

TRANSCAUCASUS 3

Number 3, January 1998

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Responsible Editor:

Vicken Cheterian, Geneva:

Geneva Institute for Democracy Building, 15 rue des Voisins, 1205 Geneva.

Tel: +41-22- 329 33 37, Fax: +41-22-320 58 73. E-mail: chetiri1@hei.unige.ch

Editors:

Shahin Rzaev, Baku:

Telephone: +994-12-90 67 13, e-mail: shahin@amnesty.Baku

Tamar Chikovani, Tbilisi:

Tel: +995-32- 96 42 64, e-mail: PR-tbilisi@iberiapac.ge

Nino Gelashvili, Tbilisi:

Tel: +995-32-99 96 02, fax: 99 08 33

Hagop Assatryan, Yerevan:

Tel: +37-42-58 22 97/58 24 83, e-mail: azg2@arminco.com

MEDIA BULLETIN

Editorial

BY HAKOB ASATRYAN, COORDINATOR OF THE PROJECT IN YEREVAN

The «Transcaucasus Media Support Project», supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, has successfully come to its concluding stage. During 1997 four conferences took place within the framework of this project in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Gudauri (Georgia) and Tsakhkadzor (Armenia).

The first three conferences focused exclusively on the professional problems of the journalists of the three Transcaucasian countries. The topics discussed included the development of the independent and state media in these three newly independent states, the legal basis of the free press, the regional and local press, the advertising market, the audiences of various media, television and radio, printing houses and press distribution agencies. Also covered were human rights and social problems and their reflection in the press.

These conferences proved once more that the journalists of Transcaucasus need not only information on professional issues but also personal contacts. Meetings and discussions after the sessions of the conferences showed that journalists are willing to cooperate regardless the conflict situations which exist between the countries they represent. It is true that each side was trying to prove its own case but it did not prevent the journalists from carrying on dialogs and understanding the main point which is to assist public consciousness to get rid of hatred and the image of an enemy in relations with their neighbors and to start solv-

ing complicated problems rather than ignite inter-ethnic conflicts.

That is why the fourth conference which took place in Tsakhgadzor, Armenia, in October was dedicated to the role of media in regional ethnic conflicts and some aspects of journalistic education and media support projects sponsored by Western countries. It was a unique opportunity for its participants, as for the first time since the beginning of the conflict, five journalists from Azerbaijan were able to visit Armenia. Owing to the generous support of OSCE, journalists from Abkhazia and Northern Ossetia were also able to take part in this conference and as a follow up three young journalists from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia spent a month in Switzerland on a training program. These journalists were Arman Jilavyan from Snark News Agency in Armenia, Tofigakhanum Kasymova from «Zerkalo» («Mirror») a Weekly in Azerbaijan and Temo Cheishwili from «Iveria Expressi» a Daily from Georgia. It is uncertain whether the «Transcaucasus Media Support Project» will be continued next year but I can certainly state that 1997 was a year of significant steps in bringing together the journalists of Transcaucasus. New friends and acquaintances were made, professional ties re-established and the information exchange restored.

Let's hope that this spirit of cooperation will endure and help us find a mutual support if not in global, but at least in professional matters. •

THE CONCEPT OF JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

BY ARISTAKES KAZINYAN, NEWSPAPER «AZG», YEREVAN

As it may seem at first or even at second glance, the notion of journalistic ethics is not always a constituent part of the general philosophical category known as «ethics». The only tangible connection between these two notions is «my inner moral law» as Kant called it once. Meanwhile, if the notion of «ethics» entails a Process (to live your life in accordance with generally accepted moral principles), the idea of «journalistic ethics» alienated from this, entails a Result, that in our case is the procured information. In this respect the notion of «journalistic ethics» is an industrial category dealing with the general policy of the enterprise in the process of production, rather than the moral or ethic aspects.

In other words the principal or conceptual difference between the notions of Process and Result defines the difference between «ethics» and «journalistic ethics». Thus, if the notion of «ethics» by its essence is a derivative of the «inner moral law», «journalistic ethics» is guided by more prosaic rules defined by the «Law on Press and other Mass Media.» Only this law can and has to determine a journalist's behavior independently from the moral judgment of his/her actions. Often an extremely important information is obtained by immoral (from the viewpoint of generally accepted values) «production process» which does not always mean a violation of journalistic ethics. After all it is impossible to serve two masters and create two contradictory idols. The excessive load of morale hinders journalist activity and under certain circumstances can reshape the journalist into something bohemian and heavenly like a poet or a dramatist.

Consciously or subconsciously every single journalist has to realize this danger in the work process and allow himself to be guided solely

by the respect of the criminal code and judicial norms. We can conclude by stating that from a journalist's position any information, procured by legal means and corresponding to real facts, is completely justified.

State structures, which de jure and de facto are considered legal by modern civilization, are characterized by a dense web of various self-securing laws. Numerous legal acts such as «The Copyright Law» and the «Law on the State Secrets» substantially complement the «Law on Press and Other Media».

As any other human activities, the behavior of journalists in modern countries is also regulated by laws, which in this case are directed against plagiarism and other forms of violation of journalistic ethics.

Independently from our mental capabilities, civic stands or potential abilities, me and my colleagues present here represent countries, which can hardly be viewed as based on the rule of law. These countries have only just started democratic reforms. We are in a transitional period characterized by a high degree of self-isolation of the ruling bureaucrats from the society caused by their isolation from the press. The absence of respective laws or the refusal to follow the existing laws on the provision of information by bureaucrats leads to the search of indirect ways of procurement of this information. Under these circumstances the only criteria of journalist moral has to be the full conformity of the obtained information to reality and not «gentleman agreements» or taboos. Otherwise the journalist ceases to function turning into and being manipulated as Harlequin or Pierro (depending on the circumstances) in the hands of bureaucrats.

