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Media Training in South Caucasus

Three Reports Presented During CIMERA Workshop in Tsakhkadzor,
Armenia, March 2-4, 2001

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Journalistic Education As Seen by Editors

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This survey was made based on interviews held with the editors-in-chief of the following newspapers: “Aravot”, “Azg”, “Haikakan Zhamanak”, “Iravunk”, “Novoye Vremya”, “Golos Armenii”, “Hayots Ashkharh”, “Yerkir” and “02”.

Every year, hundreds of journalists, who graduate from higher education institutions and obtain their degrees, knock at the doors of editorial offices in an attempt to find ways of putting their profession at the disposal of the public. However, this mass of yesterday’s students finds out now and again, with much surprise and profound disappointment, that the things learnt during the course of five years is far from being adequate to serve their vocation, and that they have to start everything anew.

The State University of Yerevan, The Pedagogical Institute, and also the great majority of 70 private higher institutions of Armenia, are involved in the training of journalists whose knowledge and level of professionalism cannot possibly meet the requirements set forth by the demanding editors. Then, what is expected and required by those editors, and what makes them dissatisfied?

1. General knowledge

Throughout the five years spent at the universities’ departments of journalism, the accumulation of general knowledge principally occurs which, in itself, is quite important, but insufficient in terms of activities of the would-be journalists. Editors note that the young journalists’ main weaknesses lie in the domain of a specific knowledge of specific spheres. They are not ready to portray any of the public spheres, such as law and legislation, economics, politics, etc. In fact, many journalists proceed as follows: today they are writing on politics, tomorrow - on family planning, the day after tomorrow - on potato harvesting. Thus, the “02” daily is concerned about the lack of journalists with legal background. Editor Tigran Farmanian thinks that such journalists should be prepared and trained with effect from the commencement of their studies at the departments of journalism.

Most editors prefer hiring other specialists: economists, lawyers, political science experts, physicists, etc. At the “Iravunk” newspaper, the staff is mainly composed of engineers; in “GA”, candidates of biological sciences prevail, and there is no-one trained in journalism at “Novoye Vremya”.

As a matter of fact, it is impossible to assess the journalistic education detached from the general education context. According to the above editors, apart from being the reflection of the situation in the general education system, it also represents the status of the society as a whole. The student of our days not only fails to read professional literature, but also seems to have lost any interest in literature in general. Under those circumstances, the principle of self-education, as a possibility of realizing one's own potential and making room for new qualitative achievements, does not work.

2. Professional Training

For a beginner, the meeting with the editor and the first assignment are decisively important. The editors mainly emphasize the following shortcomings:

a) Absence of curiosity. No initiative, ability to search for and identify a topic are manifested. Hacob Avetikian, editor-in-chief of the "Azg" daily, says that initially he requests submission of three stories; one of the themes he offers himself, and leaves the choice of the other two to the journalist. Taken aback by such an assignment, the beginner always asks the editor for a specific topic to work on, which indicates that the beginner finds it difficult to identify the theme of the day.

Even if such themes are found, these mainly turn out to be the same old issues referred to each and every day: "27th of October", National Assembly, cultural events, etc. Young journalists seem to be unable to discern private cases and stories of interest. They do not realize yet that the work of a journalist does not start from writing an article, but rather from searching and finding an idea.

b) Beginners do not have a good command of devising the material. This was noted in the course of the interviews held with all the editors. Even in those cases when they learn the relevant rules during their on-the-job training, they prove to be unable to practice them in their work.

They avail themselves of the so-called second-hand sources, writing materials based on press-conferences, taking for granted all kinds of information put at their disposal and then presenting it to the public.

Inexperienced journalists find themselves at difficulty when trying to focus on the important rather than on the secondary issues, to express their thoughts in simple sentences and clear language. According to the opinions expressed by the editors of "Aravot", "GA" and "NV", the above-mentioned constitutes a drawback characteristic of the general education, its roots to be found in schools. There the schoolchildren were taught to write highly emotional compositions, using a lofty language. This style is also maintained by the students of journalism although it does not comply with the spirit of modern journalism.

Another drawback is also observed: young journalists tend to make generalizations. An introduction becomes the indispensable part of their story: they usually start with

something too far away from the subject, then, only after a while, get to the point. An editor is often obliged to cut out the first paragraphs of the material.

Young journalists do not know how to formulate questions. Editor of one of the dailies, Flora Nakhshkarian, conveys her surprise in recounting a visit of students from the journalistic department of a private institute where none of them was ever able to ask her a question. After a long pause the only question that was articulated was as follows: “How much do your journalists earn?” The “Haikakan Zhamanak” daily kept publishing an announcement for quite a long time, inviting young journalists to join the staff. As the editor-in-chief of the paper, Nicol Pashinian says, within 6 months more than 70 people responded, with only two of them being able to write an article.

Most probably, the main problem here can be defined in the following way: in the stories submitted by the young journalists a major thing is missing - the concreteness of the individual. Instead, materials abound in own opinions, assessments and conclusions.

c) Even the tastiest meal is hard to consume if it is served badly. Beginners are unable to present their plots. They lack a style of their own, an unique personal penmanship. They stick to the same standardized vocabulary and conventional thinking and find it a hard task to entitle articles.

d) A student in journalism does not read newspapers, fails to follow up on current events and political processes.

