

A year after the pandemic through the eyes of media monitors in Central Asia



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Introduction

In 2021, all the five Central Asian republics celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of their independence. After the restrictions related to COVID-19 were lifted, economic growth in Central Asia resumed and the growth of private remittances in 2021 spurred consumption and growth rates in all the countries of the region.

The under-performance of the gold mining sector, however, slowed down the recovery in the Kyrgyz Republic.¹ The pandemic-related restrictions imposed by China in 2020 hurt frontier trade in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, affecting small businesses. Vaccination rates in the region remain relatively low, making it vulnerable to new waves of infection.

A more favourable external environment, including a sharp rise in commodity prices, and specifically energy sources, contributed to an increase in export volumes and export earnings. At the same time, the rise of energy prices in 2021 caused an escalation of popular discontent and aggression against the governments.

On the political and geopolitical side, the change of power in Afghanistan and the entry of the unrecognised and banned Taliban organisation to the leadership of the country posed a difficult geo-

political dilemma for the governments of the Central Asian countries. In addition, in 2021 the three countries of Central Asia held elections at various levels.²

At the beginning of the year, **Kazakhstan** held parliamentary elections, followed by the first direct elections for rural *akims*, who were previously elected by *maslikhat* deputies.³ In November, an expanded meeting of the political council of the Nur Otan party took place. At the meeting, the chairman of the party, Nursultan Nazarbayev, transferred his presidential powers to Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

In the autumn of 2021, the epidemiological situation improved in the country, events involving a large number of people were allowed, but journalists were still prevented from attending offline meetings of the Parliament and the Government. Restrictions on access to buildings of governmental agencies, which were introduced for journalists in March 2020 due to the pandemic were lifted a year and a half later.

¹ https://24.kg/ekonomika/220982_itogi_goda_inflyatsiya_okazalas_vtri_raza_vyishe_rosta_ekonomiki/

² <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/aziya-glavnyesobytiya-2021-goda/31636302.html>

³ In Kazakhstan, an *akim* is the head of an *akimat*, a municipal, district, or provincial government (*akimat*), and serves as the Presidential representative. *Äkims* of provinces and cities are appointed to the post by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister. A *Mäslihat* (Kazakh: Мәслихат) is a local representative body (parliament) in Kazakhstan that is elected by a population of a region, district and city.

Kazakhstan's position on the situation in Afghanistan is very restrained. Kazakhstan limited itself to only certain statements and, not being a direct neighbour of Afghanistan, may not perceive interests in Afghanistan as a priority. On the other hand, Kazakhstan has always put forward initiatives in the field of regional security, having economic interests in Afghanistan and, more broadly, in the South Asia region. In general, the country stands for close regional cooperation. In addition, Kazakhstan placed emphasis on humanitarian issues. Among the Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan has been for a long time one of the states that offered humanitarian support via various assistance programmes to Afghanistan.

In 2021, **Kyrgyzstan** held presidential elections, while local self-government elections and parliamentary elections took place twice. In the spring of 2021, a referendum was held in Kyrgyzstan on the adoption of a new Constitution. According to the revised content of the Constitution, Kyrgyzstan has become a presidential republic, where the head of state receives more powers, including the possibility to control the cabinet of ministers.

The structure and functions of the *Jogorku Kenesh*, the country's parliament, have also changed. Members of the parliament are now elected according to a mixed system: some are elected in single-member constituencies, and the rest along political party lines. In addition, the new Constitution does not allow parliamentarians to unite in coalitions and form a government. In 2021, the country's legislation underwent a very thor-

ough change as a new Tax Code and a new Criminal Code were adopted.

The April conflict on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border was a tragedy for both countries: there were fatalities and wounded citizens on both sides. Many residents of the border area were forced to leave their homes, and local infrastructure was seriously damaged. In resolving the conflict, experts count on people's diplomacy, which will allow reconciling the two countries.

For Kyrgyzstan, the situation in Afghanistan is of great importance because it is one of the closest neighbours of the republic. Kyrgyz authorities were among the first in Central Asian region to meet with representatives of the government appointed by Taliban forces. In September 2021, with the President's approval, the Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of the Kyrgyz Republic, Taalatbek Masadykov met with the Taliban-appointed Afghan Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi.

Tajikistan continued to experience the effects of the pandemic which has significantly reduced migration flows and, as a result, the volume of remittances being sent back by workers abroad. Nevertheless, Tajikistan, unlike its neighbouring countries, has quickly returned to the Russian labour market, therefore the drop in the GDP of the country came at the middle of 2021, and the economic indicators approached the pre-pandemic level towards the end of the year. This can be explained by several reasons. The main one is the short duration of the lockdown. Tajikistan was one

of the last countries in Central Asia to close its borders as COVID-19 was recognized only in June by the authorities.⁴ In addition, Tajikistan was one of the first to lift restrictions within the country and to re-open its borders.

The coming to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2021 became one of the key events for Tajikistan. The stance of Dushanbe on Afghanistan differs from the one of its neighbours in Central Asia and even Russia and China. Tajik President Emomali Rahmon recently expressed his opposition to recognising the Taliban as a legitimate force in Afghanistan.⁵ In order to urgently solve problems in the field of politics and security, Tajikistan considers it necessary to create, as soon as possible, an inclusive government of Afghanistan involving representatives of all ethnic groups, primarily Tajiks, who make up to 46% of the population of Afghanistan.⁶

In **Uzbekistan**, the struggle for the introduction of Shariah rules in schools, colleges and universities began with vivid debates in the society over wearing of hijabs for girls. As a result, a dubious compromise was found: it was allowed to wear a headscarf as a symbol of the national dress of Turkic women.

The scandal around blogger Miraziz Bazarov, who raised questions about the rights of LGBT

people in his channel, became another point of public tension and conflict. 2021 was also marked by the intensification of the campaign against the journalist Agnieszka Pikulicka, who tried to convey objective information to citizens.⁷

In the spiritual realm, pro-conservative religious views are becoming stronger, and an idealised view of the everyday life of Uzbeks has revived. This can be observed around the situation with the ban on a number of Turkish TV series, the scandal around the TV series Sabriya directed by a woman. It is particularly disturbing that the daughter of President Mirziyoyev, Saida, who holds the post of the Deputy Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Public Fund for Support and Development of National Mass Media and is a member of the Republican Commission for Ensuring Gender Equality, joined the persecution of the director and the channel.⁸

Against this background, the radicalisation of religious views, the desire to point women to “their place”, to dictate them the style of dress and mandatory behaviour is intensifying in society. Against the background of violations of individual rights, especially property rights, a number of religious figures and activists present religion as a panacea for all problems of society. The secular authorities and the President were actively

⁴ <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/31318855.html>

⁵ <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/tajikistan-the-talibans-toughest-critic/31459346.html>

⁶ <https://www.caa-network.org/archives/22130>

⁷ <https://cpj.org/2021/11/polish-journalist-agnieszka-pikulicka-denied-entry-to-uzbekistan/>

⁸ <https://www.uzmetronom.com/2022/01/20/po-shhuchemu-veleniju-po-moemu-hoteniju.html>

criticised, including calls to make Uzbekistan a country that should live according to Shariah.⁹

The language issue, including the initiative to introduce a new alphabet, reminiscent of the Turkish version of Roman letters, has been also in the public limelight. However, some technical difficulties in implementation and criticism from the public forced the government to back off and postpone the adoption of the draft law.

The adoption of amendments that give citizens and legal entities the right to contact government agencies and public institutions in other languages became another important topic for public discussion. However, when submitting an application in another language, a translation into the state language must still be attached.

Attitudes towards Russia are also ambiguous: many citizens are

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/mirziyoev/permalink/1522618818097150/>

frightened by international sanctions against Russia, the annexation of Crimea, and attempts to draw Uzbekistan into the EAEU and the CSTO. At the same time, Russia is perceived as a country that provides employment for a considerable number of the citizens of Uzbekistan. The number of citizens moving to Russia exceeds the number of people coming to Uzbekistan for permanent residence.

The current situation in Uzbekistan can be characterized as stable but close to a breaking point, because the analysis of the processes given above reveals the growth of problems in the attitudes of citizens towards the current government, shortcomings in the fight against religious radicalism, and the planting of archaic views in the ideological sphere.

The views expressed in the report do not represent the official views of European Union or the partner organisations. The opinions expressed and arguments employed are those of the authors of the report.

Methodology

In our monitoring, we use the methodology of the informational-analytical center “SOVA”, which has been specialising in monitoring and analysis in the field of nationalism, racism, hate crimes, hate speech, relations between religious organisations for more than 20 years and conducts regular research to identify hate speech in media and on-line.¹⁰

This media monitoring is based on both quantitative and qualitative methods. Manual monitoring was used both to collect and document information, as all messages containing hate speech, fake information and disinformation were monitored and manually sorted by a team of media monitors from the four countries of the BRYCA project.¹¹ The choice of manual screening was taken as machine monitoring cannot always capture the context and identify hate speech messages. At the very beginning of the project, the team of media monitors specified a list of keywords by which to identify hate speech messages, currently con-

sisting of **707 words**, in Russian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Tajik, as well as **96 websites, 88 groups and pages on social media platforms and 93 opinion leaders**.

In selecting media resources, the following factors were taken into account: the intensity of traffic, the toxicity of comments, the number of articles and posts in on-line publications and social media, the genre of materials: post, news, analytics, multimedia (text, photo, video or audio), photo report, interview, survey, comment/opinion (editorial or author’s), topic of the article/reportage, frequency of publications, coverage or publication of material with elements of hate speech. This selection procedure was also applied to publics.

In selecting opinion leaders, such parameters as the number of reposts of their messages, the number of comments under posts, the number of subscribers/friends, and the recognisability of the individual among the population were taken into account.

As opinion leaders have been publishing less and less frequently messages meeting our criteria, since the end of January 2022e decided to pay less attention to them and only include them in the following cases:

- if the Media Monitor/s found a link redirecting to the opinion leader in the media analysed;

¹⁰ <https://www.sova-center.ru/database/>

¹¹ BRYCA is a project funded by the European Union and implemented by ERIM (IREX Europe doing business as ERIM), Media Support Center Foundation (Kyrgyzstan), MediaNet International Centre for Journalism (Kazakhstan), Modern Journalism Development Center (Uzbekistan), and Public Organization “Gurdofarid” (Tajikistan). The project promotes critical thinking and aims to strengthen the resilience of youth to misinformation and hate speech online in Central Asia as part of the global objective to promote support to civil society in protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms worldwide.

- if there were bombastic statements from the opinion leader on the current situation.

bles, including a screenshot and link to the article, post, comment or image analysed.

Quantitative component covers media monitoring data, social networks (groups and public), opinion leaders as well as user comments on some websites of news agencies in discussing news. Our team recorded the amount of hate speech in the information space by gender, regional, territorial, ethnic, racial, religious and other social attributes. The received data were documented into special ta-

Qualitative component of the monitoring includes the analysis of messages, qualification of sentiment (mild, moderate, harsh) and the types of the identified hate speech on the basis of certain keywords and expressions which frequently occur in the information space. In classifying the sentiment of hate speech, the media monitors took as a basis the variant proposed by Aleksandr Verkhovsky.



“Harsh” Hate speech

1. Direct and immediate calls for violence.
2. Calls for violence using general slogans.
3. Direct and immediate calls for discrimination.
4. Calls for discrimination in the form of general slogans.
5. Veiled calls for violence and discrimination (for example, promotion of positive contemporary or historical experience of violence or discrimination).