As a result, the press loses its function as a guardian of society and entitles the bureaucrats to do whatever they want to. It is worth mentioning that the guardian function of the press costs us dear putting journalism on the same list with the most dangerous human activities.

As a matter of fact this is a global problem and before introducing our local cases, I would like to dwell upon some similar Western cases.

In a well-known case dating back to World War I, the public became aware of the poor supply of ammunition to the front line owing to the British newspaper publisher Lord Nordkiff. By publishing these materials Lord Nordkiff breached the «gentleman agreement» and violated all norms of «journalistic ethics», but by doing so he helped to improve the supplies in the interests of his motherland and the Antanta coalition.

A more recent example is the attempt of the Swiss government to misinform the parliament about the quality of purchased one hundred «Mirage IIIS» jet fighters. It was not a result of a deliberate information leakage (someone just complained about it at the presence of a reporter), however the public debate sparked off over this strategic issue helped to correct the wrong decision made by the military and state bureaucrats.

The next example is from modern times and reflects the events of the Gulf War in 1991. The restrictions imposed by the military of the Western alliance on the coverage of this war disappointed the public and eventually undermined the «confidence in mass media» (Herman Mein «The Mass Media in Germany»). The protest was addressed mostly against the US for the creation of so called «information pools» restricting the information flow. Only the reporters of certain countries accompanied by the military patrol were allowed to visit the front line. The censored information was then distributed among the journalists who were not allowed to visit the front to carry out an investigation of their

own. This situation was going on in the Western press and the information with a «cleared by» tag continued to appear. As a result, the Gulf War was presented as a kind of sport event with almost no casualties, giving the public a distorted picture of events and turning the journalists into public relation figures in the hands of the military.

But I would also like to draw your attention to another type of examples, such as the lawsuit against the German magazine «Der Spiegel» in 1962, which published an article about Bundeswehr's weaknesses during the «Fallex 62» military exercise.

19 days after the publication of the article under the title «Conventional Defense Readiness», publisher Rudolph Augstein was arrested and charged with «violation of journalistic ethic norms» for somehow obtaining the information about the situation in Bundeswehr. Moreover, a four week long search was conducted in the publishing office and resulted in the seizure and arrest of editorial and archive materials. However, the Federal Supreme Court dropped the charges against the magazine building its conclusion on the Constitution and the «Law on Press».

Few years later, in 1968, Germany adopted the eighth amendment to its Criminal Code restricting the punishment of journalists for high treason and divulging of state secrets. According to the new law charges can be brought only against those «...who will pass the state secrets to a third party and by doing this will create a serious threat to the national security of Germany.» This amendment served a lesson to German bureaucrats and secured the guardian function of the press.

A journalist's vocation is to obtain correct information and his obligation is to publish correct information. However, in our region and particularly in Armenia the institute of legal power is in an embryonic condition and this peculiarity does not allow us to carry out our professional duties normally and to illustrate this I would like to refer to my personal experience.

rience. At a party at my friend's, a flight engineer by profession, I followed his conversation with his colleagues and learned about a project of our government to build a large cargo terminal on the territory of one of the airports. Among those competing for the tender was a construction company from a «not so friendly country. « This was going against the strategic interests of my country and I decided to verify and learn more about it. But the person would refuse to talk and warned me about the taboo on the topic. As a result of this I was forced to sign under an incomplete material and publish it in an attempt to avoid the worse. Regardless the relatively passive public reaction to the article, I learned that a certain group in the high management of the Civil Aviation Department has used my article as an argument in their own interests and forced the top management to announce a new tender. This was not the only case in Armenia but I brought it up because this happened personally to me. Similar cases appeared in Georgia in connection with the transport of narcotics, but I do not consider myself competent enough on Georgia to comment on them.

The lack of information that forces the hungry journalist to obtain information by all possible ways, is similar to the search of food for survival and hence does not put the possibility of «criminal» (in the sense of not so moral) action out of question. Consequently, the higher the level of the functional interdependence of the reporter and the carrier of information, the lower is the possibility of violation of universal moral norms.

In the meantime, a certain isolation of our region from the international journalist community and consequently the inability to follow our publications has resulted in intense plagiarism in Armenia and in the region as a whole. This is a moral and not a professional problem, and like any other moral problem it is not possible to solve it in principle. The essence of the problem lies in the meaning and profitability of this disgraceful manifestation of human nature. In the countries where adopted laws actually work (such as the «Law on Copyright»), this sort of human activity is simply not justified if not punished. Unfortunately in our countries things are going the other way.

Concluding my extremely subjective and arguable interpretation of the notion of journalistic ethics, I would say that it is an indispensable part of the technological process called «the information gathering». On the eve of the third millennium a journalist has to care only about obtaining, selecting and transmitting information. These are the civic duties of journalists for which they often pay with their good name.