Editors speak on all of these drawbacks, bearing in mind the image of an ideal journalist whom they would wish to have in their office. A professional journalist should be mobile, operative, keen, able to immediately check the information received, and having an analytical way of thinking. He should be a person who might be able to find the gist of a story, introducing a new idea into the paper — fresh, important. He should also possess the basic information and knowledge of his field, approaching the level of an expert, manifesting a knowledge of English, computer skills, experience of work in a daily paper or a TV news programme.

Higher institutions do not train journalists with such qualifications. According to the editors, the main reason for that is the following: people who are detached from practical work teach at such institutions. As a result, a student will accumulate some theoretical knowledge, but will not be able to utilize this base in practice. Also, there are some people among the faculty who are outdated mentality with obsolete knowledge and concepts on journalism. Meanwhile, journalism is evolving and brings about new requirements. Proceeding from a clear realization of this fact during the past few years, an active process of renewing the teaching staff was started at the department of journalism at YSU which, undoubtedly, will introduce new trends and much fresher thinking.

- a) Training occurs mainly within the four walls of the higher institution. It is impossible to acquire practical journalism skills just the same way as literature or history would require. As defined by the “Aravot” daily’s editor, “they teach one to swim at the higher institutions without plunging into water”, which results in the fact that “the journalistic muscles” fail to be developed. “02”’s editor-in-chief, Tigran Farmanian, suggested that a few students in their second year should become interns at an editorial office so that the theory is combined with active practice.
- b) The editors also offered to make the curricula easier and to increase the quotas of practical classes at the expense of theory.
- c) They also voted against collective training in journalism. “One should work individually with each student” - they say.

Alongside these critical comments, the editors also mentioned some positive phenomena. They find the level of literacy of the beginners satisfactory (firstly, those that have graduated from the university), as well as their theoretical basic knowledge.

When hiring youngsters, the editors are guided by a number of criteria: existence of a reporter’s “feel”, persistence, resourcefulness, communication skills. But, the priority is attached to talent and intellect. If these two are present, then such a journalist can be relied upon.

In order to have their criticisms aligned with their aims, the editors offered to abstain from the role of a passive, self-centered critic, and to cooperate with the departments of journalism by taking part in the molding of the new generation of journalists. Today’s student may prove to be the strongest and the most valuable employee of the editorial office tomorrow.

3. Information, Archives, Investigation

A newspaper may become successful, not only due to the gifted professionals employed by it, but, also, through the availability of reliable and overwhelming sources of information.

a) In their daily activities, newspapers use the following sources of information: Internet (Internet as a source of information is accessible for all editorials), news agencies (practically all the newspapers have subscribed to three agencies except for the “02” newspaper which itself provides the news to agencies), the Moscow and foreign press, archives, compiled of their own issues (all of them with no exception preserve issues within a period from two months to one year), sometimes also containing two - three other publications (this is not typical, due to shortage of free space). The “Azg” daily has chosen to complete, by this May, the compilation of electronic archives-filing which will include all the issues of the newspaper published during the past ten years. The files of the publications printed in “Azg” on political topics are organized in accordance with thematic, authors and factual sequence.

As compared with the other newspapers, “02” has the advantage of being able to freely use the archives of the MIA information center. Almost all the newspapers place their electronic versions in Internet. “Golos Armenii” has two electronic versions of its publications: one reiterates the contents and the format of the newspaper, and the other is composed of thematic selections. The electronic web-page of “Azg” was visited by 23,5 thousand people within one and a half months. The “Azg” site is prepared in four languages - Armenian, Russian, English and Turkish.

b) “Golos Armenii” possesses an exceptional archival library where issues are kept starting from 1934. As the editor-in-chief asserts, the employees of other editorials can use it if they so choose.

c) Some other newspapers also have rich electronic archives (“Novoye Vremya”, “Iravunk” /the latter has about 10,000 photos/). Effective from 1998, “Azg” collects photo archives on a CD.

d) An important source has also been constituted from the personal archives of journalists which contain compilations of materials related to different topics, newspaper articles, biographies of political leaders, details of criminal law-suits, etc.

4. What Kind of Sources of Information Newspapers Lack?

Newspapers need to have the available information organized into computer files so that it can be operatively used whenever necessary. Of great importance is the creation of information data-bases in the editorial offices. Journalists usually have to make immense efforts in order to check the most elementary pieces of information. Some editors (for example, “Haikakan Zhamanak”) expressed their readiness to pay for a data base creation.

“Novoye Vremya” offered to set up a centralized information centre for dealing with Diaspora problems. On the whole, the volume of materials presented in the Internet on Armenia is extremely insufficient. Even if such information exists, as a general rule it is not systematized.

Editors emphasized the importance of cooperation with, and information exchange among, the newspapers. After all, we all serve the same goal, they said.

5- The Role of Press in Society

1. Newspapers consider their main mission to be providing information to the public. They come up with information on everything that is happening around us which directly or indirectly affects people. They portray not only the facts related to the internal and external policies and the economic life of the country, but also regional information updates are provided and the public gets the opportunity of gaining access to events and developments worldwide. The editor-in-chief of “Azg” underlined the significance of the

economic information and analytical publications. It considered depicting this sphere to be crucial.

