concept.

**Global Dialogues:**

* While Zauresh Battalova’s organization is not a partner or a grantee of the Foundation, they recommended that she could be a good contact for any Eurasia Program projects related to constituency-building, political processes, or fostering a new generation of political analysts, particularly for the Global Dialogues project. Additionally, maybe she could be a helpful liaison to fostering greater interaction and collaboration with government officials? She could factor into the constituency-building concept in that regard, too.
* There is a lot of overlap between Bota’s program and “Global Dialogues.” Bota should potentially be involved in the selection process, and at the very least she can give EP good advice on promising young fellows. Need to follow up with Michael and Ana specifically on how to best channel Bota’s knowledge into the Global Dialogues program.
* Like Bota, Saule should be consulted and looped in with the Global Dialogues project. She would be well-suited to recommend potential budding policy analysts for GD.

**Media/Freedom of Information:**

* EP should be in touch with the Foundation about the Legal Media Center in Astana, as it would make a lot of sense to integrate them into some of our cross-regional initiatives or conferences that EP sponsors, particularly those associated with our media or transparency concepts.
* On the grant making side, might be worth discussing this group with Karina and Vicki. LMC mentioned that Ana stopped by their office in May, but there wasn’t much discussion of how LMC might work with EP, or even what the new EP is about. I gave them more of a briefing on it, so now they better understand the structure.
* LMC mentioned that they had submitted proposals to NED and IREX but had not heard back. I will follow up on that. The Foundation will also meet with NED staff during their trip to the region in July 2014.
* We should put Saule in touch with the EP media folks, as she (in addition to Dariya) could also recommend some good participants for some of the workshops and the internship program that they have planned for 2015.
* Follow up with Dariya on any potential points for collaboration between EP and the Foundation, particularly in the following thematic areas: the digital switch, increasing pluralism and alternative voices in Kazakh and Russian-language media (specifically a EurasiaNet tasks – Katya and Justin), and reform of media laws.
* If we ended up funding a convening/discussion for the Foundations Program Coordinators/Directors on the digital switch, Dariya would be a good person to bring into it.
* Follow up with Dariya on the status of NED co-funding for which the Foundation applied (for the I-Media trainings). Karina is looking into this.

**Social Inclusion (Health, Disability Rights, Human Rights – Fields)**

* Discuss this work with Kate Lapham and ask what role she thinks EP may be able to play in it.
* Ana met with them on her last visit and discussed inclusion of social and economic rights into the idea of rights – follow up with her on her takeaways from that meeting, but it really resonated with the Foundation.
* Ask Ainur, Saule, and Aizhan whether they work with Kairat’s disability rights NGO (it’s the biggest one in KZ), get a sense of whether they are working with members of the former BOTA coalition. There could be a role for the Foundation there, but it is likely they are already partnered with a lot of those NGOs.
* The Social Inclusion Initiative is trying to collaborate more with the government on inclusion issues. They are already in close contact with their counterparts who work on social inclusion issues in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, although they mentioned that the programs in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are significantly larger than the one in Kazakhstan. They want to take study tours to Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia to concretely see how inclusive education is working (or not working) in those countries. Maybe this could be a place for EP to bridge the gap.
* Follow up with Aizhan to find out more on what she is doing with LGBT rights issues in Kazakhstan, discuss with grant making team in EP who works on this topic. Several LGBT groups from Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan have met with OSF and HRW in the past few weeks, maybe there is a way to network similar groups in Kazakhstan with their counterparts in those countries.
* Find out if HRI is working with Kazakhstan’s NPM and if they have addressed lack of doctors in NPM.

**Transparency and Accountability**

* Zhovtis will be at the meeting in Oxford that Alisher is attending on June 28, may be useful for Alisher to meet with him (if he doesn’t know him already). Zhovtis should also be connected to EP’s Regional Academy of Good Governance as a speaker/expert in light of his twofold knowledge of the history of civil society in KZ as well as his role in anti-corruption and human rights efforts (specifically the BOTA Foundation).
* Intro between Vinay and Askar for the study tour to India on social monitoring/audits.
* Explore whether Fiscal Governance Initiative can get involved/provide lessons/funding; put them in touch with Julie McCarthy
* Make an intro for Askar and Alisher so Askar and Anna can be included in the discussions on our transparency and accountability field, particularly on the topics of grand corruption/assets recovery, open data, and budget transparency. They will be able to recommend local actors who can take part in the “Regional Academy of Good Governance.”
* Make intro with Elizabeth Eagen to follow up on any interest in Information Program, especially in area of sharing/opening of state data for journalists’ use, as well as budget transparency for extractive industries and “alternative data collection” (i.e., how journalists can collect information that is not simply produced by the state. This are of interest also applies to the Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan Foundations).