Certainly, I am far from wishing to present the journalist as an immoral craftsman or a mere informer. All my assumptions are derived from the civic platform ruled by absolute truth, where known notions get their real meanings. In this respect I can commit immorality in order to prevent a more dangerous development for the public. Hence the notion of journalistic ethics is a fiction created not at all by the supporters of free dissemination of information. •

THE PROBLEMS OF JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

BY TOFIGKHANUM KASYMOVA (NURANI)

HEAD OF THE INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT

OF THE «ZERKALO» («MIRROR») WEEKLY PAPER, BAKU

The problem of journalistic ethics has probably emerged simultaneously with the establishment of press and other media as a significant public institution. This issue entails something more than merely a discussion over the ways and means of getting information or what sort of evidence should a journalist possess while writing an article (especially when the article is not a sort of hidden advertising). The problem of journalistic ethics is much wider and encompasses a whole set of issues concerning the relationship between the press and the society. Very generally the whole set of journalistic ethics can be divided into three parts:

1. Relations of a journalist with the «hero», more precisely with the «anti-hero» of his/her publication;
2. Relations with the readers;
3. Relations among the journalists themselves i.e. some aspects of corporate or professional solidarity.

Perhaps the relations between a journalist and his «anti-hero» are studied in our society most comprehensively. During the Soviet period, when it was impossible to speculate about the freedom of press, a popular wisdom among journalists was: «if you write a feuilleton or critical article, use only 10 per cent of collected facts and hold the other 90 until the trial.»

The history of the USSR as well as the Newly Independent States including Azerbaijan is full of lawsuits against the newspapers. The outcomes of these legal proceedings were and are quite different from case to case, favoring the paper or the «victim» criticized in it.

The changes that took place in our public life, including the political struggle and disputes over the hot topics of the day affected the work of the mass media.

Often lacking arguments, some authors, especially in the state media and TV, directly offend their political opponents. As a result of this there is a big number of lawsuits brought against the media for offending the

honor and dignity of politicians. However, unlike the «Soviet period, « when an offended «anti-hero» would only demand to publish an official refutation, today's claims are backed by a demand of financial compensation for inflicted moral damages. Often the demanded financial compensation threatens to jeopardize the functioning of the paper. In a recent case, one of the party leaders of Azerbaijan called his political opponent «a KGB agent» during his interview to the opposition paper. The lawsuit against the paper followed immediately. The reporter was trying to defend himself by stating that his duty is to report the words of the interviewed person without any distortions, and it is the interviewed politician and not the paper which has to be hold responsible for the insult. Nevertheless the court obliged the newspaper to compensate for the inflicted moral damages and the amount of compensation was so high that it endangered the publication of the paper.

However, the problems of journalistic ethics are not over here, as the relations between the journalists and readers pose a much more complicated set of questions for the society and for the journalists themselves. The most vital of these questions is the journalists' right for a personal opinion and the ratio of the facts and commentary in the coverage of an event. Nowadays there is a wide variety of media in Azerbaijan, be it pro-governmental, opposition, independent or commercial, reflecting the whole range of genres from the pure propaganda to the so called «I write what I see» approach. Regardless of the continuing discussion over whether the reader needs the facts or the opinion of the reporter on those facts, the reader in Azerbaijan has something to choose from. It seems though, that our society has already made its choice between the «bare facts» and the commentary.

According to a recent poll carried out by the Union of Independent Journalists «Yeni Nesil» (New Generation), «Ayna» («Mirror») weekly and «Azadlygh» (Freedom) daily were the most popular printed media in Azerbaijan. Both fa-

vor the analytical articles and commentary over the «bare facts» approach.

The emergence of «local wars» and so called «hot zones» on the map of the former Soviet Union created the notion of «hot spot journalism». Within those spots the notions of objectivity and journalistic neutrality are treated rather freely. It would be wrong to assume that statement of facts and the absence of comments prevents the reporter from being biased. Suppose we are talking about events in Chechnya. How should a reporter call its capital, Grozny or Djohar-hala? Covering a territorial dispute, where all the geographical locations usually have a double name, can put the journalist in an awkward situation even if he tries to be neutral.

In case with Pridnestrovye (Moldova), we face a dilemma of whether to call the Pridnestrovye Republic of Moldova a «self-proclaimed» or do not touch this sore issue. One of the main principles of journalistic ethics reads «audiere et altere pars» (let the other side be heard). This principle is consigned to oblivion in conflict regions because journalists simply have no possibility to cross the front line few times a day if any, and the advantage for the reporters of third countries (not involved in the conflict) who are able to go to Yerevan, Baku, Tbilisi and Abkhazia is obvious.

For the journalists who are citizens of the country of conflict, the very idea of impartiality is unacceptable, even if they do not consciously distort the facts. In order to be able to cover conflict «objectively» the reporter of the country involved in the conflict must even forget his citizenship and sacrifice such notions as patriotism and civil duty. A way out of this situation has been found rather quickly. In the majority of publications the priority is given to the national interests rather than to common human values. For the journalist visiting the site of a conflict with a short-term mission it is equally difficult to look unbiased.

The notorious «balanced approach» adopted by the Moscow journalists on the early stages of regional conflicts considered a strict equality in reporting the positive and negative facts about the parties of the conflict. Certainly, such an approach has helped the journalists avoid charges of supporting one of the sides. But it also deprived the readers of the real picture of the events where the negative facts from each side were not always equal.

Severe competition and the lack of financial possibilities gave birth to a more recent phe-

nomenon once called «misinformation without the misinformation» in one of the novels of the famous Russian dissident writer Edward Limonov.

The TV news report from a hot zone shows a Shia Muslim running across the road and firing his «Kalashnikov». But I have a good visual memory and I recall the same Muslim running across the same street few weeks ago on another occasion. The desire to illustrate material is quite understandable and the use of archives is common practice, but quite often the visual materials do not correspond to the report or present one side while commenting on the other.