Newspapers also act as “deliverers” of knowledge. Thus, “02” offers to its audience legal knowledge and increases the relevant awareness of the public.

At the same time, the competition spread in newspaper markets requires a flow of exclusive news. As a result, the desire of attracting a greater audience quite often leads to a chase after cheap sensations which is typical, to a smaller or bigger extent, of all the periodicals.

2. Audience Guidelines

As the “Iravunk”’s editor-in-chief thinks, besides information the readers also look for analytical articles on the newspaper pages. That is, it is not only the "what is happening" that they want to know about, but also "why it is happening". Moreover, as “Aravot” asserts, it is not enough to write about current events, but one should also indicate what the people themselves think about those events. Readers are really interested in gossip.

3. Influence

“One of the most important functions of our newspaper, - “Golos Armenii” says, - is that we can succeed in solving socially significant problems. In a number of cases following our publications, the government took measures towards localizing the vicious phenomena disclosed by ourselves. And, on the contrary, as a result of our statements, the government on several occasions abstained from taking steps which might otherwise have lead to tragic consequences”.

4. Preventive Function

For example, the “02” newspaper has chosen to strive for the prevention of potential crime through publications. The inevitability of disclosing the committed crimes becomes a specific warning for the readers.

Nevertheless, we may want to agree that a newspaper with 3-4 thousand issues cannot possibly claim to serve as a source of mass information, since it does not reach those masses. Hence, it is very difficult to define the degree of impact of the newspapers on the public and their overall role in society. Nowadays, the press faces a question - “to be or not to be”. Most newspapers are not sure at all whether they will be issued tomorrow. The press is a reflection of our reality and cannot differ from it too much - either on the positive or the negative side. But, the press of the transition period should be at least a step further ahead of this time - in order to guide society towards stability and well-being.

Journalistic Education Issues in Azerbaijan

Shahin Rzayev
Media Expert

While preparing this statement within the framework of the *Caucasian Media Development Institute* project, we had a chance of interviewing the leaders of the following periodicals: “Echo” daily newspaper, editor-in-chief Rauf Talishinsky; “Zerkalo” /*Mirror*/ daily, editor-in-chief Elchin Shikhlinsky; “Nedelya” weekly newspaper /*Week*/, editor-in-chief Esmira Baghirova; “Monitor Weekly” weekly journal (now inoperative), editor-in-chief Elmar Huseinov; “Khalg” daily, editor-in-chief Mahal Ismailoglu; “Azadlig” daily, editor-in-chief Gyunduz Tairli, “Yeni Musavat” daily, editor-in-chief Rauf Arifoglu; “7 Ghyune”, weekly newspaper, editor Mamed Suleimanov; “Impulse” weekly newspaper, editor-in-chief Matanet Aliyeva. The first four are published in Russian, the rest in Azerbaijani. The shorthand notes of the interviews with the leaders of the prints published in the Azerbaijani language are presented here as translated by the author.

1- Overview of the Mass Media Status in Azerbaijan in 2000

Prior to analyzing the replies to the questions of interest, I would think it appropriate to briefly outline the current situation of the printed press in Azerbaijan. During the previous year of 2000, a number of noteworthy events took place; among them, the ratification of a new Law “On Mass Media” on February 8 was one of the most important.

This Law prohibits all kinds of censure in mass media, underlines the responsibility of journalists for word-for-word citing of the information source, and restricts the maximum size of any possible fines to a level of three months’ financial expenditure. However, as compared with the previous law of 1992, it contains several clauses that cause opposition both among mass media representatives and those of law enforcement and international institutions. According to Article 19 of this Law, a mass medium may be deprived of its official registration if it has a record of losing a lawsuit thrice within a year.

At the time of the adoption of this Law, the above item was not duly considered but, last August, based on this article, the Ministry of Press and Information brought about an action to close down the “Uch Nogta” newspaper. Another drawback of the Law is to be found in entitling executive authorities to the right of confiscation of a print issuance without a relevant decision of the court. Journalists strongly oppose the change introduced in respect of accreditation cancellation. If the previous Law defined that a court take the decision on such a cancellation, based on the institution where the

journalist was accredited, now the institution itself has the right to cancel the accreditation of a journalist. The Law abounds in other regulations that are in contradiction with international standards and not contributing to freedom of speech, but this should be covered separately. According to the “RUH” Committee for protection of journalists’ rights, more than 140 instances of violation of such rights were registered last year. Seven journalists were arrested, including two editors-in-chief - Rauf Arifoglu (“Yeni Musavat”) and Vagif Hajibeili (“Intibakh”). The journal “Monitor Weekly” was deprived of its license, 65 journalists underwent physical pressures from the authorities. Within the last year, the economic situation of the printed mass media considerably deteriorated. One of the main reasons for this was the artificial increase of newsprint costs.

Back in summer, the State Committee for Customs considerably complicated the newsprint paper import and customs clearance procedures. It even led to a picket of mass media representatives in front of the building of the State Committee. Then, starting from January 1, 2001, the new Tax Code came into effect, according to which the newsprint importer would be liable to pay VAT twice for the same product. This resulted in an increase of the relevant costs by about 40%, thus most negatively affecting the incomes of editorial offices and leading to a situation whereby a number of small-scale newspapers had to stop their issuance.