“Moderate” Hate speech

1. Justification of historical cases of discrimination and violence.
2. Publications and statements that question the generally acknowledged historical facts of violence and discrimination.
3. Allegations of historical crimes by one or another ethnic (or other) group.
4. Pointing to the links of any social group with local and/or foreign political and state structures with a view to discrediting it.
5. Allegations of the criminality of one or another ethnic group.

6. Speculations about the disproportionate superiority of any ethnic group in material wealth, representation in structures of power, etc.
7. The accusation of the negative influence of any social group on society, the state.
8. Appeals to prevent the consolidation of certain social groups in the region (district, city, etc.).



“Mild” Hate speech

1. Creation of a negative image of an ethnic group.
2. Mentioning the names of an ethnic group in a derogatory context.
3. Allegations of the inferiority of an ethnic group.
4. Allegations of the moral infirmities of an ethnic group.
5. Mentioning a social group or its representatives as such in a humiliating or offensive context (for example, in a crime chronicle).
6. Quoting xenophobic statements or publishing this type of texts without an appropriate comment defining the delimitation between
7. the opinion of the interviewee and the position of the author of the text (journalist); providing space in a newspaper for apparent nationalist propaganda without an editorial comment or other debate.

Hate speech in Central Asia

During the current year, the media monitors' team monitored **1,430,934** messages on social networks and media. Every day, the team of monitors collected data and processed them according to the project methodology.

During 2021, we found/identified **3,660** messages of the hate speech subcategory. Of these, **715** messages were classified as "harsh" hate speech. Those messages mainly called for the expulsion of certain social groups from the region or country, for killing and beating them.

During the monitoring, moderate forms of hate speech were also found, such as **"moderate" (1,326 reports)** and **"mild" hate speech (1,584)**. We also noticed that "harsh" hate speech is lowering in the region and basically it has

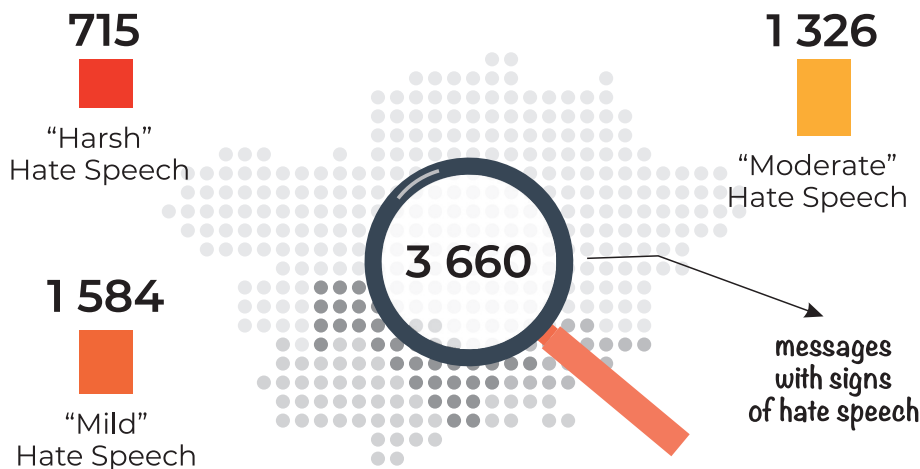
transformed into "moderate" or, in some cases, into "mild" forms.

Below we look at the cases of each country and analyse the maximum number of cases of hate speech in each of them individually. It should also be noted that the text covering each country was provided by the team of media monitors that worked in that particular country.



In the media space of Kyrgyzstan, hate speech is most often found in comments under publications on social networks and some mass media, with emphasis commonly

Total number of monitored messages – **1 430 934**



placed on ethnic and regional affiliation and the gender aspect.

In 2021, hate speech messages in the Kyrgyz-language media concerned political figures, mainly women, gender, LGBT people, protesters, other ethnic groups such as Chinese, Russians, Tajiks, Pakistanis and others, professions (minibus drivers, doctors, etc.), religion (Muslims) and coronavirus.

Each time, hate speech is raised towards specific representatives depending on the news, heated debate and trends. For example, in January 2021, the presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan and a referendum on determining the form of government of the state were held. Female politicians appeared in news more often, which caused anger and irritation among Kyrgyz-speaking users. Most of the comments were related primarily to gender rather than their activities. Commentators urge them to “calm down”, “perform motherly/female duties”, “not go up against the Kyrgyz people.”

The topic of violence against women is one of the most widespread and hottest topics also in the Russian-language media of Kyrgyzstan. Almost every day, there are news or posts about another expression of violence, and such publications collect lots of comments. Some audience representatives comment expressing sympathy, while others condemn the victim of violence in the classic “It’s her own fault!” manner (for example commenting the news “Man beat and buried his wife alive in a hole.”)¹²

¹² https://kaktus.media/doc/433450_depytat:_gei_yzypiryut_nashy_ideologiu.html

On the eve of International Women’s Day, deliberate attention is paid to the march for women’s rights, in particular after the incidents happened during similar events in the previous years. At the same time, social media accounts opposing pro-Western values, feminism, LGBT representatives and NGOs became more active in the comments under posts about this event. For example, Shailoobek Atazov, a member of the Parliament, stated at the meeting of the Jogorku Kenesh that gays are usurping our ideology: *“Last year, 500 non-governmental organisations that impinge upon the ideology of the country were closed down in Russia. We need to close them down, too. They arrange various gay parades. They usurp our ideology. They are following the extremist path.”*¹³

Several domestic conflicts also provoked a wave of anti-Russian comments. There was a drunk visitor who attacked an employee in a children’s entertainment centre just because she was consulting in Russian¹⁴ or another event when a boy was beaten by peers at a sports summer camp.¹⁵

In 2021, the protesters “turned” into a separate social group. Almost every week, there were news about protesters demonstrating against something or someone. In the Kyrgyz-language media, they are hated and perceived as people who have “nothing to do”, “paid

¹³ https://kaktus.media/doc/433450_depytat:_gei_yzypiryut_nashy_ideologiu.html

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/172800432762053/posts/6142522919123078/?d=n>

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/azattyk/posts/4439244606140100>

up”, “pro-Western”, “gays and lesbians”, “NGOs” and so on.

Since April 2021, hate speech against Tajiks has increased dramatically as a result of the events on the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. News about burning houses and schools in Batken, comments from outside experts, lost young men, and demand to provide weapons ramped up the tense situation. In the Kyrgyz-language media, there were calls “calm the Tajiks”, “close the borders”, “bring them to their level”, etc.



Photo. Press service, Ministry of Defense, Kyrgyzstan

This incident caused a wave of hate among commentators, and any news concerning the border conflict was accompanied by hateful rhetoric. For example under the publications of *Kaktus Media website* and the online portal *news.kg* there were messages containing derogatory terms based on ethnicity (Kyrgyz/Tajik), and calls to violence.¹⁶ Periodically, there were news about shots, attacks, and so on. However, the hate speech towards the Tajiks has eased and commentators

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=469344930984018>

condemned not only the ethnic groups, but also the President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon.

In early June, minibus drivers went on strike for several days in a row. In this way, they expressed their dissatisfaction and requested the mayor’s office to raise the payment from 10 soms to 20 soms due to the increase in the price of gasoline and other reasons. Because of this, people were forced to take trolleybuses, buses and taxis. In the Kyrgyz-speaking media, commentators wrote negative comments about minibus drivers. They demanded that the minibuses be completely removed. This is not the first time this year that minibus drivers went on strike. As a result, the payment was increased from 10 soms to 15 soms in November 2021.

This year, hate rhetoric based on ethnic grounds was clearly expressed against Pakistanis. This was due to the fact that after the aggravation of the situation in Afghanistan, some users of social networks began to write that the number of Pakistanis looking like Afghans increased in Bishkek.¹⁷

In 2021, there was also a lot of hate speech and negativity towards girls and women. For example, after the performance of Aisuluu Tynybekova, Meerim Zhumanazarova and other Kyrgyz female wrestlers at the Tokyo Olympics, they were condemned by Ozubek azhy Chotonov, a well-known religious figure in the Kyrgyz Republic. He said: “*that they go out half naked and the whole world sees their thunder thighs. But this does*

¹⁷ <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/31421482.html>

*not mean that you need to undress for the sake of a medal”.*¹⁸

In December 2021, Nazira Aitbekova, a well-known journalist and blogger, caused a heated discussion on social networks. On Facebook, she posted photos where she was “half-naked” and wrote a post saying that *“in our society, it is a shame to undress but not to steal”*, and so on. In the Kyrgyz society, she was broadly condemned. Commentators addressed different types of messages including that she set “a bad example for modern Kyrgyz girls and women”, “dishonours the Kyrgyz people”, and “she definitely needs a man.”



Uzbekistan

In the media field of Uzbekistan, like in other countries of Central Asia, hate speech is most often found in comments on social media posts and media publications. The controversy also involves trolls, who further intensified confrontation in the dialogue. Such disputes often reached the point of open calls for violence, and it should be noted that discussions take commentators far from the topic of the main publication as one word leads to another in their conversations.

Many publications, in order to avoid problems with such commentators, activate the pre-moderation mode. Therefore, for example, there are practically no comments

¹⁸ <https://www.instagram.com/p/CUxG2GBsEYF/>

with hate speech under publications of Gazeta.uz. Many sites, such as on Repost.uz and Anhor.uz, do not provide the possibility of commenting at all. The publications try to protect their content from hate speech. In 2021, in the monitored media space of Uzbekistan, hate speech was most often found under materials of the unregistered publication UPL.uz and Vesti.uz, where commenting is uncontrolled. The latter on-line publication has a propaganda focus, so its hate speech is thematically homogeneous.

If you pay attention to quantitative indicators, the monitoring shows that it increased in the Uzbek segment of the media in May 2021, and nationalism became the main topic.

The Uzbek-Russian nationalist rhetoric emerges around holidays associated with the Soviet legacy. May 9 is the Day of Memory and Honour in Uzbekistan, and this is the day of Victory over fascism. This is the time when the number of publications about the celebration and, accordingly, the number of comments divided along national lines increases. The rhetoric involves the topics of language, religion and traditional values.¹⁹

Hate speech was also caused by social network reposts of materials with statements by opinion leaders, in particular, the leader of the Milliy Tiklanish (National Revival) party, Alisher Kadyrov.²⁰

¹⁹ <https://upl.uz/obshchestvo/20503-news.html>

²⁰ <https://podrobno.uz/cat/obchestvo/kadyrov-zayavil-chto-flag-sssr-podnyatyy-nakontserte-v-tashkente-eto-flag-zakhvatchika-okrashennyi/>

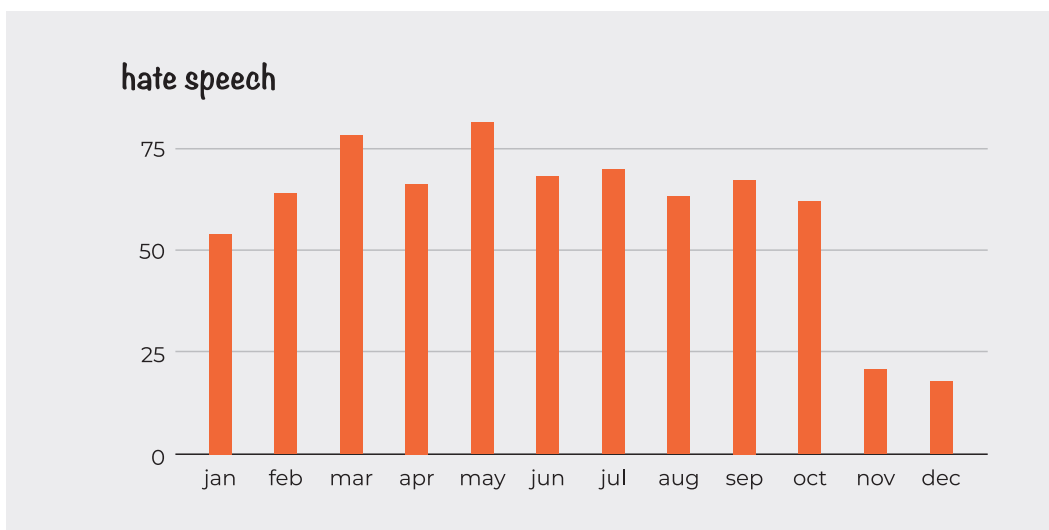


Figure 1. Number of hate speech cases in Uzbekistan (January-December 2021)

The rhetoric of nationalism continued because of the Palestinian-Israeli events, but the focus changed towards anti-Semitism. Statements by opinion leaders intensified the rhetoric of hatred. Yulduz Usmanova, a well-known Uzbekistan singer, urged to come to the rescue of brothers in faith and resort to arms.²¹



Photo: Iulduz Usmanova, Radio "Ozodlik"

The conflict that took place on the border of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan caused hate speech towards the Kyrgyz.²² During the year, nationalist manifestations in comments could be observed in relation to the Gypsies,²³ Chinese,²⁴ Afghans, Pakistanis, Iranians, Indians²⁵ and other nationalities.

