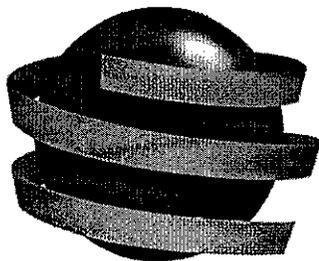


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## INTERNEWS

### *QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT*

Armenia-Azerbaijan Spacebridge

USAID Award Number 112-G-00-00-00009-00  
Activities Report for April 1-June 30, 2001  
and Final Project Report

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## **QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT**

Internews Network, Inc.

USAID Award Number 112-G-00-00-00009-00

Quarterly Report for the period April 1-June 30, 2001  
and Final Project Report

### **I. OVERVIEW**

This is the Fourth Quarter and Final Report for the USAID-funded Armenia-Azerbaijan Space Bridges project, which was organized by Internews network.

The United States Agency for International Development awarded Internews Network \$275,549.00 to produce a series of 24 interactive video links between Armenia and Azerbaijan to increase mutual understanding and tolerance. These links were broadcast as a weekly television show in both countries.

This project, which began on July 1, 2000, stayed on schedule and within budget. This report reflects activities and achievements between April 1 and June 30, 2001. In addition, this report provides a summary of the project's achievements, as well as future plans as a result of this landmark undertaking.

On Nov. 16, 2000, Internews successfully launched this weekly-televised exchange, known as a "Space Bridge," that was broadcast under the title *Front Line*. From the initial weeks at the outset of the launch of this program, its popularity received broad viewer interest and initiated a lively public dialogue on relations between the countries (see section IV, "Governmental/Viewer Response"). The program was available to a potential audience of five million people in the two countries combined.

This project coincided with an increased pace of peace talks between Azeri President Heydar Aliyev and Armenian President Robert Kocharyan. While no peace was reached during this period, rumors of both a breakthrough as well as a return to war abounded in both countries. This tremendously raised the profile of *Front Line*, the only public dialogue between the two countries.

### **II. FOURTH QUARTER PROGRESS AND FINAL PROJECT OVERVIEW**

This regional project covers a number of intermediate results under USAID strategic objective 2.1 in Armenia "More Transparent, Accountable, and Responsive Democratic Governance" and strategic objective 2.1 in Azerbaijan, "Civil Society Better Organized and Represented."

Internews carried out the following activities during this quarter:

- 1. Produced and aired the six final weekly Space Bridges on ANS TV in Baku and Prometheus TV in Yerevan.**
- 2. Shortly following the end of this project, initiated plans with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe for similar cross-border television productions.**
- 3. Also following the end of this project, Internews and Space Bridge staff participated in a special conference sponsored by the Council of Europe on the value of cross-border production in defusing conflict.**

## 1. Project Implementation

The Space Bridge, which ran under the title *Front Line*, began airing on Nov. 16, 2000. As of the end of this reporting period, we have produced and broadcast 24 of the 24 planned programs.

The show ran for 30 minutes. In Baku, *Front Line* aired on ANS TV at 10 p.m. every Thursday; in Yerevan, it aired on Prometheus TV every Thursday at 10 p.m. The potential audience was over five million viewers in the two countries combined.

The show employed existing satellite-link infrastructure in the Mir television studios of Baku and Yerevan. Every Wednesday at noon the two production teams established the satellite link and taped a show lasting approximately 35 minutes. The show was later edited separately by each production team to 30 minutes in order to eliminate pauses and to tighten the sound track, which suffered from an inevitable time delay in transmission. As a previously agreed to rule, neither side was allowed to cut comments made by guests. Hosts comments were cut by mutual agreement.

*The topics and guests that were aired in the final six programs of this project were as follows:*

<b>No</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Guest</b>
19	22.03.01	Football	<b>Valeri Hajiyev</b> – head of the department of National Teams of the Association of Azerbaijan Football Federation
			<b>Edward Markarov</b> – Coach of “Mika Ashtarak”
20	29.03.01	Joining the European Council	<b>Rustam Mamedov</b> – doctor of International Law / was a department head in the staff of the Azerbaijan president and Baku State University’s Dep. of Int. and Gov. Rights of Foreign Countries
			<b>Artashes Geghamyan</b> – leader of the “National Unity” Party. Head of the parliamentary fraction “Rights and Unity”
21	05.04.01	Youth and Conflict	<b>Vafa Asadova</b> – graduate of Baku State University, master of Psychology;
			<b>Vlada Alekhankina</b> – senior assistant of the “Center for development” of the University “Khazar”
			<b>Ashot Avetisyan</b> – undergraduate of the Philosophy dep. Of Yerevan State University, president of the NGO “Yerevan Center for Democracy and Peace”;
			<b>Sara Margaryan</b> – works at the Chair of Regional Geography of the Linguistic University
22	12.04.01	Comedy Clubs	<b>Vado Korovin</b> – author and leading actor of the KVN team “The Guys from Baku”, one of the managers of the TV program “Planet the Guys from Baku”;
			<b>Mourad Dadashev</b> – the leading actor of the KVN team “The Guys from Baku”