Another problem: decrease of the advertisers’ interest in newspapers. Understandably, all these factors may finally result in the financial dependence of newspapers and restriction of their freedom. Here is the response of “Monitor Weekly” journal’s editor-in-chief, Elmar Huseinov, related to the economic state of the Azerbaijanian mass media: *“Under such circumstances where the income is lower than one thousand a year and the consumers involuntarily degrade, i.e. people begin to buy sub-products rather than high-quality meat, go for sub-newspapers instead of newspapers, the press has no other alternative but to make the necessary adjustments. And in order to be sold, it is forced to sell the only product left at its disposal—the political resource.*

In fact, our Azerbaijanian newspapers of today are involved exactly in this kind of activity. Actually, we are currently selling either one of the political positions. Not because we are so bad or venal, and neither because we want it that way, but since there is no other way out. Prospectively, an individual wishing to buy a newspaper should not have to choose between bread and paper. The public is not ready to pay for the expensive newspapers; today, Azerbaijanian newspapers cost just as much as western ones. A newspaper cost should allow for the consumer’s choice to be made within the domain of quality. There and then, proper competition will be maintained, and we may be able to state that the formation of the press market has started. Until then, we will have to face the current situation since we are working at ditch-bottom, buying newsprint at a price which is 30% more than for a publisher in the United States or Canada, whereas the print house services here are far from the internationally accepted standards. We just have to survive abnormally at the expense of increased costs, that is - our consumers, small volumes of issuance, insufficient cash flow, and selling political resources”.

2- The Role of Mass Media in the Society

This is the question which was asked from the very start of my interviews with all the leaders of printed press. While speaking about their periodicals, the editors gradually became much more friendly and open. Based on their answers, one can conclude that the mass media have quite an important role in the present-day society, and their leaders realize the fact very well. The printed message has still preserved its significance, and publication of a bureaucrat's portrait simultaneously in a number of periodicals would at least cost the latter a severe warning from the supervisor. However, under the pressure of severe competition, from time to time some of the periodicals yearn for sensations, very often damaging their own image since the readers are more used to regarding a newspaper as a reliable source of information.

In respect of the above problem, the editor-in-chief of the "Azadlig" newspaper, Gyunduz Tairli, said the following: *"Today the low purchasing capacity of the population, the financial difficulties of the mass media and the consequent decrease of their professional level has led to the fact that the mass media of today are not perceived as a reliable source of information. Thus, I can state that some 3-4 years ago mass media used to be one of the state security guarantees; that is, the public perceived it as a reliable source of information. The present-day mass media fail to upkeep that esteem. At the same time, during the recent period, tendencies towards creating a higher reputation are observed in the Azerbaijanian press; it is more reluctant now to make much ado about nothing and to chase sensations which, in itself, constitutes a positive change. I hope that in case these tendencies persist and the mass media are not absorbed by the politically-orientated oligarchy - and such a threat does exist - the lost position of the mass media could be regained by the end of this year"*. In their comments on the role of mass media after the transition period, most editors expressed a wish for reduction of political influence on the press.

The editor-in-chief of the newspaper "Nedelya", Esmira Bahirova, says she hopes the press becomes the fourth power. Towards that end, it will be necessary for the second and third sectors of power to function normally which, unfortunately, is not the case in today's Azerbaijan. The editor-in-chief of the "Monitor", Elmar Huseinov, clearly connects the end of the transition period to President Heydar Aliyev's retreat from the political arena, whereas the editor-in-chief of the newspaper "Echo", Rauf Talishinsky, is concerned that the transition period will last for many years. Last year was a time of parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan. Probably this fact accounts for the exceeding involvement of the Azerbaijanian press in politics, as we see it. According to the opinion expressed by Mahal Ismailoglu, editor-in-chief of "Khalg Gazeti" (published by the Department for the activities of the President of Azerbaijan), there are only 3-4 newspapers in Azerbaijan, which can be considered really independent, that is - free from political influences. Prior to the elections, both the authorities and the opposition made their best efforts to avail of the influential power of the mass media. This fact, alongside with the violations of the norms of journalistic ethics by some of the newspeople, have led to a series of conflicts among mass media.

This might best be illustrated by groundless defamation of the “Musavat” party on the eve of the elections, organized by all the state-oriented periodicals after the unsuccessful attempt of hijacking an airplane by the leader of the Nakhichevan organization of this party. Severe confrontation was observed, not only between the state-oriented and oppositional newspapers, but also among those that supported the interests of various oppositional groups. Thus, during the *National Front* party’s cleavage period, the “Yeni Musavat” daily, representing the wing of the so-called *classics*, very often published aggressive articles directed against the *reformers’* wing, while the latter responded in their turn through the “Azadlig” newspaper. To some extent the role of a self-regulatory body was envisaged by the Council of Editors-in-chief. There were a few cases when the above Council succeeded in finding solutions to the “internal problems”, thus preventing the editorial offices from opposing each other in the court. Seven editors-in-chief created their own pre-election bloc Named “Media-2000” and decided to nominate themselves for the elections. Although all the newspapers supported their own candidates, none of them was elected.