Sexism is the second most common type of hate speech in the Uzbek media field. Here you can find objectification, for example, in the comments to the material "Actress from the Turkish series 'Kara Sevda' Melisa Asli Pamuk will visit Tashkent",²⁶ where many pointed to the physical parameters of the actress and treated her as a sexual object, disregarding her acting skills and professionalism. Justification of the harassment of women in different coun-

²¹ <https://youtu.be/5qvhaCTWH0A>

²² <https://upl.uz/policy/20554-news.html>

²³ https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=431121118446111&id=100046446790525

²⁴ <https://upl.uz/world/21333-news.html>

²⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/553693881324624/>

²⁶ <https://upl.uz/culture/21855-news.html>

tries,²⁷ justification of violence and comments with a common mark “It’s her own fault”,²⁸ arguing that a woman cannot be a leader, a good driver, an athlete and other manifestations of inferiority,²⁹ expressions that women’s destiny is exclusively in birth of offspring, and even in a more crude form, that a woman is an incubator,³⁰ stereotypes that women are deceitful, duplicitous, and emotional, as opposed to intellectual abilities,³¹ and others can also often be found in the media space of Uzbekistan both in comments to media materials and in social networks and instant messengers.

Hate speech towards representatives of different regions of Uzbekistan is also often found in user comments. For example, there is a stereotype that the inhabitants of the Sirdaryo Region are criminalised,³² the Jizzakh people are upstarts,³³ inhabitants of Andijan and Namangan are duplicitous,³⁴ and so on.

In the monitoring of on-line media in Uzbekistan, the category of hate speech towards migrants can also be identified. The rhetoric regarding internal migration is char-

acterised by one focus: “provincial people vs Tashkent people”. The comments contradistinguish the supposedly uneducated, uncivilised, wild, criminalised “provincial”³⁵, and in a ruder form “kishlak”³⁶, with arrogant metropolitan people. In materials regarding external migration, hate speech is often triggered by criminal incidents involving or against migrants from Uzbekistan in the Russian Federation.³⁷

The category “Propaganda” is not as widely represented in the monitoring because it often echoes other topics and is closely related to manifestations of nationalism and the topics of religion and language. It can be noted that the main conflict areas are the opposition of “our and European spiritual values”³⁸, the information confrontation “Ukraine vs Russia”³⁹, and “Americanisation.”⁴⁰



In the Tajik media space, hate speech could be found most often in social networks groups, among which Facebook is the leader, fol-

²⁷ <https://t.me/digestuz/9353>

²⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/baraholka.uz/permalink/3836490403079336/>

²⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/voditeli/permalink/1840699872772319/>

³⁰ <https://upl.uz/incidents/21919-news.html>

³¹ <https://upl.uz/incidents/21868-news.html>

³² <https://upl.uz/policy/21990-news.html>

³³ <https://www.facebook.com/anatoliy.ivanov.weisskopf/posts/5186170901423784>

³⁴ <https://upl.uz/obshestvo/21408-news.html>

³⁵ <https://upl.uz/incidents/21574-news.html>

³⁶ <https://upl.uz/incidents/22221-news.html>

³⁷ <https://vesti.uz/moskvichej-dostalo-svinstvo-migrantov/>

³⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/480920865932066/permalink/718783822145768/>

³⁹ <https://vesti.uz/opolchenec-iz-fergany-ne-vyhodit-iz-boja/>

⁴⁰ <https://upl.uz/policy/20607-news.html>

lowed by Instagram. Such media outlets as Asia Plus and Radio Liberty carefully filter their articles and they contain almost no hate speech. However, hate speech cannot be called a rare phenomenon in comments on pages in the above social networks. Nevertheless, people do not dare to leave comments containing offensive words on official websites.

Hate speech gains a special momentum when some social and political events occur that stir people's emotions. At such moments, hate speech reaches its peak.

Like in other countries of Central Asia, in Tajikistan, topics related to gender, religion, corruption, migration, border conflicts between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and the topic of coronavirus that has swept the whole world in the last two years are particularly sensitive. The capture of Afghanistan by the Taliban was also an important topic.

One example related to gender-related themes is the brutal murder of a 7-year-old girl in a district near the capital. The girl was killed by a close neighbour who, after raping her, brutally dealt with the body of the raped and murdered girl by dismembering her. This story evoked very strong emotions among all residents of Tajikistan and beyond. The people demanded and wanted the blood of the pedophile rapist. This was strongly expressed in comments that were written under all the topics associated with this terrible event. In addition to all this, there were comments from fake accounts that encouraged and justified the actions of the pedophiles using Islam. Such comments added fuel

to the fire, thus contributing to the growth of hate speech.⁴¹

Another high-profile and terrible event related to the topic of sexism and gender is the story of Madina Mamadzhanova, who died because damage to her health caused by Aziza Davlyatova, the official wife of Parviz Davlyatov. Having spent in the hospital several months, Madina passed away. After the public learned about this story and the case was taken up by the mayor of the city of Dushanbe under his personal control, the case was reopened and new details surfaced each time. This sad story is also connected with corruption. It followed after several individual figures in high positions were negligent in their duties. Naturally, these people were removed from their posts after the case was examined.⁴²

Afghanistan has completely passed into the hands of the Taliban. Lawlessness and ruthlessness towards children and women. Afghanistan is not only a neighbouring country, but also has the same language – Farsi, Dari – and a history intertwined with Tajikistan. Afghanistan is populated by different ethnic groups of people, including many Tajiks. Tajikistan, headed by President Emomali Rahmon, not only avoids to try to establish ties with the new government of the neighbouring country, but also openly adheres to the position that the Taliban cannot be trusted.⁴³

⁴¹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/mikrofoniozod/permalink/3043807049181266/>

⁴² <https://www.facebook.com/100011421107076/posts/1762183577505662/>

⁴³ <https://www.facebook.com/asiaplustj/posts/4188437844554640>

Another sensitive topic is the latest events that took place in the Pamirs. The incident that happened with Gulbiddin Ziyabekov caused a storm of negative emotions among the people in the Pamirs and outside the country and resulted in a rally that lasted several days.⁴⁴ The people put forward a number of demands and conditions for the authorities but they were not accepted and the rally was suppressed.⁴⁵ Up to now, there is no internet in the Pamirs. Commenting on this act, the authorities said that the temporary internet shutdown is a protective measure.⁴⁶



Photo: Radio "Ozodi"

The topic of coronavirus and vaccination is still among the most debated. Social networks also spread a lot of misinformation on this topic. The people are alarmed because a new wave of the virus began in the summer and it is progressing no less severely than the first one. However, the death rate has dropped remarkably. Vaccination is another thing associated

⁴⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/128878693843929/posts/4623110071087413/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/128878693843929/posts/4625997107465376/>

⁴⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/128878693843929/posts/4626464047418682/>

with the coronavirus. Most people do not believe in the effectiveness of vaccination. On the contrary, they are convinced that the vaccine can be the cause of death for many.⁴⁷



Kazakhstan

The monitoring of the information field of Kazakhstan in 2021 showed that the problem of the spread of hate speech remains of great relevance. In 2021, Kazakhstani experts of the BRYCA team recorded 1,345 messages containing hate speech. Of these, 586 messages were classified as containing mild hate speech, 498 as moderate hate speech, and 261 as harsh hate speech.

In 2021, gender discrimination against women and LGBT people became the most common narratives. Conflicts and intolerance on inter-ethnic, racial and linguistic grounds also remain one of the most acute topics. During such incidents, moderate and "harsh" hate speech are the most common, with calls for discrimination as well as glorification and justification of violent actions.

The on-line information resources where hate speech was most common in 2021 include *nur.kz*, *tengrinews.kz*, *azattyq-ruhy.kz*, *zakon.kz*, *abai.kz*, *qamshy.kz*, *zhasalash.kz* and *alashainasy.kz*. Most often, hate speech was spread in user

⁴⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/asiaplustj/posts/4182970928434665>

comments, but often headlines and articles themselves were discriminatory in nature.

Gender discrimination

The content analysis of popular Kazakhstani media outlets and publics in social networks shows that public discourse is dominated by the normalisation of discriminatory language against women and representatives of sexual minorities. This conclusion is based on the results of the monthly monitoring of 60 media outlets and popular accounts on Facebook and Instagram in the Kazakh and Russian languages. The topic of discrimination against women is traditionally on the top in the reports of media monitors in Kazakhstan. Quite often, the media publish headlines that assault the dignity of women or have a deliberately accusatory tone. Even if a message was written in a relatively neutral way, hate speech is contained in the comments in the overwhelming majority of cases. The main motive of the messages contains the “she herself is to blame” message. Even in a situation of absolute violence against a woman or her child, social condemnation will be directed against the woman in one way or another.

The tragic incident that occurred in Almaty in November 2021 can be referred to as an example. A 28-year-old woman jumped from the 9th floor together with her three children.⁴⁸ The tragedy

⁴⁸ <https://www.instagram.com/p/CWpWG8XIJlq/>

caused a great public outcry. In their comments, users expressed their condolences to the family of the victims but also often blamed the mother for what had happened and severely condemned her for the death of the children.