In the case of the Russian «Vesty» news program in 1992 the report about the shelling of Khankendy (Stepanakert-the capital of NK) was accompanied by a picture of burning houses in Shusha. In another case the Azerbaijanian television was airing a series of programs about the tragic events in January 1990, where among other shots, a group of young men in white, short-sleeved shirts was marching with slogans. Even if Azerbaijan is a southern country, no one can wear short sleeves there in January.

An event, which took place recently with a prominent Azerbaijanian writer, reveals another fact of a complicated ethical issue. In an interview to the well-known weekly magazine he recollected a period of his life when he was living and working in Moscow and noted that the ties between Azerbaijan and Russia should be strengthened and improved in every possible way. However, this interview was published only few months later, during a severe anti-Caucasian campaign in Moscow, when the illegal actions of the Special Squadron of the Moscow Police were intently examined by the Azerbaijanian Embassy in Moscow. As we can see from this example, the timing of the publication can put its «hero» in an awkward situation.

It seems to me that there is not a separate, isolated solution for the problems of journalistic ethics. Probably the emerging problems will be solved by both the unwritten «code of honor» and the personal convictions of the journalists and readers. •

The author of this article - reporter of the newspaper «Ayna» («Mirror»), and Nair Alive, - commentator on international issues, regularly publishes analytical articles devoted to home policy, have been acknowledged the best journalists of the year.

THE MASS MEDIA AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

BY REVAZ SAKEVARISHVILI, CORRESPONDENT OF NEWSPAPER «ALIA» AND
CORRESPONDENT OF RUSSIAN DAILY «SEGODNYA» IN TBILISI

While studying different aspects of mass media activities it is necessary to take into consideration the very specific character of its nature.

There are considerable differences between the electronic and printed media in Georgia. Virtually, printed media does not depend on the direct influence of the government, which of course does not eliminate the possibility of protectionism or a hidden financing by state structures, political parties or any financial groups. The main disadvantage of the central press is the fact that papers are distributed mainly in the capital and in some other main cities. As to the regional press officially or unofficially belongs to the local administration which itself consists of appointed and not elected officials. These officials are quite good in censoring the materials eliminating the possibility of even the slightest discrepancy with official thoughts. There is no space for social issues in these papers or it is only symbolic and there are no special publications dedicated to social issues at all. The situation with the coverage of social problems is even more complicated in the electronic media. The two main TV channels, which cover all the territory of Georgia, are totally controlled by the government, which does not intend to incorporate it or tolerate any deviation from the state policy, including the social field. Even if an alternative program manages to get on the air, the content of this program does not transcend the bounds of general thoughts. There is also no significant progress in private channels full of concerts and films and news blocks of news from news agencies. In the coverage of political issues, private TV channels display some alternative but with a moderate vision partly because the state had repeatedly taken away their broadcasting licenses for different reasons. The radio is not much different from the programs of the state radio censored toughly. Programs of private radio sta-

tions are full of music and a couple of insignificant news.

So, it appears that for the coverage of social problems there is only space in dozen of newspapers published in Tbilisi and distributed in the regions in limited quantities. Therefore, even if the media would sharply cover social problems it would not cause an adequate public reaction. Still, this fact does not eliminate the responsibility of mass media for the poor coverage of social problems, which is caused by both subjective and objective reasons. Probably the main objective reason is that unlike political and sport information, social issues are not popular among the readers. The media demonstrates a pure market approach: Social problems are not sold hence we are not interested in them. Being part of a complicated process, social problems cannot be considered separately, but even if a complex investigation of a process is carried out, the social problems are usually disregarded. The general apathy towards social issues could also be a result of the failure to serve this information in a more digestible way for the reader. Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention, that in the last two years the coverage of social issues in mass media has intensified compared with the first half of the 90-s. This could be the result of the fading attention to ethnic and regional conflicts which were filling all of the space before and all kinds of reforms which catalyzed the emergence of social problems.

The emerging social problems and their coverage are directly tied to the problem of transformation of the public consciousness. The objective reality requires that reforms are implemented by the «shock therapy» method, but the public consciousness changes very slowly.

The problems accompanying the reforms cause a certain discontent in a society and can be acute enough to risk jeopardizing reforms.

The mass media prefers not to assume any risk by taking the responsibility and plays the role of a double-faced Janus supporting the reforms and the anti-reform public opinion at the same time. Under such a duplicity policy, the mass media either closes its eyes on social problems or presents them in a more favorable way leading to the misinterpretation of and mishandling of these problems. The mass media does not use its chance to prioritize social problems in the situation of the absence of state social policy. Any criticism in the mass media regarding the social policy is limited to the statement that social paragraphs or funds are not allocated in the budget. Moreover, sometimes the media supports the pseudo-social actions of the government. For example, the press actively covers the fact that the government is intending to make a 20 per cent increase in wages and pensions increasing them from 9 to 10.8 Lari, which in fact is only 1 USD. The media itself repeatedly reports the value of the minimal consumer basket of 80 Lari. With rare exceptions, the mass media does not analyze those contradictory facts. At the same time, no one seems to be interested in how the population earns its living. On the contrary, the press is amazed with the surviving abilities of the state bureaucrats whose monthly salary is about 15 USD with the monthly fee of their cellular phones far exceeding it.

The press totally disregards the social problems of the disabled and pensioners.

In a recent scandal the pensions were not paid in time even if the funds had been allocated long ago. The media actively covered this incident by reporting on the Security Council meetings and the speeches of the President. Journalists launched an investigation to find the incompetent bank, governor, or the accountant to be blamed in the scandal. People who were immediately responsible for this remained in the shadow. No one got interested in the social injustice, when the pensions of those who were over 60 were brought to the same level with the pensions of those who had actually worked for 60 years. The same occurred with the disabled by birth and the disabled from the war whom the state sent to

war and has left alone today. The press covers the disabled only when they are picketing, organizing hunger strikes, or when the parliament or the government discusses the allocation of funds. Even in this case the media mainly tries to find out what political parties are backing the protesting disabled and pensioners.

