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Principles of democratic creative journalism and the modern Azerbaijani press¹

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Abstract. The article discusses several issues related to this topic. The author conducts a study of the principles of democratic creativity of journalism and the application of these internationally recognized principles in journalism in Azerbaijan. In the article, the author also examined a number of national newspapers operating on the democratic principles of accuracy, impartiality, and revealed their difference from other publications. The article emphasizes the commitment of Azerbaijani journalism to the traditions of classical national experience. The article is rich in references to local and foreign theorists who have studied this issue. Goncha Agayeva quoted and expressed her attitude to the ideas of such theorists of journalism as Jahangir Mammadli, Ali Hasanov, Gulu Maharamli, Gurevich S.M., Vartanova E.L. and others.

Keywords: classical journalism, pluralism, national journalism, Bolshevik press, Law on Mass Media of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Press Council, propaganda journalism.

Introduction. The development of democracy is possible only in societies that are based on certain legal foundations for the process of simultaneous collection and transmission of information and have a variety of easily accessible information. Journalists who want to obtain

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information should not encounter artificial obstacles. This, in fact, also applies to ordinary citizens. According to Article 50 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, everyone has the freedom to legally search for, acquire, transmit, compile and disseminate information. "The conditions for obtaining information for everyone must be equal. No other mode of access to information may be established for individuals and groups in any normative legal act or in any other regulatory act and practice" (1,24-25). Although the path to information is the same for everyone, however, in obtaining, collecting and transmitting information, journalists, unlike representatives of other professions, are put forward certain conditions and requirements, the observance of which indicates the level of their professionalism. Observance of these rules - the principles of creativity of journalism - is very important. There is also a scientific and theoretical truth: "Undoubtedly, in any country in the world there are specific features of journalism, but most of them are of a general nature" (2,8). There are quite a lot of principles of a general nature. For example, in the practical book "From journalists to journalists", prepared by the British Council within the framework of the UN Development Program, the following nine principles are indicated:

1. The main task of journalism is to reveal the truth.
2. First of all, journalism must be loyal to citizens.
3. Verification of information is the essence (task) of journalism.
4. Those who practice journalism should not be dependent on the subjects they cover.
5. Journalism must be the driving force behind independent monitoring.
6. Journalism must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
7. Journalism should strive to present important information in an interesting and appropriate form.
8. Journalism must maintain excellence and proportionality in news.
9. Those who practice journalism must be given the opportunity to act according to the dictates of their own conscience" (2,8).

In international journalism, the above-mentioned principles of activity were generalized and brought into a more specific form, and required accuracy, impartiality, conscientiousness, objectivity, and balance from journalists. The introduction of these principles, which had long been formed in international journalism, into the modern Azerbaijani national press was by no means an easy task. During the period that was considered part of the "journalism of the Soviet era", it was simply impossible for our national press, as well as radio and television, to adhere to the above-mentioned principles, and to build media activities on their basis. For about 70 years, the Soviet press was guided by the principles of journalism defined by V.I. Lenin as a directive, and forced all press organs to act in accordance with these principles. "On October 27, 1917, by the first decree signed by V.I. Lenin, 92 newspapers were closed in two months." (3,292)

Later, in June 1922, the Council of People's Commissars created an organization in the country - now the former USSR - called "GLAVLIT", which carried out the function of monitoring ordinary publications. "GLAVLIT" had the following powers: "Protection of military and state secrets in the press and politics; implementation of ideological control over all printed products, radio and television broadcasts, exhibitions; preparation of a list of information that should not be covered in the media; control over printed products imported into the USSR and exported from it, and issuance of appropriate permission; confiscation of politically harmful and outdated literature ..." (4,35). Thus, in the presence of such a control mechanism, the list of powers of which is not provided in full, a journalist would not have been able to introduce international practice into the Azerbaijani press. Such an opportunity arose only after Azerbaijan gained independence. With the return to power of the head of the Azerbaijani state Heydar Aliyev, the state created conditions for freedom of speech and the press, and the use of international practice by journalists. In this regard, the head of state, with the aim of developing a free press, contributed to the formation of its legislative base. The legislative base of the media, first of all, relied on the constitution. "The articles of the constitution, ensuring freedom of the mass media, also prohibit state censorship in the media, including the press." (5.14)