Another high-profile case is the death of Ayazhan Yedilova in Kazakhstan. On 19 March 2021, she left work and disappeared. A few days later, the girl was found killed. It was established that on the day of the disappearance, Ayazhan was going to meet a new acquaintance. In December, the defendant Torebekov was sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment.⁴⁹ The comments to this news are dominated by victim-blaming and the readers accuse the victim of frivolity and dissoluteness.⁵⁰

The negative social response to the women’s march on March 8 in Almaty demonstrated a rather low level of tolerance. This event caused a wave of homophobic comments, especially among Kazakh-speaking citizens. Most often, activists were alleged as belonging to the LGBT community and extreme intolerance was expressed. Omar Zhalel, a philosopher, religious scholar and Abay scholar, spoke on his YouTube channel and in an interview with the media that feminist movements are alien to Kazakh culture and are the result of a pernicious influence of Europe. He also promotes the idea that a daughter in

⁴⁹ https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/ubiystvo-ayajan-edilovoy-podozrevaemyiy-otritsaet-455693/

⁵⁰ https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/ubiytse-ayajan-edilovoy-vyinesli-prigovor-v-almaty-458014/

a family is like a commodity and her chastity must be protected.⁵¹



Photo. NUR.KZ/Petr Karandashov

The topic of the LGBT community traditionally causes waves of negative comments. One of the cases clearly demonstrates public perception and the way news are given in the media: “I am a transgender: The conflict near the capital’s shopping mall was caught on video”. Such clickbait headlines are often used by popular media. Users usually do not even try to understand the situation and often use profanity and harsh hate language.⁵²

Hate speech on inter-ethnic, racial and linguistic grounds

The topic of inter-ethnic conflicts is the most debated in the Kazakhstani society. The problem is exacerbated by the public rhetoric of opinion leaders and online users. Often these actors manifest tolerance to violence, glorifying

⁵¹ <https://kaz.nur.kz/society/1903496-aitqanym-aidai-keldi-omar-zalel-feminister-seruine-bilik-ne-usin-ruqsat-bergenin-aitty/>

⁵² <https://www.nur.kz/society/1924485-ket-ket-ket-karagandintsy-ustroili-aktsiyu-protesta-protiv-sobraniya-lgbt-aktivistov-video/>

the participants in ethnic violence acts and calling for radical measures against ethnic groups. Moreover, authorities prefer to hush up this topic, and local officials criticise national minorities, urging them to respect the Kazakhs. This, in fact, legitimises violence and aggression, creating the risk of recurrence of conflicts in the future.

In October, another inter-ethnic conflict took place in the village of Pidzhim in Almaty Region. According to the MediaNet publication “*The Study of hate speech in Kazakhstan: The perception of resonant inter-ethnic conflicts in social networks. Possible solutions*”, the reaction of local authorities to this inter-ethnic conflict clearly demonstrated their inability to adequately respond to such conflicts.⁵³ They tried to calm the dissatisfaction of citizens with statements about the privileged status of the Kazakhs, which, in fact, is an unconstitutional justification and legitimisation of violence. Such communication and low levels of trust in the authorities lead to an escalation of hate speech and increase the risk of the recurrence of conflicts in the future.

During inter-ethnic conflicts, sinophobia and discrimination against Russian-speakers also intensified. One of the arguments justifying discrimination against Russian-speaking citizens is the requirement to have a command of the state Kazakh language. “Language Patrols” is the most high-profile case related to this topic. In the summer of 2021, Kuat

⁵³ <https://medianet.kz/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/%D0%AF%D0%B7%D1%8B%D0%BA-%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B6%D0%B4%D1%8B-KAZ.pdf>

Akhmetov, on his YouTube channel “Til Maydani online partiyasy”, called for making provocative videos with representatives of the service sector and speaking with them only in Kazakh. Some citizens who followed his calls and began to upload videos on the network with pressure on Russian-speaking shop assistants, waiters, and managers. The movement became quite popular, the videos quickly gained views and comments. The authorities resolutely stamped this initiative and called it “cave nationalism”. The channel “Til Maydani online par-

tiyasy” was blocked. Criminal proceedings were instituted against Akhmetov for inciting ethnic hatred and he is on the wanted list. However, videos with language inspections are still periodically published, where people and various institutions are publicly harassed. Kazakhstani and Russian media actively covered this: “It was a hate campaign”: a Kazakh woman told about threats from Til Maydani activists.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ <https://ru.sputnik.kz/20210820/Eto-by-la-travlya-kazahstanka-rasskazala-ob-ugrozakh-aktivistov-Til-Maydani-17918027.html>

Regular monitoring of the information field of the Central Asian countries made it possible to describe and analyse the most common toxic narratives that serve as the basis for hate speech and discrimination. An analysis of public rhetoric suggests that hostile rhetoric on the Internet intensifies during conflicts and can become an ideological basis that spurs individuals to actual violent actions.

Based on the results of media monitors, it can be noted that in almost all countries the topics of gender stereotypes and LGBT are leading. Russophobia and ethnic topics can also be distinguished.

Unfortunately, most cases of hate speech can be found in social networks, with no responsibility and attachment to a particular person. The observation of one of the media monitors can be noted, which says that bots, trolls and fake accounts are most common in social networks. It is them who are often the initiators of chats or verbal conflicts. As far as media are concerned, they are strictly regulated and moderated in almost all countries of the region. In the end of our annual report, we will return to the issue of hate speech and have proposed several recommendations for the non-dissemination of hate speech in the countries of Central Asia.

Disinformation in Central Asia

During the past year, the media monitors of the project analysed 1,430,934 messages containing disinformation/disinformation and hate speech, including 1,453 messages from the disinformation category. Disinformation was mainly aimed at the coronavirus infection, immunisation campaigns, border conflicts and, of course, conspiracy theories. Below, we will look closely at the situation in each country and talk about the main topics and theses on disinformation in our region.



Kyrgyzstan

COVID-19 pandemic

In Kyrgyzstan, like everywhere in the world, a large-scale campaign has been launched to promote false information about the harmful effects of vaccines from the beginning of vaccination against coronavirus infection. One group contains information about the fatal danger of vaccines⁵⁵ or that a vaccinated person becomes a carrier of COVID-19 and “exudes a virus”⁵⁶, while the other is con-

⁵⁵ <https://factcheck.kg/vakcziny-snizhayut-immunitet-i-privodyat-k-massovym-smertyam-faktchek/>

⁵⁶ <https://factcheck.kg/vakczinirovannyj-chelovek-stanovitsya-nositelem-covid-19-i-istochnik-iz-sebya-virus-fejk/>

spiratorial in nature, in particular, in relation of the “golden billion” and chipping. So, in July, a video was circulated on social networks and instant messengers, where a group of men who call themselves the council of Kyrgyz aqsaqals argues against vaccination against COVID-19. According to them, vaccination is a plan of the globalists and masons to exterminate all people.⁵⁷

Connoisseurs of conspiracy theories also replicated fakes about chipping the population by means of vaccination. Thus, a number of videos appeared in messengers, in which people who have been vaccinated apply a magnet to the injection site and it sticks. The authors of the videos claim that along with the vaccine, they received subcutaneous injection of micro-

⁵⁷ <https://kloop.kg/blog/2021/07/18/gruppa-muzhchin-v-kyrgyzstane-rasprostranyaet-fejkis-prizyvom-ne-vaktsinirovatsya-ot-covid-19/>

chips, which, due to the presence of metal in them, hold magnets.⁵⁸

Besides, the fakes related COVID-19 were dominated by the topic of its treatment with folk remedies. A zombie fake about the treatment of coronavirus with garlic water resurfaced.⁵⁹ According to an anti-mask fake, which also sparked outcry in the neighbouring country of Kazakhstan, black worms live in masks.⁶⁰

Political fakes regarding vaccination also appeared in the Kyrgyz media. Thus, the news that China demanded to vaccinate 70% of the population of Kyrgyzstan to allow trucks to pass through customs, which was announced by the chairman of the Customs Service of the Kyrgyz Republic, turned out to be fake. The Chinese Embassy in the Kyrgyz Republic denied this information.⁶¹

Politics

Elections in Kyrgyzstan are always accompanied by the spread of false stories of various kinds. Thus, on the eve of the parliamentary elections, fake information about the candidates, allegedly sourced from the media, was massively

⁵⁸ <https://factcheck.kg/kyrgyzstanczev-chipiruyut-s-pomoshhyu-vakczin-ot-covid-19-proveryaem/>

⁵⁹ <https://factcheck.kg/kyrgyz-fejk-lechenie-koronavirusa-chesnochnoj-vodoj/>

⁶⁰ <https://factcheck.kg/v-mediczinskih-mas-kah-obnaruzheny-chervi-nanochasticzy-nepravda/>

⁶¹ <https://factcheck.kg/trebovanie-kitajskoj-storony-o-vakczinaczii-70-naseleniya-kyrgyzstana-eto-fejk/>

distributed on Facebook. For example, the news was published under the logo of Radio Azattyq, that the leader of the Butun Kyrgyzstan party, Adakhan Madumarov, had fled Kyrgyzstan. Under the logo of the information channel Next TV, a fake was spread that the athlete Valentina Shevchenko demanded that Adakhan Madumarov be held accountable for “having sold Kyrgyz lands”.⁶²

The situation in Afghanistan after the seizure of power by the Taliban induced lots of fakes in the of social networks Kyrgyz. Thus, a popular video of dancing Talibans turned out to be fake, as well as a photo of a Talib with an ice cream.⁶³ The message that a number of states have recognised the power of the Taliban terrorist movement in Afghanistan is untrue⁶⁴ as well as the information that Vladimir Putin offered Joseph Biden the joint use of military bases in Central Asia to coordinate actions in the Afghan area.⁶⁵

The conflict on the border of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan became another cause of the spread of a huge amount of fake information. For example, a video was circulat-

⁶² https://kaktus.media/doc/449938_v_socsetiah_poiavilas_feykovaia_informaciia_o_kandi_datah_ot_smi.html?fbclid=IwAR11etLI94-nE4rfzUIG3gXhGJFu0dN2dgTSSk7YIgFCXUWBX941qkQLumk

⁶³ https://kaktus.media/doc/444882_foto_i_video_iz_afganistana_stavshie_memami-okazalis_feykami_faktchek.html

⁶⁴ <https://factcheck.kg/soobshheniya-o-priznanii-talibana-v-mire-nepravda/>

⁶⁵ <https://kloop.kg/blog/2021/07/22/rossiya-nepredlagala-ssha-sovmestnoe-ispolzovanie-voennyh-baz-v-tsentralnoj-azii-glava-midlavrov/>

ed on social networks and instant messengers, in which allegedly Afghan militants were moving towards Isfara⁶⁶. During the conflict, information was also actively spread that Turkey intended to provide military assistance to Kyrgyzstan. The news was published on the site specialising in fake and “yellow” news.⁶⁷ Later, in July, information appeared about the persecution of students, citizens of Tajikistan, studying at universities in the Kyrgyz Republic. The Ministry of Education and Science of Kyrgyzstan denied this statement.⁶⁸

Cyber fraud

In WhatsApp, mailings in the name of local companies for the draw of cash prizes became more frequent. According to the terms of the mailing, you need to choose a prize and make mailings to a certain number of groups or users. For example, there were mailings sent in the name of Gazprom on the occasion of the New Year⁶⁹, allegedly Coca-Cola offered a drawing on the occasion of Christmas⁷⁰ and the National Bank conducted a survey on the occasion of the

⁶⁶ <https://factcheck.kg/videofejk-s-afgans-kimi-boevikami-napravlyayushhimisya-v-isfaru/>

⁶⁷ https://kaktus.media/doc/437407_informatsiya_o_tom_chno_tyrciia_peredast_kyrgyzstany_bespilotniki_feyk.html

⁶⁸ <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/minobrazovaniya-oproverglu-informatsiyu-o-presledovanii-tadzhikistanskih-studentov/31365646.html>

⁶⁹ <https://factcheck.kg/moshennichestvo-gazprom-ne-provodit-rozygrysh-denezhnyh-prizov-k-k-novogodnim-prazdnikam/>

⁷⁰ <https://factcheck.kg/s-rozhdestvom-coca-cola-daet-besplatnye-podarki-faktchek/>

25th anniversary of its founding.⁷¹ The websites offering prize draws are not among the official sites of the above companies and are used to distribute malicious links (phishing).

The monitoring and analysis of the channels distributing fakes and misinformation showed that the key subjects of the dissemination of fake information were users of social networks and instant messengers, in particular WhatsApp. Almost all fakes related to COVID-19 used the manipulation of pseudoscientific facts, clickbait headlines, and references to conspiracy theories.

