
THE MANY INTERNAL PROBLEMS OF JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA IN UZBEKISTAN

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Beyond the heavy censorship, Uzbekistan's journalism also suffers from its own many illnesses such as dilettantism, incompetence or violation of ethical principles.

Take for example an article published in the *Tashkentskaya Pravda* about the regional khokimiyat's session (local authorities, ed.). You will only find the names of the participants and the agenda; no analysis of the problems raised during the meeting, nor any mention of the decisions made. A usual reader remains at a loss, asking himself: "So what? What is the sense of the reporting?" He would get the same feeling reading reports in newspapers like the *Delovoi Partner* and the *Chastnaya Sobstvennost'* on sessions of their supervising authorities: only short comments saying that such events took place, with no description of specific purposes, facts, or solved problems. "Sometimes it seems that it is just done to make higher heads appear in public, but the real consequences of the sessions they are holding remain hindered." A former *Delovoi Partner's* employee said: "As a result the articles look like a reprint of the session's minutes: dry, uninteresting and obscure." In her opinion, such articles were completely useless because they would never find a reader. These examples are revealing to understand how the Uzbek press addresses current events of the political and public life of the country. Basically, mere formal clerical reports are published, lacking any specific analysis of the arising problems and having nothing in common with professional news-making. Articles about the real standard-of-living, unemployment and beggars are very rare in Uzbekistan. It might appear obvious that "Uzlit" (an abbreviation that stands for the Inspection of state secrets protection in the Uzbek press) will never let such articles be published; however, journalists themselves do not take the risk to bring to light these "shadowy" aspects of the life in Uzbekistan. "There are two major problems" - the executive secretary of an economic edition said. "The first is the censorship, the second is the lack of people who would dare to write about these problems."

"BUTCHERS" OF JOURNALISM?

Dilettantism is one of the most crucial problems of journalism in Uzbekistan, and it has some clear roots. Quite frequently, people nominated by higher authorities enter journalism. Those who are at the "top" do not seek for professionals, but for persons who are apt in serving their policy, never having any doubts and never standing up against them. Such "specialists" know little about a newspaper's policy, journalism, and do not understand the strategy and tactics of mass media. Unfortunately, sometimes they have no interest even in the welfare of the staff. Journalists used to call such people "butchers". As an example, the *Delovoi Partner*, once a profitable newspaper, and now degraded into a boring edition. Highly professional reporters had to leave the newspaper for reasons either due to impossibility of working with its management or by direct order of the Chief Editor. The newspaper lost its voluntary subscribers (i.e. those who did not subscribe under pressure of the ministry - the newspaper's founder), advertisers and contributors. The private press is not immune from such political interference. When problems appeared in the private *Biznes Vestnik Vostoka*, then the "GosKomPechati" (Gosudarstvenii komited po pechati – State Committee for Printed Press, which delivers registrations for printed media) interfered in the choice of the new redactor, even though it has formally no right to do so. *Biznes Vestnik*

Vostoka, was then headed by a person who had never been engaged in journalistic activities beforehand. For the sake of cost-saving, he dismissed almost all the staff, and implemented recommendations of the newspaper's accountant on how to build and pursue the newspaper policy, and reprinted most of the materials from Internet. Though, despite this inertia, the newspaper keeps afloat (the earlier boosted "trade mark" of the edition is still attracting the advertisers), it, nevertheless, has lost its personality.

"CANNED FOOD" OF THE PRESS

Conservatism in journalism constitutes another problem. Journalists sometimes do not address and some problems, considering them as firm traditions which could not even be discussed. For example, the position of a woman in the East, the opinion of a subordinate - independent of that of his/her chief, and, ostensibly, such so-called obscene topics like contraceptives, family planning, etc. Because discussions of such problems are not welcomed in the present predominantly conservative environment, one can consider quite natural that the mass media do not raise these questions. But on the other hand, there is also a threat that journalists might be punished if they would dare to discuss those burning questions in their publications. Any free thinking is so suppressed by the political system that journalists are afraid to write anything that mismatches the state policy. No one should have any doubts, for a doubt is a lack of faith in the leader or in the flawlessness of his thoughts and ideas. The old slogan "Who is not with us, is against us!" most efficiently works in authoritarian countries, thus making a baseline of conduct for the mass media. People in power aspire to maintain such a level of political thinking to suppress opposition, especially in mass media.

BLACKMAILERS OF MASS MEDIA

It is not a secret that among journalists there are sometimes such "experts of the pen and ink" who know nothing about the profession. They do not understand what the mass media are for, and for why and what reasons they became journalists. Moreover, some of them transform their craft into a profitable bread-winner. Of course, there is nothing bad in a reporter making honest money. But, sometimes a journalist misuses his "fourth power" , infringing ethical principles. Some of those "businessmen" would openly say they are "milking" somebody for money. They go, say, to a local (district, urban, wholesale) market-place and make pictures of all negative factors, and then blackmail the respective management, threatening to publish same in the press (or show on TV), thus forcing the management into corruption. In Uzbekistan, such facts were registered at the Prosecutor's office which investigated some criminal cases concerning 'pseudo-journalists'. Thus, an employee of the Surkhan-Darya regional TV, who made his "shadow" business by abusing his position, was sentenced to three years of imprisonment for racketing.