3- General Education

As a general rule, the leading journalists of the Azerbaijanian newspapers do not have a professional education. Almost all the editors with whom we met and talked displayed a sceptical attitude towards the professional education programmes that the graduates of the journalistic departments had completed. The toughest assessment was articulated by Haji Emin Eminbeyli, editor-in-chief of the “7 Gyun” daily (as presented by an editor of the same newspaper Mamed Suleimanov): *“If you wish to ruin a gift, then send the person to the faculty of journalism”*. Gyunduz Tairli, editor-in-chief of the “Azadlig” daily, believes that, anyway, there are some fields of specific knowledge which can be mastered only at the journalistic departments of universities, though he admitted that the teaching there is not provided on a proper level. The “Echo, one of the most popular and respected newspapers in Azerbaijan, has only one professionally-trained journalist on its staff - the editor-in-chief, Rauf Talishinsky. In reply to the question related to the importance of the professional education in journalism R. Talishinsky said: *“I am very sceptical in respect of the so-called journalistic education, since I’ve got one. Apart from that, I also had the pleasure of defending a candidate Ph. D thesis on journalism. Hence, I think I have a moral right to be sceptical towards this issue, and I really am. As far as I know, I am the only one here with a professional journalistic education, which is right in my opinion. Among our employees there are physicians, oil experts, people who were trained in history and political science. I believe that this situation is the right one.*

The editor-in-chief of the “Monitor Weekly” journal, Elmar Huseinov, is of the opinion that the theoretical knowledge acquired at the institutes most often is used in practical work to the extent of only 5%. And this is common, not only in the sphere of journalism, but in all others as well. Among the important sources of general knowledge, the following features were named: erudition, family upbringing, drive towards self-development, team-work skills. “7 Gyun” daily’s editor-in-chief, Mamed Suleimanov,

referred to the breakdown of the Soviet system of education and the absence of any other substitute of equal value. The editor-in-chief of the “impulse” daily, Metanet Aliyeva, faces hardships while trying to choose a journalist that could be assigned to write on economic issues. In her opinion, much of what is taught at the economic faculties does not meet the requirements of the present-day market economy and journalism. Among the shortcomings of general education of the journalists, especially the young ones, the interviewees often mentioned the insufficiently- developed vision.

According to the editor-in-chief of the “Yeni Musavat” daily, Rauf Arifoglu, the journalists quite often lack a well-balanced, thoughtful approach to diverse viewpoints. Most editors are confident that these drawbacks can be remedied in the course of joint work alongside with the gaining of experience. The “Echo” daily’s editor-in-chief expressed the following opinion regarding this issue: *“I think that the knowledge necessary in a person’s work can be obtained in the course of such work, if we are speaking about journalism, not neurosurgery. This is a specific field where the store of one’s knowledge can really be filled with no limit. On the other hand, an individual should act as a self-perfection system, eager to read or learn, reaching towards a higher level”*.

Referring to the reasons of insufficiency of journalists’ knowledge, the editor-in-chief of the “Azadlig” daily, Gyunduz Tairli, noted: *“Up to my 4th year in high school, I regularly got the Russian press which was delivered straight to my house. I always read the periodicals, made use of my father’s library where about 40 thousand books were brought together, read quite a lot. Then something happened, which I don’t understand even now, but at present I find it impossible to read. The result is that I lose a lot, let alone the youngsters. It should also be added that, in our time, there was a good basis for knowledge. The present situation is perhaps conditioned by the fact that there are no books, or it has become impossible to buy them, also by the sad state of the libraries, education system... Altogether these factors, that would normally contribute to the formation of the information basis and the outlook of a person, have become very weak. It is very difficult to understand and evaluate the processes happening today”*.

4- Practical Skills of Journalists

Among the most important qualities necessary for a journalist, the following were stated: the ability of thinking and acting quickly (R. Talishinsky), mobility and decency (E. Shikhlinisky), honesty and incorruptibility (M. Aliyeva), honesty and strong principles (E. Bahirova), ‘the journalist grasp’ (M. Ismailoglu). As for the editor-in-chief of the “Azadlig” daily, Gyunduz Tairli, this is what he said: *“Firstly, I should say, stickiness which we had better call purposefulness. There are a lot of journalists who are very good at writing, but they lack personal features like going after one’s aim until the very end. Also, there are journalists whose writing skills are far from being satisfactory, but, at the expense of their being of the go-getting type, they are a greater success. Secondly, although it may seem trivial - the ability of listening and hearing. Being patient and calm. And undoubtedly - constant work on one’s own self, pursuing self-perfection”*. Elmar

Huseinov, editor-in-chief of the “Monitor Weekly” values in journalists their ability to put their thoughts and ideas on paper. Besides, he believes that “the best type of a journalist is the professional amateur. That is, the objective of a journalist should be: arriving somewhere, understanding of what the people are doing, writing about it today and forgetting it, and starting to write about quite a different sphere the next day. That is why I am so surprised that journalists in Azerbaijan begin to impose their views and opinions on others. A journalist cannot have an opinion”.

The editor of the “7 Gyun” daily, Mamed Suleimanov, values the absence of ideological bias in a journalist, the ability of manifesting a critical approach towards his own materials and elaboration of his own style.