In the media of Kyrgyzstan, misinformation and fakes are found in public pages that are not official sources of information. Basically, these are just Instagram pages that copy news without filtering and checking. They are immediately distinguishable by their flashy news headlines and pictures that arouse interest.

In 2021, Whatsapp mailings were still active where it was said that some local banks or supermarkets like Narodny, Globus and others were raffling off prizes or money. People fall for such messages despite the fact that the link is not official and the request to provide their card details is suspicious.

On WhatsApp, a fake message was distributed to all public transport drivers that everyone had to undergo a technical inspection

⁷¹ <https://kloop.kg/blog/2021/12/20/projti-opros-i-vyigrat-50-tysyach-somov-natsbank-soobshhil-o-novom-vidе-moshennichestva/>

of the vehicle and would be punished otherwise.⁷²

The loudest news was that the Minister of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic, Alymkadyr Beishenaliev, announced that coronavirus can be treated with aconite – Issyk-Kul root.⁷³ Many were indignant at his statement, and also repeatedly said that the poisonous root could kill a human. However, this news did not surprise Kyrgyz-speaking users in any way. On the contrary, they supported it and gave examples when aconite all but cured cancer. In provinces, people began to take a tincture of the root. There are cases when people were hospitalised or died.⁷⁴



Photo: Zdorovye AKIpress

There was information that a woman in Norway noticed that her breasts had increased after vaccination.⁷⁵ Her experience and opinion are presented as if this is

⁷² <https://www.instagram.com/p/CWnk1V4sKfc/>

⁷³ <https://www.bbc.com/kyrgyz/kyrgyzstan-56798557>

⁷⁴ <https://www.azattyk.org/a/31244226.html?fbclid=IwARIT7V6ykJHBB9r8UVVzzDgBL6co17dJDz7KrajF-RBYOKEIQvbEW6EYVw>

⁷⁵ <https://www.instagram.com/p/CR1xWCULTha/>

some kind of scientific proof that, indeed, breasts grow from the vaccine. And the title was: “The breast may grow after vaccination”. Commentators used laughing emoticons, scoffed and wrote that this was some kind of marketing ploy and promotion of the vaccine.



Uzbekistan

In 2021, disinformation in the media segment of Uzbekistan was presented quite differently: from fakes to “Nigerian letters”, clickbait and conspiracy theories. The topics of disinformation messages were also diverse: from huge monsters found on the shores of Lake Tudakul⁷⁶ to manipulative headlines about the introduction of criminal liability for sexual intercourse of minors⁷⁷ and conspiracy theories that a foul smell spreading in some areas of Tashkent resulted from spraying substances, causing Covid-19.⁷⁸

In 2021, fake news about Covid-19 can be differentiated as a separate category by the degree of prevalence, breadth of thematic coverage, and variety of techniques. Fake news makers used newsworthy opportunities to mislead the audience, presented outdated information as relevant, and invented new ways to spread falsehoods. For example, people in Uzbekistan

⁷⁶ https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=369607643376097

⁷⁷ <https://uznews.uz/ru/article/28636>

⁷⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/PotrebiteI.Uz/permalink/4284828314877810/>

were regularly informed about the resumption of quarantine, replacing dates in the notices⁷⁹, there were talks about the transition of students and schoolchildren to on-line education or early start of their vacation⁸⁰, virus-induced illness and death of celebrities.⁸¹

With the start of vaccination against Covid-19, a wave of fakes about the negative impact of vaccines on health rose in social networks and messaging services of Uzbekistan, and cases of deterioration in health and even death of vaccinated individuals were described.⁸² The network was flooded with fakes about mutant children, accompanied by images⁸³, saying that people who received the vaccine were left speechless and could not stand on their feet and other consequences.⁸⁴

Such mailings regularly appeared in Telegram both in closed groups and in public channels, on Facebook, and in on-line media. It should be said that the responsible bodies responded to such fake news quite quickly and refuted that in their official sources.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ <https://t.me/xushnudbek/8480>

⁸⁰ <https://t.me/digestuz/10001>

⁸¹ <https://nuz.uz/kultura-i-iskusstvo/1201923-sluhi-o-smerti-tuti-yusupovoj-okazalis-fejkom.html>

⁸² <https://t.me/uzbhub/399>

⁸³ <https://podrobno.uz/cat/proisshestviya/no-vyy-feyk-uzbekistantsy-rasprostranyayut-v-sots-setyakh-soobshchenie-detyakh-mutantakh-s-khvostami-i/>

⁸⁴ <https://t.me/ssvmatbuotkotibi/6359>

⁸⁵ https://t.me/antifake_uz/103

Politics

The situation in Afghanistan in mid-August 2021 gave rise to a wave of fakes in the media space of Central Asia. In Uzbekistan, fakes related to Afghanistan had both a serious socio-political and a joking nature, with memes beginning to spread.

The Foreign Ministry of Uzbekistan denied numerous reports about the presence of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and other Afghan politicians in Uzbekistan.⁸⁶ Also, the Uzbek Foreign Ministry emphasised that the information published by a number of websites and agencies that Uzbekistan was ready to “open its borders” for refugees from Afghanistan contradicted the reality.⁸⁷ The myth that many governments of the world recognised the Taliban government was also debunked and the posts were accompanied by a comment that this was a fake and provided links to a factchecking material.⁸⁸

The election of the president of Uzbekistan in October 2021 also became an occasion for disinformation. The Central Election Commission of Uzbekistan denied the information that Shavkat Mirziyoyev won the elections with 90% of the vote.

A sentence of three-year imprisonment was given to a man who created a fake profile on one of the popular social networks on be-

⁸⁶ <https://ria.ru/20210817/gani-1746104765.html>

⁸⁷ <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/3357080.html>

⁸⁸ <https://factcheck.kg/soobshheniya-o-priznanii-talibana-v-mire-nepravda/>

half of the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev. He presented himself to citizens as the leader of the republic, as the head of the presidential administration and promised them to give practical help in solving problems for monetary reward.⁸⁹



Photo. Investrk.uz

Cyber fraud

In 2021, cases of phishing became more frequent in the form of the theft of funds from bank card accounts of individuals using various fraudulent tricks. Using brands of well-known financial corporations, criminals created fake websites in which the victim opened access to his or her plastic card by filling in its data.⁹⁰ In one of such video messages, the brand of the UZCARD payment system was used, while other used the brands of the Olx.uz online trading platform or the Mediapark chain of stores selling household appliances.⁹¹ A similar scheme was used in a fake Facebook mailing list mentioning the global brands Volkswagen and Hermes. The algorithms

⁸⁹ <https://uz.sputniknews.ru/20211001/v-uzbe-kistane-feykovogo-prezidenta>

⁹⁰ https://t.me/antifake_uz/128

⁹¹ https://t.me/antifake_uz/124

of the social networking quickly identified the mailing mechanism and blocked malicious links.

Mentions of brands

A lot of fake information was related to commercial structures, global and Uzbek brands and opinion leaders.

In June 2021, great interest from social media users was caused by a video with a misleading comment, where Cristiano Ronaldo, at a press conference after the Euro 2020 match, removed bottles of Coca Cola from the frame and urged everyone to drink plain water, with a comment that it caused the Coca Cola to lose 4 billion in capitalisation⁹².

Fake information, where a raffle of \$500,000 was promised on behalf of Saida Mirziyoyeva, the daughter of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, was also circulated virally⁹³.

Korzinka.uz, a popular supermarket chain, became the object of fake mailing. The message said that Korzinka.uz was raffling gift coupons. This information could have had a negative impact on the image of the large trading company but the public relations service responded quite quickly and refuted the information⁹⁴.

⁹² https://www.sports.ru/tribuna/blogs/voronin/2933432.html?utm_source=telegram&utm_medium=eme&utm_campaign=2021-06-15&fbclid=IwAR00Yihj7466WgeK6fZkWobi2yR-PtQ3Bsw7wlgH9WzhzJ-PJbnjbsNaZEK

⁹³ <https://t.me/digestuz/7949>

⁹⁴ https://t.me/antifake_uz/102

The topic of the Uzbek auto industry is quite popular. The activities of UzAuto Motors are often criticised because of its pricing policy and the artificially created shortage of vehicles. This context is actively used by disinformers. For example, in September 2021, a fake was spread that Onyx cars were being placed on the market. However, UzAuto Motors officially stated that this information was untrue⁹⁵.

Sensations and newsworthy occurrences

The distortion of the details in a message in order to create a sensation and fake stories on topics that cause stir among the public became a frequently used technique for creating fakes in the media field of Uzbekistan. For example, in September 2021, there were reports on social networks that during the hashar (subbotnik) in the temple of Hazrat Ali near Sarikand, a treasure with gold coins with a total weight of about a kilogram was found. This information was commented by the chairman of the mahalla gathering of citizens of Hazrat Ali, Suvkhonali Nishonov. He explained that a hashar was really organised on the territory of the shrine on 8 September 2021. However, no gold was found⁹⁶. In November, a fake was spread on social networks and Telegram about the adoption of Decree No 3535 of the Cabinet of Ministers of 9 November 2021, according to

which polygamy was allowed in the Republic of Uzbekistan⁹⁷.

In December, information appeared on social networks that a company with the odious name “Second Wife of the Deputy Minister” had been registered in Uzbekistan. It was alleged that the company had been registered in the name of Madina Eshonkulova, an actress, who became known to many following a traffic scandal, when she introduced herself as “the second wife of the Deputy Minister” to traffic police officers. Probably, this very story led the jokers to the idea of making a fake with a company under exactly the same name. They referred to the website of the State Statistics Committee, without taking into account that the statistics authority did not deal with company names.⁹⁸

Several breakdowns and emergency stops of trains in the Tashkent metro, which occurred in a row, stirred a wide-ranging debate and a negative reaction from the audience. Fakemakers also responded to this information. For example, a fake was circulated that two trains collided at the Beruni metro station.⁹⁹

One of the Uzbek on-line publications told that it was decided to demolish the Museum of Steam Locomotives in Tashkent, which was not bringing profit, with the exhibits to be sold for scrap and building a business centre on the

⁹⁵ <https://nuz.uz/sobytiya/1208039-zapusk-prodazh-chevrolet-onix-okazalsya-fejkom.html>

⁹⁶ <https://nuz.uz/sobytiya/1208324-nahodka-kilogramma-zolotykh-monet-v-ferganskoj-oblasti-okazalas-fejkom.html>

⁹⁷ https://t.me/antifake_uz/130

⁹⁸ <https://nuz.uz/obschestvo/1218414-firma-vmoraya-zhena-zamministra-okazalas-chim-to-rozygryshem.html>

⁹⁹ https://t.me/antifake_uz/109

vacated site. The press service of O'zbekiston Temir Yo'llari (Uzbekistan Railways) reported that such rumours occurred regularly: only this year, media representatives repeatedly contacted the company to find out about the future fate of the popular museum. The journalists were provided with the necessary information, their meetings with the museum management were organised, and conditions were created for them to make video and photograph.¹⁰⁰

In the media space of Uzbekistan, disinformation is still quite fragmented. Trends can be traced only in some topic areas. As a rule, fakes are fit into the existing agenda and context, which is formed in the media. Official information services created under state bodies as well as PR departments of commercial structures respond promptly to facts of disinformation. Despite the fact that there are no specialised fact-checking editorial offices and publications in the country yet, many media outlets open sections where they publish popular fake news and debunk them, referring to the responses from state services or foreign fact-checking resources. This helps to reduce the spread of fake information.



