JANYL BOKONBAEVA

BACKGROUND

I was born in Kyrgyzstan, a small country of astounding beauty in Central Asia, and I live in my home country. Kyrgyzstan is a land of snow-covered mountains, crispy fresh air, and gorgeous river valleys. In fact, Kyrgyzstan in particular and Central Asia in general are superb destinations for ecotourism and cultural tourism. Bishkek, the capital, is a small, quiet city with green parks. All visitors to the city and to the country appreciate the Kyrgyz people's kindness and hospitality. In Bishkek, one finds a huge number of Internet cafes, working 24/7, and the learning environment in general is good. Public libraries have suffered from a lack of literature and newspapers, but some university libraries are very good and resource centres at embassies, international organisations, and civic organisations offer up-to-date information materials. Many students from the region come to Kyrgyzstan's universities, and the student and professoriate body is very diverse, consisting of young people and scholars from all Central Asian republics, Afghanistan, China, Turkey, the US, and Europe.

EDUCATION

In 2002, I graduated from Moscow State Institute of International Relations with a B.A. in Regional Studies. I went to Moscow because I wanted a rigorous academic environment. By the time I went to Moscow, I had already had a year-long experience abroad, so the transition from my peaceful home surroundings to fast-paced Moscow living was not too difficult. Although I had a stipend that covered the cost of tuition, it did not cover the cost of living, so it was impossible to make it in Moscow without the generous and loving support of my parents. I owe them a great deal for making my academic career possible. Of course, I was not the only Kyrgyz studying

at my university; in fact, many Kyrgyz students study abroad and, what is more remarkable, many return home to contribute to a better future for their country.

PRESENT INTERESTS

My present academic interests include political systems and processes and conflict and peace studies. This interest was stimulated by the intricate milieu of Central Asian social and political networks; moreover, transition and globalisation challenges are reflected in a unique way in local realities. Processes (such as modernisation, liberalisation, or, on the contrary, archaisation) are a very interesting, as they evolve in complex, interdependent dynamics. So observing them is a very exciting thing to do. Conflict resolution is a very vibrant subject to study, too, as issues of conflict and peace go deep to the very essence of life, and studying these issues is extremely rewarding.

I have also done several study, training, and internship assignments. These included training in mission management and support, seminars, summer schools on politics and security, and internships in international projects related to social and development issues. I have been working for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Academy since 2004 as a Research and Training Assistant. The organisation is a public foundation that acts to promote the principles and values of OSCE, as embodied in its comprehensive security vision for Central Asia. The Academy has a high quality Masters degree programme in Political Science and a variety of training and research projects.

I have been closely involved in issues related to political science, international relations, and capacity building throughout my academic and professional life, so the OSCE Academy is just the right place to be. I find the organisation a dynamically developing, prestigious institution that offers great possibilities for self-improvement, for networking, and for change in the awareness and professionalism of its beneficiaries. As I witness these changes in our training participants' careers and knowledge, I am highly encouraged and motivated to continue with my work of coordinating, supervising, and assisting in training and research projects.

CURRENT WORK

As I stated, I work for the OSCE Academy, a public foundation for education in Central Asia. I coordinate several training projects on media and democracy, conflict transformation, human rights, and communication.

Our training participants work as civil servants, academicians (independent researchers, teachers at

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universities), and non-governmental activists. These are energetic and civic-minded professionals acting in promotion and protection of human rights, the rule of law, and good governance. The Academy promotes a regional (central Asian) representation in all its training events in order to foster an intensive exchange of experience and common strategies. Our trainings have a large interactive component and are always designed with consideration of participant needs and demands. Our research activities have also been quite successful, culminating in written works on ethnicity in education, legal issues in border management, and rule of law and local traditions. Our training and research alumni have been successful in continuing their academic careers, finding funds for further research and training, but also in implementing various awareness raising and educational events throughout the region. For example, two of our conflict resolution training alumni have recently received an Austrian grant for a project on prevention of torture in prisons.