When the government offered tax exemptions for the disabled they caused a big resonance, as they became a good cover for shady businesses. But when the government canceled those tax breaks, the press remained silent.

The same situation applies to the coverage of orphanages, boarding schools and soup kitchens. The press remembers them only when visited by the first lady or any other prominent public figure, or when representatives of international organizations distribute candies or free meals. Considering that the politicians usually rely on these actions during the election campaign, it becomes obvious why these topics start to appear at the same time.

In the meantime, the press avoided covering such anti-social actions of the government as the re-introduction of state taxicabs through a joint venture with some Arab businessmen. The state thus supported the financially well off competitor, which killed the private taxies. As a result of this the state got a solid profit with its red «Mitsubishi» taxies and deprived thousands of families of their income. The mass media enthusiastically sang hosannas to the city authorities and supported the «new» civilized approach to business while forgetting about those deprived from the market. The same happened when the city authorities under the pretense of improving the city image withdrew the small shops and street vendors from the central part of the city depriving thousands of families of the possibility to earn their living. And again the press kept silent or considered the social consequences of these actions insignificant compared with the improvement of the city's image.

Generally, emotions prevail in the discussion over social issues and often this develops into primitive populism. It is clearly manifested in the discussion over the reforms in public health and the education system. The press mainly stressed the high cost of these services (one

cannot get sound education, another cannot improve health). In this regard the press does pay attention to the reforms implementation and stratification of our society in different categories. Part of those categories should have social privileges in those systems in form of free service. The media mostly focuses on certain flashy facts like the reforms in the education system which will leave 10 000 teachers jobless. Again the media only stated facts and did not analyze the situation and possible consequences. The same happened with education fees, which officially exceed the minimal wage. And it is the press, which states that 80 per cents of the population live below the poverty line.

The coverage of the reforms within the public health system is also based mainly on emotions. In revealing certain negative facts or aggravated social problems the media makes serious statements about the expediency of these reforms, in other words, the media sometimes provokes social actions.

Social problems are often covered only when there are already dangerous consequences. And again the media covers those events superficially and does not go deep into the roots of the problem to reveal the real causes, covering just the scandal or sensation. Sometimes the media touches upon issues of illegal transplantation or illegal adoption but as a rule the range of issues is not expanded.

Georgia is a post-Soviet country with a number of conflict zones and refugees. In the coverage of this issue the media had been guided by a compassionate approach but now this supporting tendency is gradually declining and gaining a rather irritating tone. This tendency can be illustrated by an example. The police was repeatedly trying to prohibit street vending, the main occupation of refugees. At first, the press reacted sharply but then it gradually declined and made it possible for the police to carry on with its plans. As to the irritation tendency, it is caused by the increased rate of criminal actions among the refugees and again the media did not try to reveal the real cause of this social problem.

The problems of unemployment and street begging are not reflected at all. The media only fixes the statistic records, which are far from the real situation. Street begging has become

an arena for emotions and exaggeration of facts, let alone the large-scale hidden unemployment. All the state employees except the officers of law-enforcing agencies are included in this category but this problem is not reflected in the press.

Economic issues are a vast topic but it is worth mentioning some aspects of tax policy and land reform. High taxes can be considered a source of social problems. It is almost impossible to pay all the taxes honestly, but the non-payments of taxes is a criminal action. This issue could also be put into the foreground of social issues but in this case too, the media does not pay attention to it. In particular, the press focuses on what taxes should be levied and how the funds should be distributed between the capital and the regions. Regarding the non-payments of taxes the position of the press and the tax police coincide in blaming the taxpayers.

The land reform is another example. It is already implemented in the regions but the press does not possess any real information on events in the regions. Land reform is not considered by the press from an angle of social issues but rather from an angle of it being implemented in time.

In short, in the Georgian media, the social problems are either totally disregarded or considered only within a political context. The media only fixes the economic and social statistics which itself is a preface for the description of social reality but the reality itself somehow does not come out. No one tries to diagnose and forecast the situation and the positional analysis is absent. The media does not investigate particular social problems in the context of uselessness or usefulness for different social groups. Another main flaw in the coverage of social issues is that the media does not identify impeded social problems and what social consequences decisions of political and economic structures or of people who have a great influence on our public life may have. The media does not make a comparative analysis of a real situation and the situation in which a civilized society must live and this is why our media lacks criteria for the coverage of social issues. All above-mentioned factors have contributed to the poor coverage of social problems in the Georgian media. •

THE COVERAGE OF SOCIAL ISSUES IN PRESS

BY TAMARA CHIKOVANI, CORRESPONDENT
OF THE GEORGIAN SERVICE OF RADIO «LIBERTY», TBILISI

It is considered that the «ethic code» is not a mere reflection of ideological theses that all journalists all over the world should obey and be guided by. The ethic code is a combination of rules to which journalists commit themselves and observe voluntarily in order to be able to fully meet their own obligations towards the readers i.e. the consumers of their information.

The public has a right to true and comprehensive information in order to develop a well reasoned opinion and a respective reaction and behavior.

Therefore, a journalist should meet two criteria: professional competence and moral consciousness.

