

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 25, 2019

His Excellency Emomali Rahmon  
President of the Republic of Tajikistan  
Palace of the Nation  
Dushanbe  
Republic of Tajikistan

Dear Mr. President:

Over the past few years, the United States and the Republic of Tajikistan have looked to deepen our relationship both bilaterally and through the C5+1 Forum. As this process continues, we must ensure to maintain an honest dialogue about issues that arise. We write today to express concern about reports that journalists affiliated with Radio Ozodi, the Tajik Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), are being harassed, threatened, and in some cases, denied accreditation to work in your country.

The mission of Radio Ozodi is to provide accurate and independent news and information to local audiences. Its reporters diligently produced informed, unbiased reporting about politics, economics, social issues, and human rights in widely consumed and trusted stories. In the days of social media, its pages are among the country's most popular. Tajikistan's own national media monitors ranked it the number one news website in Tajikistan this year, and officials in your own government say they read or listen to Ozodi's coverage of politics and developments in Tajik society.

In order to continue its important work, Radio Ozodi must, of course, be able to hire staff in its bureau in Dushanbe, as well as in Tajikistan's other regions, and employees must be able to freely do their jobs without fear for their safety. However, the Foreign Ministry currently has declined to issue credentials to a total of eight journalists and support staff, effectively preventing them from this important work. Among these are video journalist Barotali Nazarov (pen name: Barot Yusufi), who Tajik authorities banned in June, two recently hired journalists, and five renewals, one of whom has been waiting since 2017. The Ministry has even denied credentials to Radio Ozodi's bureau chief in Dushanbe.

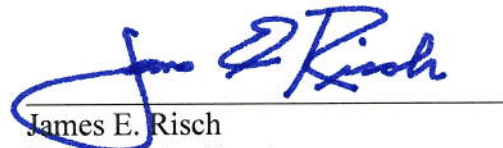
We are concerned that accreditation is being used to restrict and attempt to influence Radio Ozodi's independent journalism. Indeed, Tajik authorities temporarily striped six journalists of their credentials in 2016 after the Service published a critical article about a member of your family. That year, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media issued a statement criticizing the use of accreditation by some member states "as a work permit," and declared that, "[a]ccreditation should not serve as a tool to control content."

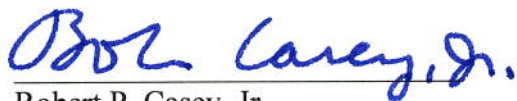
As members of the U.S. Congress, which funds RFE/RL with the aim to promote a free and independent press, we are concerned about this ongoing harassment of Radio Ozodi and its staff. If this continues, we worry that there will be repercussions for the strengthening of the U.S.-Tajik relationship. We urge you to ensure that Ozodi is allowed to operate and its staff are accredited expeditiously.

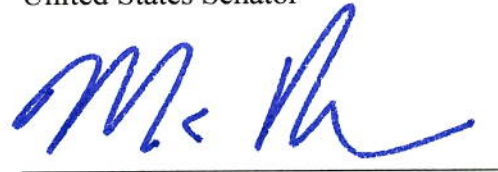
As Tajikistan looks to increase and enhance its international relationships, including with the U.S. and Europe, it is critical that Tajikistan allows Radio Ozodi and other media outlets to operate freely.

Sincerely,

  
Robert Menendez  
United States Senator

  
James E. Risch  
United States Senator

  
Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

  
Marco Rubio  
United States Senator