In Azerbaijan, which has regained its independence, the principles of international journalism are being applied to form a democratic press. Since the struggle for independence, Azerbaijani journalism has been trying to apply the above-mentioned principles of creativity to this day. However, these attempts are not always successful and not all journalists want to act according to democratic principles. This situation is typical not only of Azerbaijani journalism, but also of post-Soviet countries in general. Some Russian theorists who study the modern Russian press are not at all satisfied with the existing picture. Almost the entire Russian press at the turn of the millennium, unfortunately, continues the worst traditions of the Soviet press, remaining within the system of mass media and propaganda (SMIP), and not the system of mass information (SMI) or the system of mass communication (SMO)" (6.20). Naturally, in this country journalists are also considering a complete transition to professional standards and are taking serious steps in this direction. However, based on the results of the study, one can conclude that this process will have to go a long and difficult way. As V.V. Tulupov noted, "numerous discussions have shown that even the most experienced journalists have different attitudes to such concepts as objectivity, independence, and responsibility." (6.20)

What is the essence of these principles?

One of the Azerbaijani theorists, Professor J. Mammadli, generalizing these principles, presents them as "Western standards of journalism." This term, both in international and national journalism theory, is often presented as "international doctrines of journalism." As is known, the word "doctrine" is of Latin origin. It is "broadly understood as a concept, a set of principles." (7,181)

One of the most important international principles of journalism is the doctrine of impartiality. Some theorists highly value this principle as a factor that increases the rating of a journalist and a publication, as well as creates conditions for their recognition by all layers of society. Impartial activity requires that a journalist refrain from commenting when presenting information. In fact, this requirement is considered the main guarantee of impartiality. Along with this, the ability of a journalist to have his own opinion outside of the fact is a circumstance that intersects impartiality and objectivity. Another truth is that the application of these principles in practice is by no means an easy matter. We are witnessing that sometimes even in the most democratic countries these principles are violated. In connection with these facts, various opinions are expressed. Some scientists and public figures, normally perceiving such cases, substantiate their opinion as follows: "One can dream of the existence of some kind of constitutional regime, but one should not forget that all politicians also think about their personal interests. There is no regime under which competition is free and the press is impartial." (8,136).

If you think about it deeply, impartiality is nothing more than conscientiousness. A journalist must be able to listen to the voice of conscience. Only an impartial journalist can be conscientious.

The doctrine of good faith, in turn, sets specific conditions for the journalist. "It implies providing the subject with the opportunity to respond to a critical statement addressed to him, to any person or organization, a reasonable, clear explanation to the respondent of the idea of the topic of discussion, preventing the distortion of thought in the process of editing or editing, does not allow the use of the interlocutor's phrase out of context in other circumstances, collecting compromising information on other organizations, insulting defenseless people, abusing the possibilities of printing or broadcasting, etc." (9,142).

Compliance with such key principles as impartiality, integrity, accuracy, fairness, and pluralism by a journalist contributes to the development of professionalism and, indirectly, democratic values. However, it should be noted that it is not easy to strictly observe these principles. Thus, at times, both in international and Azerbaijani journalism, journalists face difficulties in carrying out their activities without expressing their position and giving comments. Even in the mid-20th century, some journalists in the United States believed that abstaining from expressing their position would deprive journalistic activity of its impact. In this regard, "in 1974, the American Journalists Association asked the President of the United States to appeal to the Senate with a proposal to exclude the doctrine of impartiality from the media legislation. Although the President responded positively to this appeal, the Senate rejected his proposal, without even including the issue on the agenda" (9,416).

Although according to modern principles of activity, violation of the principle of impartiality is considered unacceptable, today there are many media outlets that demonstrate a biased position.