There is a widespread opinion that the journalistic code is the code of unwritten rules, although there are some written documents defining journalistic ethics. For example the international principles of journalistic ethics, adopted at the consultative meeting of International and Regional Organizations of Professional Journalists in Paris, on November 20, 1983. This document clearly defines the ethical norms of journalists. A top priority is given to the «right of people to receive true information».

All the mass media in Georgia assure that the main goal of their activity is to provide readers with objective information, although the journalists themselves fairly complain about the impossibility of getting or verifying the obtained information. Unfortunately, quite often our papers publish unverified informa-

tion obtained from only one source or often simply referring to «well-informed sources».

It is still bearable when a paper specifies that they failed to verify or get a confirmation of this or that information. Back in the times of President Gamsakhurdia, when the reporters of the newspaper «Droni» were not allowed to the Parliament sessions, there was even a column in their paper entitled «what we have not seen but were told about.»

Unfortunately, quite often unverified and simply false information is represented as the truth. A journalist also has the right to makes mistakes but Georgian journalists do not like to admit their own mistakes. Let me remind you that journalistic ethics state that «in case of an error a journalist is obliged to undertake all possible measures to avoid its consequences, publish a refutation, express an apology and compensate any inflicted moral damage.»

In a recent example, the vice-provost of the Tbilisi Institute of Theater and Cinema brought a suit against the «7Days» newspaper for insulting him.

The court supported the vice-provost and ruled that the paper should publish an apology. But the newspaper considered the court decision as subjective and refused to express an apology.

Let's hope that the draft law on free access to information, which is discussed in our parliament, will clarify the question of access to official sources of information.

«The journalist must respect the honor and dignity of people who become an object of his professional interest; he should avoid intervening into the private life and disperse this kind of information exclusively when it is necessary for the protection of the interests of the society and the rights of the citizens. The Journalist should not disseminate unverified information and make expressions that could undermine the reputation or tarnish the dignity of a person. «

The readers define the general prevailing tone of the Georgian press today as sarcastic. The heroes have disappeared and are replaced by anti-heroes whom journalists depict in «all their glory. « This also can explain the emerg-

ing tendency in our society to give the priority not to political or public newspapers and TV programs but to the «yellow» press. The life-styles of stars and Mexican soap operas shows are wildly popular.

In conclusion I can state that journalistic ethics in the Georgian press today totally depend on the ethics and behavior of every single journalist; some act as they want, others behave differently because of different moral criteria. But it is obvious that the Georgian journalists have come to the conclusion that unethical media cannot contribute to the establishment of a civilized society. Some meetings of journalists were dedicated to the issue of journalistic ethics. It really instills hope. •

THE COVERAGE OF SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE PRESS

BY NARINE DILBARIAN, NEWSPAPER «HAYKAKAN ZHAMANAK»
(ARMENIAN TIMES), YEREVAN

The Social-liberal «draft winds» in Armenia.

The beginning of 1997 in Armenia did not show any signs of worsening social problems but already in January, when the state budget of 1997 was finally adopted with a delay, the social transfers of 2,9 billion drams were mentioned as a separate clause. This meant that Armenia is adopting a new liberal policy of social transfers, which will replace the old Soviet system of social privileges.

The adoption of the Budget and the accompanying emotions in the press were so loud that the official as well as the opposition press completely forgot about the policy of transfers. But the very first article of our Constitution states the following: «The Republic of Armenia is a social state.» Within the period from February to April 1997 the press, especially the official one, was very seriously discussing the increase of prices of the basic necessities and delayed payments of wages and pensions. While the official press presented only the official numbers of the increased prices provided by the State Department of Statistics, the opposition press tried to reveal the real cause of the increase. The «father» of the extremely liberal economy, Prime Minister Hrant Bagratyan resigned and was replaced by Armen Sarkissyan. In his very first speech in the Parliament Sarkissyan declared that the human being is going to be the center of Armenian policy and the government must turn its face to its citizens, the people. Unfortunately he did not have time to implement his promise: the official press plainly claimed that Armen Sarkissyan is not able to carry on his duties owing to health problems, and very soon, in a telephone press-conference, the

Prime Minister confirmed his health problems and resigned.

Not denying the existing health problems, the independent and opposition press insisted that the resignation was a result of more serious problems, including the conflict with the formed and established law-enforcement and economic structures of Armenia. There are already several well-established and active structures in the industry, agriculture and especially trade that have become monopolists and are protected by the top state figures. The policy of Armen Sarkissyan did not serve their interests. Besides, if Bagratyan was backing an extremely liberal monetary - economic policy, Armen Sarkissyan proclaimed the governing role of the state in the implementation of economic reforms, which first of all meant the control, and regulation of the privatization processes.

On March 25, 1997, the new Prime Minister Robert Kocharyan, a former president of Nagorno Karabagh Republic, was presenting his new concept of economic and social development of Armenia. The mass media of Armenia reacted to Kocharian's appointment suspiciously and without enthusiasm.

One of the chairmen of the Parliamentary groups Armen Martirosyan commented on it in «Aravot» daily: «Let's open the doors and windows to let in a fresh air, we must not be afraid of draughts that will refresh our atmosphere». After that interview a reporter of «Haykakan Zhamank» noted that the draught refreshes the air but sometimes the overcooling causes different diseases. For the beginning Robert Kocharyan stated: «For me there won't be any untouchable spheres, people, families or friends. «The trivial coverage of social prob-

lems which is often overdone by the opposition press is usually limited to a piteous description of poverty and beggars searching for food in the garbage.