In 2021, disinformation in the Tajik media were presented quite differently. Much fake information

¹⁰⁰ <https://nuz.uz/sobytiya/1208214-soobshhenie-o-zakrytii-muzeya-parovozov-okazalos-fejkom.html>

was of rather political nature. For example, there were statements by the President of Turkey regarding the Tajiks about stopping the aggression against the Kyrgyz, or about the situation of the Tajiks in Afghanistan. The aggravation of the situation in Afghanistan and the border clashes between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan gave rise to new fakes. However, in the Tajik segment, an old fake story about a charity event of the famous Bollywood actor, Amirkhan, was circulating.

The situation in Afghanistan

Information appeared on the social networks that after the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan, the situation of ordinary people became sorrowful. An old photograph of a girl who allegedly lost all her relatives and friends during the explosion in Kabul began to be often used in texts. And at the moment she walks on the bloody ground. In the image, the girl is holding a book in her hands and fear is seen on her face¹⁰¹.

This photo is a few years old and is not related to the events in Afghanistan. Using this photo, the author wants to manipulate people's feelings and push the reader to express negative reviews about the Taliban. This photo had been used several times in different content to describe the situation in Afghanistan. Also, there appeared a photo of a man holding a girl on his hands and crying¹⁰².

¹⁰¹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/turanica/permalink/4038817452870097/>

¹⁰² <https://factcheck.tj/2021/08/27/fejk-aksi-mardi-giryon-bo-duhtarcha-az-af-oniston/>



Photo. <https://nara.getarchive.net>

According to the text accompanying the photo, the father wanted to protect his little daughter from the Taliban. However, an investigation showed that this photo was an old one and referred to events of 2017 in Iraq.

A new wave of hatred was caused by the appearance of a photo of dancing Taliban after their “victory”. In fact, this photo was fake and a clickbait headline¹⁰³. Due to the fact that the photo quickly spread in the Tajik segment and received many negative reviews, the fact-checkers of Tajikistan conducted an investigation and found that the photo was taken 5 months earlier and was related to a festive event in Pakistan.

Border conflict

Information appeared on the social networks that the President of Turkey warned the Tajik authori-

¹⁰³ <https://factcheck.tj/2021/09/16/fejk-ra-si-tolibon-bad-az-ish-oli-af-oniston-navor/>

ties to stop the aggression against Kyrgyzstan. This information was circulated on social networks by fake accounts after the border conflict between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan¹⁰⁴.

Also, there was information that Kazakhstan was ready to help the army of Kyrgyzstan. A group of Tajik fact-checkers conducted an investigation and addressed the Turkish Embassy in Tajikistan with an official letter¹⁰⁵. The Turkish Ambassador to Tajikistan responded with an official letter to the editorial office, explaining that the information was unfounded and fake.

On the Vorukh–Batken telegram channel¹⁰⁶, there was information with a photo of the house of a family who suffered during the border conflict. The text also used a photograph of a young woman and a child with a burnt face. The text said it was a photograph of a Kyrgyz family who suffered during an attack by Tajik citizens on a Kyrgyz village. It turned out that this photo was fake and was not related to the border conflict. The woman was a citizen of Kazakhstan, and the child was a citizen of Azerbaijan. And the photos tell about a fire in those countries.

Also, it was decided to use the situation in Afghanistan for an information attack after the conflict incidents at the border with Kyr-

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/turanica/posts/4139540352797806/>

¹⁰⁵ <https://factcheck.tj/2021/05/01/fejk-turkiya-omoda-ast-ba-ir-iziston-besarnishin-oinizomii-bayraktar-tb2-va-rszo-di-ad/>

¹⁰⁶ <https://t.me/voruhbatken>

gyzstan.¹⁰⁷ Thus, misinformation appeared on the network that supposedly Tajiks from Xorâsân addressed the President of Tajikistan and asked them to create a corridor to Wârōx. And by the evening they will be able to make iftar in the White House, in the capital city of Kyrgyzstan. The text used an old photograph of the Tajiks of Afghanistan, headed by the famous Ahmad Shah Massoud.

Fakes about COVID-19

Tajiks began receiving information to their messaging services that Covid can be cured using steam. The text says that the hot water we drink is very good for health. When an individual breathes steam, it can kill the coronavirus in the respiratory tract. The text referred to statements by N. N. Kannappan, allegedly a famous virologist. It also claimed that the information was important and needed to be quickly distributed among friends. The reason was that a week of steam therapy could allow to put an end to the pandemic. An investigation showed that in fact N. N. Kannappan did exist, but he was a sexologist, not a virologist¹⁰⁸. The doctor did not write anything like that on his page. Also, it turned out that this message had previously been circulated in English and that foreign media conducted an investigation and identified it as a fake. Also, WHO indicated on its Twitter page that this information was false.

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2447567905568639/permalink/2959020721090019/>

¹⁰⁸ <https://sexologistinmadurai.business.site/>

Information that the vaccine will lead to infertility began to be circulated among people in Tajikistan. It was written in some comments on official materials of the Ministry of Health of Tajikistan. However, according to the results of a check showed that this information was false.¹⁰⁹ A video message from a WHO representative was presented stating that no vaccine will lead to infertility. And that the information was unfounded.

Politics

Information that Joe Biden cancelled the Green Card for residents of Tajikistan appeared in the Tajik segment.¹¹⁰ The author referred to information from the White House. However, this information was not found either on the page of the White House or on the page of the President himself, Joe Biden.

One of the most terrible false information reports for the inhabitants of Northern Tajikistan and part of the regions of neighbouring Uzbekistan was that the Qayroqqum Reservoir had allegedly burst. This information appeared a few months after an accident at the Sardoba Reservoir, Uzbekistan¹¹¹. This information quickly spread in the social networks of Tajikistan. However, it did not receive any confirmation during several hours.

¹⁰⁹ <https://factcheck.tj/2021/08/20/dur-voksinai-ziddi-covid-19-insonro-bezuryot-mekunad/>

¹¹⁰ <https://ittiloot.com/all/glavnaja/42678-bajden-otmenit-lotereju-grin-kart-dlja-tadzhikistancev.html>

¹¹¹ https://v-nadzor.gov.uz/uz_Cyrl_UZ/page/246/sardoba-suv-ombori-toni-buzilib-suv-toshib-chiishiga-kuchli-emir-va-shamol-sabab-blgan



Kazakhstan

In 2021, the disinformation spread in the Kazakhstani media space was mainly related to vaccines. The reason is that official vaccination in Kazakhstan began only in February. Messages of various types (audio, video, images and messages in WhatsApp) instantly spread and caused a public outcry. Phrases such as “chipping”, “Bill Gates’ theory”, “remote control of the population”, “5G towers”, and “magnets” began to penetrate our country. In addition, some coronavirus-related misinformation spread regarding PCR tests and LGBT issues. And information about the artificial origin of the coronavirus and its “non-existence” is still spreading. Now let us discuss each topic individually.

Immunisation of the population

Various videos on vaccination with Pfizer and Moderna circulated online on different social media platforms. For example, false information was spread that US Vice President Kamala Harris deceived people by showing live as receiving vaccine; that Poland, Sweden and Norway had jointly sued the WHO. Some Kazakhstani websites like Factcheck.kz and Stopfake.kz denied those information messages.¹¹² In February, official vaccination began in the country. For this reason, many fakes, clickbait and manipulations spread since that

¹¹² <https://factcheck.kz/kaz/basty-beti/kamala-harris-shynymen-vakcina-saldyrdy-ma/>

very month, thus further exacerbating the clickbait’s lack of public trust in the vaccine. For example, on 4 February, the site Stan.kz published the article “Faint after vaccination: a doctor from Taldykorgan gave a comment”. It was followed by information on the same site that “after vaccination, the condition worsened.”¹¹³ In addition, information was circulated that the coronavirus had “ended”. The number of cases of fainting after vaccination increased, and videos and audios showing them spread throughout Kazakhstan. For example, information was released that “in Almaty, another citizen was taken to the intensive care department after vaccination.”¹¹⁴ A video was circulated that “a doctor in Atyrau fainted after receiving the vaccine” and information that “a woman from Mangistau fell ill after being vaccinated”.¹¹⁵ Also, rumours that “the coronavirus vaccine paralyzes children” and the myth about the dangers of the vaccine for pregnant women were spread among the population.¹¹⁶ The untrue information that “80 percent of pregnant women (at the early stages) miscarry after the vaccine” was somehow shocking and continues to be circulated.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ <https://stan.kz/vakcinadan-keyin-talip-kaldi-taldikorgandik-dariger-tus-342819/>

¹¹⁴ <https://qazaquni.kz/news/158169-almatyda-perzentxana-qyzmetkerinin-vakcinadan-keiin-ayaq-qoly-tartylyp-qurysyp-qalghan>

¹¹⁵ <https://stan.kz/vakcina-saldiramin-dep-komadan-birak-shikti-mangistauli-349990/>

¹¹⁶ https://t.me/svobodnyy_chelovek/927

¹¹⁷ <https://factcheck.kz/kaz/basty-beti/faktchek-aksh-ta-vakcinadan-kejin-bastapky-kezendegi-zhuktiliktin-80-i-tusikpen-ayaktaldy>

Chipping, magnet and 5G towers

Fake news about ‘chipping’ spread mainly around the Pfizer vaccine. Messages were circulated among the population that “Bill Gates is going to massively chip and remotely control the population by means of the Pfizer vaccine¹¹⁸”. This further exacerbated the distrust of the population in vaccination. Even the supposedly video of Bill Gates’ speech at the Pentagon were circulated. It is said that he “foresaw” everything in advance. And the information that the population was massively chipped and remotely controlled with the help of this vaccine was changing, developed and reappeared every month. Also, a video was circulated showing a magnet “adhered” to the vaccination site. That is, this allegedly means that the population is massively “chipped” through the vaccine. And the “statement” by a Nobel Prize winner spread that people live only 2 years after vaccination. After that, many were afraid to administer the vaccine, and the illegal purchase of a vaccination certificate among people spread more and more.¹¹⁹

Absurd fakes and “poisoning” by plane

“Poisoning” by plane is one of the zombie fakes that has been spreading since the beginning of the coronavirus. In 2021, messag-

es, photos and videos with the headline “People are being poisoned by plane” were repeatedly circulated in different regions. For example, a video was circulated in Turkestan saying that “planes are spraying poison.” In video and photo format, this information was especially widely spread on WhatsApp, after which an authority denied the information. Among the absurd fakes, there was a video assembled in 2020, which says that “people who are not residents of Almaty must have time to leave the city within 72 hours because Almaty is going to be closed for quarantine.” This news was spread by the 24.kz TV channel.

Disinformation has also spread about mandarins, a “dangerous animal from the Turkestan region”, and the “Almaty strain” of the coronavirus. During some time, the people of Kazakhstan discussed the “insect” that fell from the sky along with the snow, and “worms in mask” was the most discussed and widespread news among people. Also, among the population, information instantly spread that the Muftiyat was “assigning” Nazarbayev the status of “God”. The following untrue information was circulated: “Those who received 42,500 must return 20,000 tenge.” One of the most widespread fake videos was about a “monster” in Kordai. They urge people to be careful. Information that “the vaccine will be paid from 13 July” was also disseminated.