As for the practical skills, it is possible, for example, to teach at the institutes the interviewing techniques or investigation genre. However, as reality shows, journalists learn all these things directly during their work. The editor-in-chief of the “Yeni Musavat” daily, Rauf Arifoglu, noted the significant role that the editorial staff of the newspaper plays in the course of young journalists’ training.

Unfortunately, at the time of interviews due attention was not paid to such specific issues as the techniques of working in emergency situations, which are so usual in Azerbaijan’s life. Our viewpoint is that elaboration of a special course or holding of seminars on working under such circumstances would be very useful. The following can be classified under the above mentioned category of emergency situations: business trips to frontier zones, working in the areas of possible ethnic or religious confrontations, possible conflicts with the law enforcement agencies, activities in faraway rural regions, etc. The editor-in-chief of the “Yeni Musavat” daily, Rauf Arifoglu, pointed out a specific type of information sources - the anonymous ones which exist in various structures of authorities and which are ready to share information with the newspaper against some remuneration or merely out of sympathy towards the political platform. “Yeni Musavat” has always used such information and, even once, was sentenced to a huge monetary fine for its refusal to disclose the name of its unofficial informer. The daily papers “Echo”, “Zerkalo”, “Yeni Musavat” and “Khalg” mentioned the names of their information services.

The possibilities of working with archives, as various periodicals mentioned, differ. In case of publications representing opposition, such as “Azadlig” and “Yeni Musavat”, all kinds of bureaucratic obstacles are created which, in the end, deprives them of any desire to break through the archives for the required information. Nevertheless, the independent newspapers like “Nedelya”, “Zerkalo” and “7 Gyun”, letting alone the state-oriented paper “Khalg”, most obviously do not suffer from such problems and, whenever necessary, somehow get access to the state archives.

The editors’ attitude towards the Internet is also different, but in this case merely due to some personal reasons and methods of work. The most advanced in this sphere should be considered, of course: the “Echo” daily which attracts readers from all parts of the world with its Internet-forums. In this editorial office, all the journalists freely and quite

professionally work with the Internet system and, according to the coefficients of using the Internet resources, the “Echo” holds the leadership among the Azerbaijanian newspapers. Its editor-in-chief, R. Talishinsky, mentioned the insufficient understanding of Internet’s significance as one of the main problems hampering its further development.

The same is distinctly traced in the replies of M. Aliyeva, editor-in-chief of the “Impulse” daily, who is confident that the Internet should mainly be used for the foreign policy surveys. Hence, since the paper does not have such a column, they can well go without it. Mamed Suleymanov, editor-in-chief of the “7 Gyun” paper, said that they have stopped going to the libraries as they are able to find anything that is of interest for them on the Internet. It should be noted that, up to now, Azerbaijan does not have an adequate Internet-newspaper which could be renewed more often than once a day. As for the libraries, almost all the editors questioned mentioned the grave state of the Azerbaijanian libraries. The main reason for that is the lack of personnel because of the exceptionally low salaries (15-20 USD per month), as well as the elimination of the book exchange links with other countries of CIS.

5- Sources of Information

The main sources of information for Azerbaijanian newspapers are the local information agencies. It is true though that, quite naturally, the interest towards the local information agencies decreases alongside with the reduction of the issuance of a newspaper. Editors of two weeklies - “Impulse” (M. Aliyeva) and “7 Gyun” (M. Suleimanov) referred to the information agencies with considerable scepticism, but for the others they still represent an important source of information.

Report on Problems in the Sphere of Journalistic Education and Editorial Activities

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For the preparation of the current report, the following persons were interviewed: “Kviris Palitra”, editor-in-chief Lali Guntaishvili, “Alia”, editor-in-chief Georgy Bregvadze, “6 Saatze”, editor-in-chief Merab Moistsrafishvili, “Akhali Taoba”, editor-in-chief Soso Goginashvili, Gela Ebanoidze deputy editor-in-chief of “Akhali Epoka”.

1- Introduction

The problems concerning the ways of development of freedom speech have not been solved in post-communist states up until now. Georgia is not an exception to the rule; on the contrary, the problems of Georgian mass media often make up the background for serious instability in the country.

Up to now, the Georgian mass media stand out for their low professional level. The local press ignores the principles of self-regulation and also the ethical rules of journalists' Code of Conduct. Most editorial offices have no professional textbooks that might be used as manuals. A considerable number of journalists working in mass media are non-professionals, which means they have no special professional education.

The 40 % of active journalists questioned by the “Independent Association”, while preparing their report on the state of mass media during the year 2000, witness the fact that they lack a good knowledge of professional literature, of the administrative code which regulates accessibility to information and they also are unaware of their professional rights.

Unfortunately, higher education institutions do not contribute to the process of finding resolutions to the critical situation observed in the Georgian press. Specifically, those universities where the students are taught with obsolete methods and text books form the majority in the educational system of the country. As a result, inexperienced, unprepared journalists often come to the editorials and information services. The shortcomings of the educational field make up the main deficiency that seriously endangers the processes of developing independent media. Another problem, which is just as important, is related to the issue of the editorial staff professionalism. Investigations brought out the fact that

most of the active journalists have been retrained at the editorial offices where they now work. or where they started working after they graduated from the institutes. The editors-in-chief and the members of editorial offices teach the beginners everything they know themselves, but very often this kind of education is not enough.