**Other:**

* Would be good to update Saule on the status of the Youth Exchange – she has read the latest posting on KARL, but does not have clarity about the status of OSF’s engagement with youth.
* The art exhibition “*Zhoktau*” is traveling throughout Kazakhstan. It will next be in Semey, starting in October. It might be worth a follow-up visit to Semey to see the exhibition and how it is received.

**Kazakhstan Itineraries:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **May, 29, Thursday**, **Astana** | | |
| 10.00 a.m. | Mailina str, 10, office, 10 | Meeting with Anara Ibrayeva (Head of KIBHR’s branch in Astana, mobile phone + 7 771 999 7170) confirmed |
| 12.00 p.m. | Auezova str, 24/1, office 2 (corner of Seifullin str, in front of the restaurant “Egorkino”) | Meeting with Zauresh Battalova (President of the PF “ Development of parliamentarism in Kazakhstan ”, mobile phone: +7 701 404 63 14)- confirmed |
| 2.30 p.m. | Otyrar, 15, office, 604  (near the Mall-centre “Zhannur”) | Meeting with Diana Okremova, mobile phone:+7 777 245 7662, Gulmira Birzhanova- +7 701 501 29 44 (“Legal Media center”) confirmed |

**VISIT AGENDA**

**June 3, 2014**

**15:15** Arrival in Almaty, KC 132 from Dushanbe.

**18:00** Dinner with Anton Artemyev (Executive Director) and Aida Aidarkulova (Director of Programs), Biscuit Café

**June 4, 2013**

**09:00-10:00** All team meeting, George Hall, SFK office

**10:00-11:00** Meeting with Bota Ayazbayeva (Public Policy Initiative)

**11:00-12:30** Meeting with Aizhan Oshakbayeva (Human Rights Program), and Ainur Shakenova (Social Inclusion Initiative).

**12:30-13:30** Break

**13:30-15:00** Lunch with Yevgeniy Zhovtis, the renowned human rights

activist, Del Papa Restaurant, Tole Bi Street

***Mr. Yevgeniy Zhovtis*** *is Founder and Chair of the Board of the Kazakhstan Bureau on Human Rights (until 2012, its Executive Director). In 1999-2002, Mr. Zhovtis was Chair of the SFK Board. A recognized leader of the human rights movement in Kazakhstan, he was a political prisoner in 2009-2012. Zhovtis is also a long-serving member of the OSI CEP Advisory Board.*

**15:00-16:00** Meeting with Askar Kushkunbayev (Local Budget Initiative) and Anna Yan (Transparency and Accountability Program)

**16:00-17:00** Meeting with Saule Mamayeva (Youth Program)

**18:30-20:00** Dinner with SFK board members (Karlygash Yezhenova, Assiya Akisheva, Eduard Mukhamedzhanov, Sergey Utkin, Zhan Kunserkin), Zheti Qazyna Restaurant.

**June 5, 2014**

**10:00-12:00** Participation in the partners coordination meeting on the Universal Periodic Review, SFK Office

**Participants:**

*Kazakh International Bureau on Human Rights*

*Freedom House Country Office Director*

*Friedrich Ebert Foundation*

*Article 19*

**12:00-13:00** Meeting with Bakhyt Tumenova, President of the Aman Saulyk Foundation

***Dr. Bakhyt Tumenova*** *is Founder President of the Aman Saulyk Foundation, which is one of the key foundation’s partners in the field of social and economic rights. A physician by education, Dr. Tumenova has 30 years of practical experience in the public health sector. In 1998-2001 she was Deputy Head of Oblast Administration in Pavlodar Oblast. She was also among the leaders of opposition movements “The Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan” (2001-2003) and “Alga!”(2003-2007).*

**13:30-15:00** Lunch Meeting with Dariya Tsyrenzhapova (Media Program).