			<p><b>Grigori Gasparyan</b> – <i>one of the founders of the KVN team "The New Armenians", the leading actor of the team;</i></p> <p><b>Aram Saghatelyan</b> - <i>Member of the team since its establishment, vice –president of the public organization "Pan-Armenian Network"</i></p>
23	19.04.01	Prospects for Regulation	<p><b>Fuad Akhundov</b> – <i>expert of the Analytical Services at the Secretariat of the President of Azerbaijan;</i></p>
			<p><b>Lyudmila Haroutyunyan</b> - <i>head of Sociology Department of Yerevan State University</i></p>
24	26.04.01	Dialogue	<p><b>Tofiq Zulfugarov</b> – <i>ex minister of foreign Affairs from 1998</i></p>
			<p><b>Heydar Babayev</b> – <i>chair of the State Committee of Securities under the President of Azerbaijan;</i></p>
			<p><b>Vagif Mustafayev</b> – <i>film producer, recently assigned as deputy minister at the Ministry of Culture</i></p>
			<p><b>Armen Darbinyan</b> – <i>chair of the Custodial Council of the International Fund for Human Development;</i></p> <p><b>Boris Havasardyan</b> – <i>president of the Yerevan Press Club;</i></p> <p><b>Ruben Gevorkyants</b> – <i>film producer</i></p>

It should be noted that one program that was taped in February was never aired because of abrasive content. This was a program entitled "Soldiers and Conflict". This friction manifested despite the fact that Internews spent a considerable amount of time briefing each guest before the show in order to stress the program's grounding in conflict resolution through constructive dialogue. Internews therefore decided that, based on discussions involving both production teams, this program was not useful in terms of conflict resolution and should not be aired. We feel this was the most responsible course to take given the highly sensitive nature of this project.

## 2. Consultation

Internews twice employed the skills and expertise of an American consultant during this project. This was extremely valuable in that it boosted the professionalism and dynamism of this program.

Both consultations were conducted by Eric May, a broadcast professional with prior experience with Internews. Mr. May is a top-quality trainer, with a reputation for professionalism and results not only in Internews trainings in the Caucasus, but in other C.I.S. countries as well.

Mr. May conducted trainings and consultations to *Front Line's* production and technical staffs in both Baku and Yerevan. His first consultation was held in both countries in early November, leading up to the launch of the first program. His second consultation was held in February, roughly halfway through the project.

The consultations focused on a variety of issues, including:

- Improving studio lighting
- Rearranging studio sets to in order to accommodate multiple guests in both countries.
- Revising studio camera and monitor set-up to achieve universal standards between the countries.

- Establishing parameters for camera sequences in order to standardize the visual flow in both countries.
- Improving the free flow of discussion among guests.
- Working closely with the Azeri producer of news clips for the show in order to create more interesting video packages to show on air.

Both production and technical teams in Baku and Yerevan greatly valued Mr. May's input, and the show achieved a higher degree of professionalism as a direct result of his consultation. Lighting improved, the pace of the show quickened and the quality of the video packages reached a higher level. Mr. May's previous knowledge of the show's format and its production staffs was crucial in this consultation, and allowed him to work quickly and effectively in each country.

### **3. Production meetings**

Over the course of this project we held two production meetings: one prior to the start of production and one halfway through production.

Our teams from both countries first met in Tbilisi in June 2000 for three days to decide themes of the program, format, title, discuss issues of balance and finalize fairness and editing standards.

The second meeting took place in Moscow in January 2001 for three days to discuss the show's format, pace, choice of guests and new topics.

During this second meeting our teams also learned from a critique of the show from four outside television professionals, Ilya Kor (independent cameraman), Marina Razarionova (Internews Russia producer), Alexander Tischkof (ethnographer and conflictologist) and Dr. Leokadia Mikhailovna Drobisheva (conflictologist). This consultation was conducted free of charge using professionals with close ties to our Internews Moscow office, which once again illustrates the organization's ability to capitalize on its institutional capacity.

At the same time, the production staff took advantage of this opportunity to organize an unprecedented roundtable discussion in Moscow of 50 diaspora from Armenia and Azerbaijan at which Internews showcased *Front Line*. After reviewing excerpts from the program, participants spent several hours at a social gathering critiquing the show, and offering suggestions of how to improve relations between the countries.