This is changing towards a deeper comprehension of social changes in Armenia and traditional images of poverty are moved to the background giving a place to serious analytical articles about the new social orientation. At present not only the official but also the extreme opposition papers («Irvunk» («The Law») and «Ayzhm» («Now»)) publish analytical materials on the new social policy.

On the other hand, «Hayk», the official body of the ruling party which was silent about social problems before, has suddenly began to publish letters and interviews of citizens which have not received their salaries and pensions for months. Even more, «Hayk» has started to remind the program of the ruling «Respublika» block and the Presidential program of Ter-Petrosyan which reads that the state undertakes the creation of 140.000 work places with a 100 USD monthly salary before the year 2000. It also promised a five-fold increase of the real income and guaranteed free education and medical services. President Levon Ter-Petrosian also promised to create conditions for the return of those who have left the country (according to the state statistics about half a million people), continue the construction in the earthquake zone, provide housing for the refugees from

Azerbaijan and try to solve the problem of indexation of deposits in saving accounts.

For a long time these election promises have been consigned to oblivion by official but not the opposition press. It is interesting that the paper «Hayk» remembered about this program only after the appointment of two Prime Ministers who were not the members of the ruling party, the All-Armenian National Movement. Unlike the ruling party paper «Hayk», other official media («Hayastani Hanrapetutyn» and «Respublika

Armenia» (Armenian and Russian editions) and Armenpress agency were covering social reform policy in a more moderate way. The opposition press stressed that even though the social reform policy has not yet brought any good the good thing is that the appointed new Prime Ministers are not members of the ruling ANM and are taking positive steps.

The rise of prices is explained by the fact that the government has started to collect taxes, which go directly to the State budget. Before, VAT and excise taxes were collected at the customs enriching the shadow economy.

«Golos Armenii» a Russian language leftist paper has given a quite rigid but positive mark to the attempts to collect taxes, although predicted clashes within the ruling elite. And indeed, those predictions came true with the emerging conflicts between the government and parliament accompanied by a small-scale social riot.

The system of social transfers has started to be introduced in all CIS countries, including Russia and Transcaucasus. International financial organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank require the abolition of the acting system of privileges for socially vulnerable groups as a condition for granting loans. Cash compensation should be provided for vulnerable groups instead.

Today our Parliament is on holiday, but the pre-holiday period was a hot one. The last session of the parliament was not much different from the others with a small exception, the «disobedience» of the Chairman of the Committee on Social Security, Ecology and Public Health Gegham Gharibjanian whose commission rejected and voted to revise the draft law which abolishes all privileges (free public transport, utilities and housing rent) to socially vulnerable groups (disabled of I, II, III groups, military personnel, victims of repression, single pensioners). According to the new law, instead of those privileges the socially vulnerable groups are compensated with an amount of 2642 drams (about \$5.30).

The government and the parliament started a long period of negotiations and even the Prime Minister visited the parliament on an occasion. Finally, on the extraordinary session of the parliament on June 6, a compromise was reached.

The privileges for the nine categories (514 thousand people) of socially vulnerable groups were retained and the other categories are compensated with an amount of 4000 dram - 7,5 USD. The privileges did not include the payment for used electricity above 100 KW. However, this compromise did not satisfy the society and the Parliament was surrounded by the disabled on wheelchairs and pensioners.

This insignificant social riot faded out as fast as it was kindled, and proved once more that the Armenian society is distinguished by a high social tolerance or social conformity as described by the paper «Molorak». The rioters swore and pushed an unlucky deputy who happened to be there. After the riot the government paid its debts to the budgetary organi-

zations and pensioners amounting in 4 billion drams.

During the press conference dedicated to the first hundred days in office, Robert Kocharyan sounded optimistic, as in June the government had only 1.6 billion drams in debt. He also expressed the hope that in September all debts will be paid off and it will be possible to launch a program designed to increase wages, pensions and unemployment benefits.

As a result, the government finally decided to fix the cost of a minimal consumer basket. «Better late than never» commented the press.

Meanwhile, the parliament Committee on Social Security, Environment and Public Health develops a draft law on the indexation of accounts and on Veterans.

We are expecting a hot social autumn in Armenia. The Government and Parliament should act according to the principle defined by the president Levon Ter-Petrosian in the form of a maxim: « Victory has thousand parents while defeat is an orphan. » •

THE COVERAGE OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN MASS MEDIA

BY SEVINJ HEIDAROVA; «SHARG» INDEPENDENT INFORMATION AGENCY, BAKU

Along with the sweeping structural changes in the economy of Azerbaijan which are manifested through the strengthening of the national currency manatee, a low inflation rate, the gradual growth of the GDP and boosted foreign investment, we have witnessed a significant deterioration of the social conditions of the people for the last two years. The deterioration of living standards occurs in direct proportion to the growth of foreign investment in the economy with a growing number of newly opened snazzy shops, restaurants, casinos, hotels, supermarkets and other attributes of the «New Azerbaijan».

While the vast majority of the intelligentsia, pensioners and disabled are literary doomed to extinction (for example the welfare for the disabled soldiers of Karabagh war varies from 35 to 45 thousand Manat = about 9-11 USD), the majority of papers and magazines are filled with advertising of luxury products, erotic collages and high society gossip. Some printed media are playing up to expatriate community to sell themselves for a higher price.

As to the official press, it is sometimes engrossed in state «affairs» to the extent that even when having a «popular» origin and title, they do not pay any attention to the social problems.