These two problems (general education of a journalist and professionalism of the press) are covered in the responses of the editors-in-chief and also in the journalists' interview materials.

2- General Education - Universities

According to the editor-in-chief of the leading newspaper "Akhali Taoba", among their editorial staff are 2 or 3 persons who were educated at university. He considers university education insufficient for obtaining knowledge necessary for working independently from the very first day.

"A journalist cannot master the modern policy at the university. As events are developing rapidly, it becomes impossible to study contemporary history of the country in such a short time. And the teachers are not the right ones to teach...". According to the "Akhali taoba" editor-in-chief, the lectures should be delivered by editors or other newspeople representing the press of today. However, he thinks that the main merit of a journalist is to be well-informed about political and economic processes.

The editor-in-chief of another popular newspaper "Alia", Georgy Bregvadze, and editor-in-chief of the newspaper "6 saatze", Merab Moistsrafishvily, connect the problems of journalist non-professionalism and low qualifications with the poor educational system at the Universities. According to Moistsrafishvily, the last 10 years' events promoted involvement in journalistic activities of those persons who were previously involved in politics. Within the period of 1991 through 1995, part of the society began to work in newspapers in order to improve their social and economic situation.

Merab Moistsrafishvili: "In modern media there are many journalists who have not even the slightest connection with journalism. During that period (1991-1995), journalism was considered to be the most well-paid employment. Everybody who could write began to work for a newspaper".

The political instability destroyed the educational system, then the mass media took up the function of teaching and this process is underway to-date.

What is the general knowledge that journalists lack today? The answers of the editors-in-chief state are as follows: more often the beginners do not have a good understanding of politics, economic problems and regional geography.

"First and foremost, the universities should provide the students with information which best reflects the social-political situation in the country, and it is also necessary that legal knowledge be provided during the time of study. A journalist who begins working at an

editorial office should be able to use the information about the state organization. That means - being well-informed about the state officials. A journalist is obliged to know the constitution of his country, his rights, what is allowed, and what is not, by the laws” - considers the editor-in-chief of the “Alia” newspaper.

The level of general education of journalists is determined by the external conditions such as the educational system, socio-economic condition, family upbringing. The student studying at a university is generally orientated towards learning foreign languages and studying fiction literature. At the same time, the main directions are neglected, though they are obligatory for the formation of proper skills so necessary during journalistic work. Among these, the following should be mentioned: the specifics of information collection, interviewing, reporting; working with the interviewee, the style and also the ethics principles of journalistic conduct.

The ability to work with an interviewee is of high importance. While working with the beginners, the editors-in-chief consider the problem of embarrassment and discomfort to be a very serious obstacle. It is indisputable that the students at the university must study a special programme for the work with an interviewee or with another source of information. It is important that this skill be strengthened through practice. From the answers of the editors-in-chief, one can conclude that the majority of the beginners make their first step to contact with a source of information, not within the university, but at the editorial office at the very start of their activities.

The editor-in-chief of the “Dilis gazeti”, Manana Kartoza, considers this issue to be the key problem for the future professional activity of young journalists. According to her, one of the main shortcomings of the beginners is the uncertainty, and also the exaggerated confidence in the source of information, inability to manifest a critical approach to the subject matter of such information.

The journalist’s ability to critically assess a given event, or statement, is determined by his or her knowledge about the subject they are working on. As the editors-in-chief assert, the beginners have no specific knowledge in concrete branches.

No matter how diligent the student might be, he or she will not receive proper knowledge in high schools as the majority of universities have not changed their methods of teaching since the Soviet period; moreover, the contingent of teachers remains just the same.

What is the level of knowledge acquired at universities with which the newly-trained journalists bring to the editorial staff? In general, it is superficial information on their duties as journalists. They know that, from the beginning, they must find an interviewee, to put together an interview or to make some comments on a relevant subject. But, at the same time, they have not a proper understanding of the specifics and ways of independent identification of the information source. Just as unclear are the principles of working with it, the subsequent regular work related to it, and also the search for exclusive information.

Young journalists have no idea about details, nuances that are important for collecting information. Most of them take a stereotyped action; they ask questions consecutively according to that standard pattern they had planned beforehand and, as a result, the interview has no logical construction. In this connection, the editor-in-chief of the “Akhali taoba” newspaper comments: *“The beginners cannot distinguish the main thing from other issues of minor importance.”*. The editor-in-chief of “Alia” newspaper, Georgy Bregvadze, says: *“It is important for the editorials that the journalist may think and reason extraordinarily”*. *“It is impossible to pass on to the journalist the ability of journalistic thinking. On account of our pressure of work, very often we cannot convert the theoretical knowledge of the beginners into practice. As a rule, they are not familiar with editing”*,- says the editor-in-chief of “Akhali Epoka”, Gela Ebanoidze. In the process of hiring editors pay more attention to the personality of journalists than to her/his education.

3- Press Professionalism: Editorials as Universities

Training

Today’s press by its content and form radically differs from the classic knowledge acquired at a university. This difference becomes especially tangible in the compiling of materials and also in definition of common topics.