## **III. IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES**

Internews Armenia continued to ask the Armenian government for permission to use the Inmarsat satellite transmission system throughout this project. The government refused to issue them a license. Using this system, *Front Line* would be able to be produced at remote locations. However, the Mir studios, while fixed in location, still offered a transmission quality higher than that offered through Inmarsat. While we were unable to use this system during this project, we believe that this could be possible in the future were we to continue such a program.

## **IV. GOVERNMENTAL/VIEWER RESPONSE**

*Front Line* enjoyed broad success in both countries. It was solidly ensconced as the top-rated information program. In addition, an independent poll commissioned by Internews halfway through production showed that 49 percent of residents in Baku watched the program on a regular basis. While no further official polling was conducted, anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that three-quarters or more of the population inside the coverage area watched the program.

In Armenia, a poll conducted immediately following the end of production and airing of the final *Space Bridge* showed that nearly 90 percent of people in the coverage area were regular viewers of the program. More than 50 percent of respondents said they watched to learn about the various alternatives to ending the conflict, while 33 percent watched to learn the views of Azeri politicians.

Understandably, as the show became more popular and more visible, the program was also subject to greater scrutiny. Some of this manifested itself in the form of critical newspaper articles from conservative or right-wing journalists.

Specifically, *Internews* found itself under criticism immediately following the broadcast in mid-March of a program uniting two former professional soccer players who were once teammates together in an Azeri soccer club. The show was highly emotional, as both guests pledged not to discuss the Karabakh conflict and turning instead to reminiscing about their days on the field together. The guests asked each other about old friends and showed one another photographs from their younger days.

In the days following this broadcast, *Internews* was criticized by local Azeri newspaper columnists from *Echo*, *Azadlyg* and *525* for promoting closer ties between the countries at a time when the territorial dispute has still not been solved.

These articles were mainly from conservative and right-wing authors. As such, *Internews* generally dismissed these views as not being representative of the opinions of the public at large, a belief that is supported by our independent viewer research.

## V. IMPACT

As was stated in previous quarterly reports, direct impact is difficult to measure with a project such as this, as attitudes on this long-standing conflict are deeply embedded. However, *Internews* already witnessed the beginning of such change during this project.

### *Four examples include:*

- During the program on “Football”, the Azeri guest invited his Armenian counterpart to Baku for a reunion match. The Armenian guest accepted, and had in fact said he had wanted to propose a similar idea. The two guests tentatively scheduled this match for August.
- After the program on “Religion and Conflict”, several articles by guest and noted Azeri religious academic Rafik Aliyev were published in the Armenian press by mutual agreement.
- After a program on filmmaking, an Azeri film producer was invited to show his work on Armenian television. This was the first time in a decade that Armenians were able to watch an Azeri-made film on Armenian television.
- In Azerbaijan, the *Space Bridges* were named “Best Television Program of the Year” by the Institute for Peace and Democracy. This award means far more than a simple award for professionalism. It is a sign that people are hungry for direct dialogue between the two countries.
- From July 20-22, the *Space Bridges* were the focus of a major conference in Baku organized by the Council of Europe, the *Yeni Nesil* Journalists Union and the Presidential Office. Journalists from Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia participated in this conference, which offered a forum for discussing the benefits and results—as well as the difficulties—of producing such cross-border television programs.

These are the seeds of compassion, cooperation and understanding that Internews has hoped this historic program would foster between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Such ties would not have been possible without this program.

## **VI. FUTURE PLANS**

Profound interest has been shown by various groups and funding organizations in continuing this program. Internews sincerely hopes that this will be possible. At the moment, it is important to note that after the conclusion of *Front Line*, the peace talks fell into a slump, and the rhetoric between countries took a harder line. The possibility of continued Space Bridges must be decided only after taking into consideration the political realities of the moment. There must be a strong belief that additional programs will help solve, and not exacerbate, a political situation, or be used by subversive elements to undermine peace negotiations.

That understood, Internews is planning additional cross-border productions whose idea sprang from the USAID-funded Space Bridges.

First, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has expressed an interest in funding at least two additional Space Bridges through the Mir satellite system and studios in Baku and Yerevan. This is a possibility, and will be discussed in the fall by production teams in both countries.

Second, the OSCE has also expressed an interest in funding three documentary films (one each from Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan). The films, each 20-30 minutes long, would be shot in northwestern Azerbaijan, southern Georgia and northern Armenia, in an area where the three countries closely border one another. The films would examine common issues and problems in an effort to illustrate the similar hopes of three different peoples and cultures.

These projects are, Internews feels, only the nascent possibilities that have emerged after the landmark television productions of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Space Bridges. Internews wishes to thank USAID for its support of this project, and for sharing in the vision of television as a means for achieving tolerance and understanding.