

## Oleg Panfilov

Nick Virzi

Oleg Panfilov is a man who has never held back when trying to express himself. The former member of the Glasnost Defense Fund and current Director for the Center for Journalists in Extreme Situations (CJES) Panfilov has published more than 1,000 articles, written 27 books and eight films in his time as a journalist. When giving interviews in America, however, the 50-year-old native of Tajikistan must rely on a translator to communicate the English language he is able to understand, but not speak.

Panfilov began his career as a journalist simply because he needed money. He started writing in 1974 and continued to do so through his years at the Leninabad State Pedagogical Institute and throughout his time as a school-worker and researcher. As a young person, Oleg recalled that he dreamed of writing to become famous. In the Soviet Union, however, the only kind of writing he was exposed to was propaganda. He loved politics, but was shunned from covering them.

Oleg eventually became more involved in the media, working in Tajik television and as a correspondent for a radio station and various news agencies. Oleg could never focus on just one opportunity at a time.

“After some time I realized, the more famous you are, the more you get paid,” he said with a smile.

What seemed like a perfectly normal and legitimate career in media, however, suddenly took a turn for the worse in 1992 when he was expelled from Tajikistan by the government for his work. He made a decision at that point to devote himself to protecting the rights and freedoms of other journalists. When the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) offered him a position in Moscow, he immediately said yes.

When the Moscow Bureau of CPJ closed down just two years after Panfilov got on board, he quickly found another home at the Glasnost Defense Foundation. This non-profit group was created to protect the rights of Russian journalists and defend Russian freedom of expression. He helped the foundation monitor violations against journalists for six years while also serving as deputy editor-in-chief of a Swedish journal.

In the year 2000, Panfilov created his own journalism defense foundation where he has worked ever since. Like the Glasnost Defense Foundation, the Center for Journalists in Extreme Situations monitors and publishes violations of the press in states of the former Soviet Union. Oleg’s organization also publishes manuals that “arm journalists to fight their own fight” and runs a web site that has informed more than 13 million people about Russian press freedoms. Several employees of the CJES teach as professors as well in universities, and Oleg himself has even developed and taught courses about journalistic security.