Use of brand names

Fakes related to this are especially widespread in WhatsApp. The

¹¹⁸ <https://factcheck.kz/kaz/basty-bet1/bill-gejtstin-kunalary-satanistik-ekpe-chip-zhane-baskalary/>

¹¹⁹ <https://factcheck.kz/kaz/basty-bet1/fejkkudaj-geni-zhane-dinge-karsy-vakcina-turaly-bill-gejtstin-pentagon-esebi/>

prevalence, format, and style of the texts are all similar to each other. For example, if a fake is circulated under the name of a brand, the following is necessarily noted: “on the occasion of the anniversary”, “distributed for free”, people are asked to answer a question and links to unclear sites are given. In addition, it uses the names of the most famous brands in Kazakhstan. For example, in 2021, topics such as “Toyota is holding a promotion on the occasion of the 100th anniversary”¹²⁰, “Win 100,000 tenge from Air Astana”¹²¹, “Check your status and get 50,000”¹²², “Adidas gives free sneakers on the occasion of the 90th anniversary”¹²³, “I will repay the loan for the Caspian” or “Halyk Bank is raffling off 100,000 tenge”.¹²⁴



Scene from the video. Source: Instagram.com

¹²⁰ <https://stopfake.kz/ru/archives/5747>

¹²¹ <https://factcheck.kz/kaz/basty-bet1/air-astana-dan-100-myn-tenge-utyl-al-kezekti-fejk>

¹²² <https://factcheck.kz/kaz/basty-bet1/statu-syndy-tekser-de-50-myn-tg-al-tagy-da-alayaktar/>

¹²³ <https://tengrinews.kz/internet/adidas-darit-besplatnuyu-obuv-opasnuyu-ssyilku-snova-400574/>

¹²⁴ <https://factcheck.kz/kaz/basty-bet1/xalyk-bankten-100-myn-tenge-tagy-da-fejk/>

Political disinformation and propaganda

Political disinformation can be seen in the phrase “Bill Gates is going to rule us”. It means ordinary people do not want to obey a US citizen, and there are more and more conspiracy theories talking about this. There was also a small scandal due to a video fake with an incident in a village on the border with Russia in the Atyrau Region. There were rumours that some part of our land “passed over to Russia” and information was circulated that some people in military uniform were walking around. The National Security Committee denied this information and issued a statement that it was a video from a training camp.¹²⁵ Some unclear information was also spread in relation with the events on the border of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Various misinformation about the life of the Talibs in Afghanistan and the situation in the country was also spread.¹²⁶ For some time, Russian propaganda related to the American vaccine Pfizer was circulating. Information and manipulations about its harm were disseminated in various formats. However, fact checkers checked and detected the fake in time.¹²⁷

In conclusion, we noticed that disinformation varies depending on the incident. In particular, we saw

¹²⁵ <https://egemen.kz/article/271948-uqk-atyrau-oblysyndaghy-aktsiyalar-turaly-aqparatty-dgoqqa-shyghardy>

¹²⁶ https://kaz.tengrinews.kz/world_news/jelde-auganstan-turalyi-tarap-jatkan-feykter-326307/

¹²⁷ <https://factcheck.kz/kaz/densaulyk/zhalgan-galymdar-pfizer-vakcinasy-midyn-zakymdanuyna-akeletin-in-anyktady/>

that vaccine-related information evolves, changes, and returns over time. However, it can be noticed

that at a later stage, the population analyses information unlike at the earlier stage.

Interesting fakes of 2021

Coronavirus

In 2021, coronavirus, political events (elections) and conflicts were the main topics of fakes in the countries of Central Asia. One way or another, coronavirus fakes circulated in the information space. For example, frightening fake stories on the danger of vaccinating children were periodically “relevant”. Parents were frightened by fakes about dangerous substances in vaccines that “kill children”. Moreover, false information was spread that unvaccinated children would not be allowed to attend school. In Kazakhstan, a fake was sent out about the development of a standard for killing children in Kazakhstan. According to another bogeyman story, after the adoption of this project, it will be possible to take away children from their parents for experiments¹²⁸.

A frequent topic of fakes was related to restrictive measures in connection with the infection. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, a message was circulated that people would not be able to attend public places without a QR code.¹²⁹ Also, there were so-called “zombie fakes”, which have been circulating in different countries not for the first year, slightly adapting to the local context. Unidentified people claimed that the PCR swabs used to diagnose COVID-19 were dangerous and could cause cancer.

¹²⁸ <https://stopfake.kz/ru/archives/8497>

¹²⁹ https://kaktus.media/.../450350_qr_kod_dlia_posesheniia...

This is just because those swabs are sterilised with ethylene oxide, which is a dangerous chemical substance that causes cancer.¹³⁰ Or, for example, in Uzbekistan, a video was circulated in which women vaccinated against coronavirus allegedly began to give birth to children with many mutations: with tails, hair on the body and numerous limbs. Reports of mutant babies from mothers vaccinated with Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines came from Fatih Erbakan, the leader of the Turkish Welfare Party. During a TV appearance, Erbakan spoke of the impact of mRNA vaccines against COVID-19 on human DNA and presented photographs of babies with mutations. Meanwhile, none of the pictures is in any way linked with vaccination against coronavirus. The first picture shown of a child with a tail was taken by Simon Stone in a photo editor in 2009.¹³¹

In Kyrgyzstan, a fake about an alternative vaccine that can be administered without injections, by inhaling through the nose, spread on WhatsApp. Information about the development of this vaccine appeared last autumn but at that time the medicinal product had only been tested on genetically modified mice. There is no information on further studies and test-

¹³⁰ <https://factcheck.kg/testy-na-covid-19-ne-vyzyvayut-rak/>

¹³¹ <https://podrobno.uz/.../novyy-feyk-uzbekis-tantsy.../>

ing stages.¹³² People who allegedly received the vaccine against COVID-19 claimed that a magnet could be applied to the injection site and it would hold. This is how the authors of the commercials hint that metal microchips are injected under the skin along with the vaccine.¹³³ Or, for example, false information about the risk of developing myocarditis after vaccination is disseminated.¹³⁴ The most widespread fake narrative among Kazakhstani about the dangers of vaccination for reproductive health is one of the main reasons for the mass refusal among young people. Another fake on this topic, “Vaccines against COVID-19 can cause miscarriage in women and infertility in men”, was denied by the editorial office of *Stopfake.kz*.¹³⁵

Fraudulent schemes

Most often, fraudulent fakes were circulated in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The drawing of cash prizes in exchange for personal data were often announced.¹³⁶ For example, in the Tajik segment of the social networks Instagram and Facebook, there was a video where local announcers were filmed but the voices belonged to other people. The video talks about a cash prize and, despite the errors in speech and text, people fall for it and share

¹³² <https://factcheck.kg/vakczinu-ot-kورونا-virusa-ne.../>

¹³³ <https://factcheck.kg/kyrgyzstanczev-chipi-ryuyut-s.../>

¹³⁴ <https://stopfake.kz/ru/archives/7057>

¹³⁵ <https://stopfake.kz/ru/archives/7019>

¹³⁶ <https://factcheck.tj/.../fejck-2-000-somonii-shirkati-bar.../>

this video, circulating it everywhere.¹³⁷ In Uzbekistan, fraudsters in on-line markets became more active. They offer a product that is not actually available or express a desire to buy your product. In the case of mutual trade, the phisher fraudulently steals funds from bank cards.¹³⁸ For example, they call people, introduce themselves as an officer of a bank or an organisation, and request information about a plastic card. Then, having gained access to the card, they withdraw all the funds available on it. Besides, criminals, using the brands of well-known financial corporations, create fake websites identical to the original ones, in which the victim opens access to his or her plastic card by filling in its data.¹³⁹ Also, fakes spread in Kazakhstan in October 2021 were related to the population census. In the messenger, Kazakhstani circulated an audio message about scammers who, under the pretext of a population census, allegedly made video calls, scanned the faces and take loans on behalf of the people.¹⁴⁰

Political events

On the eve of the parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan, fake information about some candidates and politicians was circulated on social networks on behalf of the media.

¹³⁷ <https://factcheck.tj/.../fejck-burdi-mol-bar-ivazi-nasbi.../>

¹³⁸ https://t.me/antifake_uz/135

¹³⁹ https://t.me/antifake_uz/128

¹⁴⁰ <https://stopfake.kz/ru/archives/8991>

Thus, with reference to Radio Azattyk, information appeared that the leader of the Butun Kyrgyzstan opposition party, Adakhan Madumarov, had left the country, and the post was accompanied by the logo of Azattyk¹⁴¹. Or, for example, there was information that the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kyrgyz Republic to Malaysia, Azimbek Beknazarov, was leaving his post and returning to Kyrgyzstan¹⁴². On the day of the presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan, two photos with results at a polling station in Sakhalin were circulated on social networks. On one of the ACS checks, the elected president Sadyr Japarov was winning, on the other, one of the candidates, Adakhan Madumarov, was taking the lead. As the Factcheck.kg team revealed, the photo with the image of the ACS check, where 345 votes were cast for Madumarov, was a fake. A photo of riots in the United States was circulating on social networks, where a young guy was noticed wearing a sports suit with the image of the flag of Kyrgyzstan. As it turned out later, this photo was a photoshop.

A sentence of three-year imprisonment was given to a man who created a fake profile on one of the popular social networks on behalf of the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev. While serving his sentence, he was also prohibited to use the Internet, says Bobur Tulyaganov, spokesman for the head of the Tashkent Region Police Department. The hearing on the case took place in the building of the Chirchik District Court, where the verdict was announced

¹⁴¹ <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/31575562.html>

¹⁴² https://kaktus.media/.../445513_azimbek_beknazarov...

to him. In March 2021, a 39-year-old man temporarily residing in the city of Chirchik, Tashkent Region, created a fake profile of the President of Uzbekistan on Facebook. He presented himself to citizens as the leader of the republic, as the head of the presidential administration and promised them to give practical help in solving problems for monetary reward. He was later unmasked and detained by law enforcement officers.¹⁴³

The situation in Afghanistan in mid-August 2021 gave rise to a wave of fakes in the media space of Central Asia. The fake photo of “Taliban with an ice cream” has circulated not only in the media of Uzbekistan. In the social networks of Tajikistan, this fake was also spread virally. The caption for the photo, which apparently shows an Afghan man, claims the man is a member of the Taliban, buying an ice cream and celebrating his victory after the capture of Kabul. A reverse image search revealed that the photo was taken back in 2002 by American photographer Steve McCurry. Steve posted the photo on his Twitter account on 28 June 2021 and wrote: “An Afghan man buys ice cream for his children in Puli Khumri, Afghanistan, 2002”.¹⁴⁴

In Kyrgyzstan, videos were circulated on WhatsApp depicting execution of people by firing squads allegedly in Afghanistan.¹⁴⁵ Also, reports about the recognition of the Taliban government in the world by three states (China, Saudi

¹⁴³ <https://uz.sputniknews.ru/.../v-uzbekistane-feykovogo...>

¹⁴⁴ <https://twitter.com/McCurryStu.../status/1409527665187504131>

¹⁴⁵ https://kaktus.media/.../444491_gyvd_bishkeka_prosit...

Arabia, and Pakistan) were circulated. No country has made an official declaration recognising the Taliban government. In its official statement, the Saudi Arabian Foreign Ministry, expressed hope for an early stabilisation of the situation in Afghanistan. The Chinese Foreign Ministry stated that first of all it respected the choice of the Afghan people and the state sovereignty of Afghanistan¹⁴⁶. A video, which was actively circulating and showed Afghan fighters as if heading to Isfara, appeared to be a fake. The video showed the movement of armed people in trucks. As it was revealed later, this video was a fragment of a film that was shot in 2003 and was dedicated to the 60th anniversary of the 201st Division.¹⁴⁷ In Uzbekistan, fakes related to Afghanistan also had a joking nature, and memes beginning to spread. The Foreign Ministry of Uzbekistan denied numerous reports about the presence of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and other Afghan politicians in Uzbekistan¹⁴⁸.