The modern press prefers to investigate the events, to expose the evidence of crimes and to obtain exclusive information. The University education is not able to teach students those skills, it prioritizes theoretical knowledge. The Universities do not propose any training in investigation to students. The young journalists are taught the skills of investigation in the process of their work at the editorials. Journalists are not trained in investigation as a genre, consequently the journalists starting

Among the things that the journalists learn in editorials is the normative code related to press. In particular, this includes the administrative code that regulates accessibility and publicity of information. In spite of this, the indicators which we clearly defined during the questioning of the journalists on the administrative code topics do not inspire much optimism; specifically, the questioning of the newspeople from the leading papers and TV stations witnessed the fact that 60% of journalists are not familiar with Chapter 3 of the above-mentioned Law which regulates accessibility and publicity of information.

Unfortunately, very often the editorials cannot afford a journalist’s training. They give the beginners the knowledge necessary for due preparation of materials. The editorials teach the style, which is practised in their newspaper, of making an article; sometimes, the principles of equal representation of different parties are also taught.

Beginners are taught in the process of work. Very often, such a training of every new employee lasts a year or two. Sometimes, the editorials refuse to give the beginners any work and put it down to their being busy. The newspapers train journalists to practise impartiality and critical approach. On the other side, journalistic ethics is neglected. This

problem is caused by the absence of self-regulation among Georgian periodicals. In accordance with the statistical data, 90% of leading papers have no Code of Conduct within the framework of journalistic ethics. Most editors do not reckon it to be necessary to agree with the rules of ethics put down in writing. Though, in editorials, there is no shared opinion on the subject.

As an example, the director of the “Alia” newspaper signed the joint statement of media organizations that appeals to pass the law about press, whereas the editor-in-chief of the newspaper expressed the opposite opinion. According to him, not a single document should have an influence on a journalist's behaviour.

After graduating from the higher education institution, a journalist gets further training but here he faces a problem of imperfection of material and a technical basis in the editorial office. For example, most of the Georgian newspapers are short of computers. For this reason, 80% of active journalists have no opportunities of getting information from the Internet and of using e-mail. Proceeding from this, one can state that the newspeople are able to use very little practical knowledge so necessary in modern journalism.

Archives

Archiving is one of the weakest points of the Georgian newspapers. Most of the leading editorial offices do not have organized, accessible archive systems that could be operatively used. Some publishing houses try not to discuss this question, considering the problem connected with archives or some other source of information to be a commercial secret and, if it were revealed, it would damage the competitiveness of the newspaper. In spite of this opinion, the editor-in-chief and the deputy chief of the newspapers “Akhali Taoba” and “Akhali Epoka” respectively do not hide their problems regarding archiving. According to the editor of the “Akhali Taoba”, his editorial office does not use a data base because of absence of computers. He also says, the editorial office has a problem connected with Internet access. The journalists have no possibilities to work on-line, and only the departments of foreign policy and sports can have access. The journalists of the newspaper “Akhali Epoka” are faced by analogous problems. Both the heads of the newspapers expect the problems to be solved.

The situation with photo archives is far from satisfying the needs of the editorial offices. For this reason it, is impossible to quickly find historical photos or other materials.

The editorials from the day of their establishment collect the photos they have used. Not every editorial office has an opportunity of copying photos on a CD. In almost every editorial office they have regulated the problem of receiving information from the news agencies. The editorial offices buy this information. They receive specific items of information, mainly by fax. *“We are short of many things. For example, we have no information from Ministry of Defense, nor from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. I think*

that the Ministry of Internal Affairs must be interested in co-operating with us”, noted the “6 Saatze” editor-in-chief.

It is obvious that Georgian newspapers need a special professional basis for the maximum utilization of information. It may be an Internet site if there are no extra difficulties or expenditures. It is possible to place and to preserve, as archives, published works from Georgian newspapers, and also information about Government structures.

4- Mass Media Role in Society

Georgian newspapers try to provide the society with maximum information on current events, giving the reader discussion themes and prompting the adoption of criticism, as well as criticism aimed at state officials and other influential persons. In that way, the newspapers form public opinion, though some of the editors-in-chief do not admit to this fact. Today’s press serves as a mediator between the society and the government.

The Georgian newspapers influence the policy of the state. But, at the same time, they are also influenced by people in power. The Georgian press does not pay due attention to the rules of the Journalist’s Code of Conduct. As the Georgian press is not sufficiently developed and does not meet the international standards, very often biased information is offered to the society. Under such circumstances, it has become usual for the society and the press to stand in opposition to each other.

What follows are the opinions of the Georgian newspapers’ editors-in-chief:

“Kviris Palitra”, editor-in-chief Lali Guntaishvili: “The role of our newspaper is to clean the press of fictitious stories, to teach the printed press to respect public opinion”.

“Alia”, editor-in-chief Georgy Bregvadze: “A newspaper is a mirror. It reflects current events. It is very important that every power structure should respond to what the newspapers write, how they write, who is the author and so on”.

“6 Saatze”, editor-in-chief Merab Moistsrafishvili: “After completion of the transition period in our country we have to fulfil just the same function as it is today - interpretation and analyzation of events”.

“Akhali Taoba”, editor-in-chief Soso Goginashvili: “I cannot say that we are forming public opinion. We just free ourselves from unnecessary emotions”.

“Akhali Epoka”, deputy editor-in-chief Gela Ebanoidze: “Our role is to analyze political events and to cast a light on the processes which are taking place in the society”.