THE INTERNET GOVERNANCE CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMMEME

The Internet Governance Capacity Building programmeme was one of the most beneficial learning experiences in my academic career, due to the programme's interactive methodology; its step-by-step, student-friendly approach; and a host of highly interesting, multi-disciplinary topics. For me, the topics of greatest interest were:
• Evolution of Internet governance – since I am interested in processes and dynamics of change, I found this topic simply irresistible;
• Human rights and education – this topic directly relates to my work;
• E-governance and e-voting – with my background in political science, I followed this discussion with interest.

The programme influenced my interests in Internet governance related processes in my country and the region. Before the programme, my idea of Internet governance was that it was a vague phenomenon, ridden by technological difficulties and technical details. After the course, my understanding was considerably clearer, as I realised the role of diplomacy and policy aspects in Internet governance.

I now see issues of freedom of media; ethical and normative regulations for the Internet; and the legal and social-cultural implications of Internet governance from another, improved and broadened angle. Before, I did not comprehend fully the scope of changes that are occurring in governance, changes that are revolutionary in terms of technologies employed and the expected effects on the lives of ordinary people. These insights have allowed me to re-shape my working priorities and plans for future directions in work and academics. The programme gave me some interesting ideas for future business projects and Ph D studies, and for topics that might be of interest in our training and research programmes.

THE FUTURE

Democratisation entails many challenges for the future of the digital world in my region and my country. Freedom of expression and freedom of media are very often at stake, and civil society should keep a constant watch on regulative measures and other restrictions imposed on Internet sites to prevent free and fair dissemination of information. For example, some Kyrgyz members of parliament have suggested abolishing the posting of viewer comments on news sites, as some of these comments were believed to be "slanderous" and "disturbing" and could threaten stability and peace. While the intellectual and ethical quality of user comments on some Kyrgyz news sites is often very low, banning

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expression of thought in an indiscriminative manner is not a solution. Rather, more emphasis should be put on responsibility of site editors and responsible staff to filter offensive, slanderous, and hate-inciting comments, and to promote a culture of non-violence and respect.

A more equitable international regime in information and knowledge exchange is needed to reduce the negative repercussions of the digital divide on rural and remote communities in the developing world. Educational software is badly needed in Kyrgyz rural schools and public universities, but the cost is too high for schools that sometimes lack funds for basic facilities.

My plans for the future are to continue working in education and training, disseminating knowledge on various social and political issues, participating in social projects, and, thus, contributing to the building of human capacity, especially among young people. I also appreciate having this job, as the development of Kyrgyzstan depends on that of its neighbours and trade partners. I get inspired by the way young people of all Central Asian countries communicate, cooperate, and engage in fruitful networking. So I believe that Internet governance knowledge and skills should be disseminated further among students of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

MY E-LEARNING EXPERIENCE
E-learning is not really different from taking a physical-world course in the sense that one still has to apply a

certain effort to stay abreast of events, listen to classmates, and engage in fruitful discussion. I find e-learning tools extremely useful and fun.

Of course, there is a difference from taking a physical course and some nuances of real-world, human interaction were missing. Yet, in a way, this difference helped me to concentrate better. Whereas in a physical course, discussion often sways away from the initial theme, in e-learning, one can stay more focused, either because the topic is always before one, or because of the limited time for chat sessions. Also, one learns to express oneself as clearly and succinctly as possible, to avoid spending a lot of time typing.

I had no major difficulty in balancing the course demands with my other activities, as the course schedule was very flexible, allowing for entering the class anytime, leaving the assignment, and coming back when needed. To a certain degree, the asynchronous learning even helped me better organise my schedule.

It was extremely interesting to interact with people from different backgrounds, countries, and stakeholder groups. Discussion with every person was like discovering a completely different world. Finding out that many problems of socio-economic development in other countries mirrors the current state of affairs in Asian countries was a very positive insight. It meant that I could use best practices and accumulated experience from many places.