In Tajikistan, against the background of the border conflict between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, many unsubstantiated reports were circulated. For example, one of the most bombastic posts was published on behalf of Assol Moldokmatova, a civil activist and the Secretary General of the Issyk-Kul Forum named after Chingiz Aitmatov. On 3 May, Assol post-

¹⁴⁶ <https://factcheck.kg/soobshheniya-o-priznani-talibana-v.../>

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/BRYCACentralAsia/photos/a.124344049206377/370664181241028/>

¹⁴⁸ <https://uz.sputniknews.ru/.../ashrafa-gani-i-drugix...>

ed on her Facebook page the post “Good news: the reaction of Mr Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the President of Turkey.” According to the report, her open letter with a complaint about “threats from Tajikistan directed against Kyrgyzstan” was delivered to the President of Turkey, who “reacted immediately”.¹⁴⁹

Flying train and werewolf

Facebook users were not surprised by the “Japanese innovation”. They noted in their comments that such technologies were quite possible for that country, which is highly developed in the field of technology. There were also sceptical comments: “Of course, it’s hard to believe that such things already exist,” and even such as follows: “Yes, I personally saw such a train”.¹⁵⁰ However, many users noted that this was a montage and took the information more as a joke¹⁵¹. Also in June, a video fake with an “unknown monster” that looked like a werewolf was actively circulated in messengers. In the video, a man says in Kazakh that he hit the unknown creature with his car and at first confused it with a dog.¹⁵² The fake went viral and caused quite a large public outcry.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ <https://twitter.com/MevlutCavu.../status/1388521725634260993>

¹⁵⁰ <https://factcheck.tj/.../faktcheknews-ofitsialnoj-otvet...>

¹⁵¹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/portalmolodeji.official>

¹⁵² <https://factcheck.kz/.../fej-k-video-so-sbitym-oborotnem-v...>

¹⁵³ <https://factcheck.tj/.../nepravda-preduprezhdenie-erdoganom-tadzhikistana-dlya-nepovtorenie-voennoj-agressii/>

Conclusions

It is difficult to fit the whole situation and all the examples in a single report because this topic requires huge resources and processing of information. During a year, the team of media monitors from four countries monitored 1,430,934 messages, and only 5,113 (3,660 of the Hate Speech Category and 1,453 of the Disinformation Category) turned out to be toxic.

Summing up the results of 2021, we can say that Central Asia has found itself in a web of infodemia (as anti-vaxers and conspiracy theorists intensified) and sinophobia, sexism against women and Islamophobia since the situation in Afghanistan. The authorities in some countries did not immediately recognize that there were anti-vaxers in the countries and did not take urgent action, which was a catalyst for infodemia and a vigorous information campaign against immunization. People were forced to spread unverified and unofficial information through social media and communication channels, which led to panic and chaos. For example, in Kazakhstan, anti-vaxers reached school and started a “fight”, only later law enforcement agencies of Kazakhstan took measures.

Speaking of hate speech, we would like to note a similar devel-



opment trend with the tendencies of disinformation. The main topics (ethnic, national and religious) and related (gender equality, language issues (Russian vs local languages) were attended. This trend is steadily continuing the dynamics of 2020.

The BRYCA team encourages everyone to be vigilant in the dissemination of any information, to check the source, to be media-friendly and not to resort to hate language. We hope that the language of hostility and disinformation in our region will be even less in 2022 than in the previous two years.

Disclaimer:

This review is based on the results of the media monitoring carried out within the BRYCA project “Media and Information Literacy to Promote Critical Thinking of Youth in Central Asia”. The monitoring has been carried out in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan since January 2020.

The BRYCA project is implemented with the financial support from the European Union. All examples presented in the review

are provided for information purposes only. We are categorically against the use of hate speech of any tonality.

This publication has been prepared with the financial support from the European Union. The content of this publication is the responsibility of the media monitors’ team of the BRYCA project and does not represent the views of the European Union.



List of selected and monitored online sources



Kazakhstan



Websites

1. newreporter.org
2. factcheck.kz
3. caravan.kz
4. tengrinenews.kz
5. nur.kz
6. total.kz
7. zakon.kz
8. sputnik.kz
9. holanews.kz
10. 365info.kz
11. Egemen.kz
12. Aikyn.kz
13. Stan.kz
14. Qamshy.kz
15. Sn.kz
16. Baribar.kz
17. Alashainasy.kz
18. Qazaquni.kz
19. Jaszqazaq.kz
20. Zhasalash.kz
21. Abai.kz
10. Астана - Что? Где? Когда? - Facebook
11. Атамның басы-ай” - Facebook
12. “Дүниежүзі қазақтары” - Facebook
13. “Шындықтан қаша алмайсың” - Facebook
14. “Жаға ұстатты” - Facebook
15. “Қазақ ұлтшылдары” - Facebook
16. “ztb_kz” - Instagram
17. “eapgram” - Instagram
18. “ZTB | Qazaqstan” – VK



Social media pages and networks

1. Оян Қазақстан - Facebook
2. Kok Team- Facebook
3. ДВД Алматы- Facebook
4. Под Небом Казахстана - VK
5. Raketa – VK
6. Iada.kz - VK
7. Алматы. Что? Где? Когда? - Facebook
8. МЫ ТЮРКИ - Facebook
9. Кокшетау: Что? Где? Когда? - Facebook
1. Әміржан Қосанов
2. Мұхамеджан Тазабек
3. Айдос Сарым
4. Расул Жұмалы
5. Мұхтар Тайжан
6. Серік Абас-Шах
7. Айгүл Орынбек
8. Самат Сақ
9. Дина Елгезек
10. Сәкен Майғазиєв
11. Ахметбек Нұрсила
12. Аятжан Ахметжанұлы
13. Жанболат Мамай
14. Ержан Рашев
15. Досым Сатпаев
16. Кайрат Кудайберген
17. Баян Алагузова
18. Денис Кривошеев
19. Нуртас Адамбаев
20. Алтай Байшулаков
21. Серікжан Есенғосұлы
22. Ермек Нарымбай

 **Kyrgyzstan** **Websites**

1. Kaktus Media
2. Kloop.kg
3. Akipress
4. K-news
5. 24.kg
6. Вечерний Бишкек
7. Sputnik.kg
8. Инфограм
9. Kyrgyz News
10. Новости Кыргызстана
11. Kyrgyz Azattyk Unalgysy
12. Супер инфо
13. Маалымат
14. Эл гезит
15. Next TV
16. Ачык Айкын
17. BBC News Кыргыз
18. Акипресс
19. TRT Kyrgyz
7. OMK5
8. Черный список.
9. Нам не понравилось
10. DIESEL.ELCAT.KG
11. AKIpress
12. Kaktus Media
13. Azattyk Media
14. KLOOP

 **Social media pages and networks**

1. Новости Кыргызстана
2. Беспредел КГ
3. КОМПРОМАТ КГ
4. Кыргызстан 2020
5. Кабарчы КГ
6. Авторынок Кыргызстана

**Leaders of public opinion**

1. Дастан Бекешев
2. Алтын Капалова
3. Бектур Искендер
4. Гульмира Тыналиева
5. Мээрим Осмоналиева
6. Гульнура Торалиева
7. Кадыр Маликов
8. Пахман Валентина
9. Болот Ибрагимов
10. Улан Үсөйүн
11. Арстанбек Абдылдаев
12. Чубак ажы Жалилов
13. Рита Карасартова
14. Илим Карыпбеков
15. Асель Кадырбекова
16. Тимур Файзиев
17. Абдышукур Нарматов

 **Uzbekistan** **Websites**

1. kun.uz
2. gazeta.uz
3. podrobno.uz
4. nuz.uz
5. spot.uz
6. anhor.uz
7. repost.uz
8. vot.uz
9. upl24.uz
10. uzdaily.uz
11. vkratce.uz
12. xabar.uz
13. vesti.uz
14. daryo.uz
15. qalampir.uz
16. mytube.uz
17. mover.uz
18. fergananews.com
19. centralasia.media
20. sputnik.uz
21. ozodlik.uz



Social media pages and networks

1. Alter ego (Youtube link)
2. Women Empowerment Club Tashkent
3. mdk.uz
4. Наблюдения под чинарой
5. Портал молодежи Фешн терапия
6. Не молчи
7. Мастава
8. Потребитель.уз
9. Инсайдер
10. Столик с видом на планету
11. Дочь железного дракона
12. Pickuper UZ
13. TROLL UZ
14. Водители Ташкента (DRIVERS.UZ)
15. Потребитель плюс. Постим всё, что запрещено в группе Потребитель.уз



Leaders of public opinion

1. Азиза Умарова
2. Комил Алламжонов
3. Шерзод Кудратходжаев
4. Лола Каримова
5. Никита Макаренко
6. Ирина Матвиенко
7. Фернанда Манчини
8. Саша Иванюженко
9. Ферузхан Якубходжаев
10. Али Кахаров
11. Хушнудбек Худойбердиев
12. Нигора Акилова
13. Давлетов Кирилл
14. Альтман Юлий Юсупов
15. Умид Гафуров



Tajikistan



Websites

1. Информационное агентство «Азия»
2. Национальное ИА «Ховар»
3. Информационное агенство «Авесто»
4. Сайт радио «Озоди»
5. Информационное агенство «SugdNEWS»
6. Международное ИА «Sputnik»
7. Информационный сайт Таджикистана
8. Сайт газеты» Согдийская правда»
9. Сайт газеты «Вечерный Душанбе-Вечёркв»
10. Информационный сайт
11. Сайт газеты «Токикистон»
12. Сайт газеты «Оила»
13. Сайт газеты «Фараж»



Social media pages and networks

1. Nigohi nav/Новый взгляд
2. #Насилию Net.
3. Tajik Mama Group
4. Иформация для размышления
5. Обзор Вести Согда
6. Мы Талдикистанцы
7. Женсовет Tj
8. Азия плюс
9. Youth of Sughd/Молодёжь Согда

10. Я люблю Худжанд/ I Love Khujand
11. Центральная Азия: Политика, Общество, Религия
12. МЫ-ТАДЖИКИСТАНЦЫ! / МО -ТОЧИКИСТОНИЁН!
13. Ахбори Тоҷикистон-Новости Таджикистана-News of Tajikistan
14. Новости Центральной Азии/Ахбори Осиёи Марказӣ/Central Asian News
15. Ҷавонони Суғд — Youth of Sughd
16. АХБОР БАРОИ АФКОР/ИНФОРМАЦИЯ ДЛЯ РАЗМЫШЛЕНИЯ
17. Asia-Plus
18. TV YORMATOV
19. Пайки Сугд
20. Телевизиони Тоҷикистон
21. dfilm.tj



Leaders of public opinion

1. Раҷаб Мирзо
2. Хилватшоҳ Маҳмуд (Ҳоҷаев)
3. Сайидмуҳиддин Дӯстмуҳаммадиён
4. Сайф Достиев (Мизроб)
5. Раҳматилло Зойиров
6. Салими Аюбзод
7. Мирзо Салимпур
8. Мавҷуда Соҳибназарова
9. Саиджафар Усмонзода
10. Икбол Тешаев
11. Негматулло Мирсаидов
12. Зебо Таджибаева
13. Зульфия Голубева
14. Лилия Гайсина
15. Гульнора Амиршоева
16. Раҷаб Мирзо
17. Рустам Гулов
18. Manzura Mahkamova
19. Чони Сафарзода
20. Аъзам Акбаров
21. Негматулло Мирсаидов