However, it should be noted that one cannot equate the expression of a position with bias. Thus, there is a big difference between the concepts of "the position of a journalist" and "biased position". A journalist who has expressed his position in some publication or speech may be considered to have violated professional norms, but cannot be accused of bias. In the modern globalizing world, where the number of conflicts is growing, a journalist who speaks out in connection with the ongoing processes from a civic position, protesting against the oblivion of original national values as a result of globalization, cannot be considered biased. In democratic societies, in which opinion and choice are respected, a journalist's elevation of civic rather than professional duty to the priority should be perceived with tolerance. Of course, if a journalist specifically points to the same object as the cause of current events and, indulging in emotions, brings the feelings of citizenship and responsibility to the level of national discrimination, then this already reduces faith in the impartiality of this journalist's activities.

The reason why we started the discussion of doctrines with the doctrine of impartiality is that this doctrine is given more importance in both international and Azerbaijani journalism. In fact, all the above principles have equal impact on the development of democracy. The principle of accuracy, which seems simple at first glance, is one of the most important issues from the point of view of regulating journalistic activity. Intentional distortion or careless distortion of any fact related to an event leads to a violation of the principle of accuracy of journalism, which is unacceptable in professional terms. The principle of accuracy, first of all, requires responsibility from a journalist. Collection and transmission of facts is a process that requires both responsibility and creativity from a journalist. Thus, a careful, logically consistent construction of facts related to an event prevents a violation of the principle of accuracy in a publication. This also contributes to comprehensive coverage of an event, full preparation of any news or material.

Cases of violation of international norms in the course of journalistic activity are observed not only in the post-Soviet countries and developing countries, but also in developed democratic states in which these principles have been formed.

For example, "It was only later that it became clear how biased the BBC's reporting, renowned worldwide for its impartiality and objectivity, was during the so-called Arab Spring revolution in support of the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime and based on the facts of the alleged genocide of civilians committed by the Libyan authorities" (10). Whereas, "the areas covered by the BBC's ethical guidelines" have the following sequence: "Integrity; impartiality and pluralism of opinion; objectivity, authors and consent; privacy and public interest; criminality and anti-social behaviour; harm and offence; children; public policy and political events; war, terror and

emergency; religion; editorial independence and integrity; external relations; interaction with audiences; the law; responsibility" (11).

As for the introduction of democratic principles of journalism in the Azerbaijani press, the local media system has been operating on these principles for a long time. In particular, independent newspapers are more active in this regard. If pro-government and opposition newspapers play more of a role as a platform for the authorities and the opposition, then independent press examples proceed from the above-mentioned international principles of journalism, taking into account only the interests of society. The activities of such newspapers as "525-ji Gazet", "Kaspi", "Express", "Ayna" and others can be included in the analysis. It would be appropriate to note that in the first years of independence, society had a great need for such newspapers and, in general, for independent mass media. After the propaganda journalism imposed by the Soviet Union on its citizens for many years, society greeted free speech with great willingness and faith, examples of independent press, forming the thinking of a free press and in a short time acquiring the status of a "national newspaper". The status deservedly awarded to them for adopting democratic principles of activity was at the same time a responsibility imposed on them. It is no coincidence that "unlike all other typological models, only a national newspaper is able to fully satisfy the public interest" (12).

The truth of this idea is undeniable, but there is another truth, which is that society consists of people with different worldviews, interests and characters. The audience, consisting of a set that is far from monotonous and rich in differences, must also necessarily consist of different groups that are in constant search of media that correspond to their interests. "It is obvious that the media attracts readers depending on their characteristics and typological character" (13.57). Even if the professionalism of the newspaper is not recognized, then, thanks to the ironic subheadings addressed to a specific addressee, person, the newspaper has a significant number of readers. Understanding this, pro-government and opposition newspapers, using this interest of readers, in a certain way provide for themselves economically. According to some theorists, "Anyone who establishes a newspaper, first of all, must seriously pay attention to the economic side of his activity" (14.46). Naturally, there is a large grain of truth in this idea. Material interests in journalism, as in all spheres, play an important role. However, this point cannot be put above professionalism. Thus, it is more expedient and correct to expand the readership not at the expense of biased and inaccurate information, but by observing international principles of professionalism.

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