However, there are a number of publications, mainly leading independent papers, which regularly cover social issues making those papers very popular. First of all this is the paper «Zerkalo» (Mirror) boldly and impartially convicting the torturers of the nation» regardless of their ranks and titles. Among others there are the analytical magazine «Monitor», the newspapers «Azadlygh» (Freedom), «7 Gjun» (7 Days) and «Panorama». If the press keeps

silence about the hot topics of the day to avoid problems in their activity and does not cover «bad news», those problems do not cease to exist and may even aggravate.

The Press is considered the fourth power and for the sake of protection of the vulnerable it should do its uttermost. Today, when Azerbaijan has rolled back to the level of the sixties by the main economic indicators and the vast majority of the population struggles to survive it is treason not to write about the social problems.

Owing to the press social justice has been restored many times and the facts of severe violations of the rights of refugees, the disabled and other socially vulnerable classes have been revealed. The article of Elmira Abdulaeva of «Zerkalo» forced the procurator to cancel his decision of extradition of blind people from the legally occupied premises. «Zerkalo» also revealed the facts of suicides of disabled soldiers of the Karabagh war doomed to poverty, embezzlement of funds allocated for the treatment of disabled soldiers in Israel and many other similar facts. Publicizing these facts had a large repercussion in our country and caused a large-scale reshuffling of top-level officials. In the meantime we have to admit that our people were socially much better protected in «Soviet times».

At present, the majority of the enterprises in our republic stand idle with their workers being sent on indefinite administrative leave and doomed to a futile search for a new job without any social protection from the enterprise or the government.

According to the State Committee on Statistics there are 70 thousand unemployed people

in Azerbaijan but according to other sources the real number is about 400-450 thousand people. More than 300 thousand jobs were lost as a result of the occupation of our territories.

Naturally, any government should strive to keep the earnings of the population no lower than the minimal living cost. The minimum living cost in Azerbaijan today is about 370 thousand manats (about 90USD) with the average monthly salary of 115 thousand manats (about 30 USD). The government's debt in unpaid wages to the population is about 250 billion manats with 80 per cent of this debt accounting for industry workers. The law on the «Minimal Consumer Budget» was adopted five years ago but disregarding its obligations to the ILO convention of 1970, the country has not officially defined the minimal living cost until now. From July 1, our government has abolished all privileges on the use of public transport and utilities for teachers, pensioners, journalists and participants of the liquidation of the after-effects of the Chernobyl accident, leaving the vulnerable alone with their thoughts of where to get their much needed assistance. But who can help the people if not the state?

The increasing cost of living leaves the salaries far behind with the prices for utilities in 1996 having gone up 1190 times and for the water 6000 times compared to 1991. The 1,200,000 pensioners, disabled and the socially vulnerable classes are doomed to the mercy of fate. Sometimes the officials appointed to the structures of social defense hurt the interests of those under their protection. Thanks to the

investigation carried out by journalists it was revealed that the funds allocated for the disabled in the ministry of Labor and Social Security were used to buy luxury cars for this ministry. According to the State Committee of Statistic more than 60 per cent of funds transferred by various businesses and enterprises to the Employment Fund of the Employment Center are spent for maintaining this service itself. The unemployment benefit is so low (about 5850 manats a month - some 1.4 USD) that it is not sufficient to cover the public transport expenses necessary for the registration of the documents needed to get that unemployment benefit. Even after the registration only one third of the registered get the official status of an unemployed and only 13 per cent of them get this miserable benefit.

The privatization process carried out under the conditions of social deprivation is perceived by our people as black humor about their position in society. Out of desperation the people are forced to sell the privatization vouchers for 1-2 per cent of their real value.

Compared to 1991, the birth rate in our country, where people lack means for even buying bread, medicines and basic necessities, has fallen from 27 to 19 per 1000 residents. The mortality rate has sharply gone up mainly owing to cardio-vascular diseases.

An «invisible» struggle between the rich and the poor is under way in my country. The gap between the well off and the miserable grows wider and the media should assume more responsibility in its service to the community and save it in case of need. •

THE MASS MEDIA AND POLITICAL PROCESSES

BY IVLIAN KHAINDRAVA, INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST, TBILISI

Both topics of my report emerged in the countries of my region not long ago and are young, if not infant. The real political processes in our countries began probably ten years ago and the beginning of their coverage in the media also dates back to that time. I am not going to talk much about what was before that, as the official coverage of these processes was worth the processes themselves and the free press did not exist. Politics was prepared in the Kremlin and the rest of the republics were left with their pseudo ministries of Foreign Affairs, which nobody took serious.

Indeed there were some differences in particular problems of domestic life in the republics but the ways of solution of these problems could by no means be different from those designed in the Kremlin. I regret to confess that our press began to change later than the Moscow press. Russian magazines and newspapers became very interesting in no time, while ours, with rare exceptions, remained under the pressure of the communist authorities. Meetings and demonstrations filled the streets, the national-liberation movement was rapidly expanding but the papers, TV and the radio continued to curse the «informals» and hide objective information as they were doing before.

It was rather a ridiculous situation because under the new conditions people were able to compare what they saw and heard on the street with the information provided by the state media, which sometimes did not cover the events at all.

Demand creates supply and at the end of the 80-ies various parties and movements created their papers which were also not always objective, and often presented the desirable as a reality. Besides, the lack of efficient printing facilities and legal backup was creating prob-

lems for their timely reactions to the events necessary for real papers. The establishment of the independent press in Georgia began with the relinquishing of the power by the communist party on April 9, 1989.

This brief historic introduction was needed to approach the main problem in the functioning of the chain of political processes and mass media. This problem is the problem of adequate reflection of the political processes. Whatever others think, but the mass media is secondary in its essence because it informs about something which is already occurring. In its turn the further course of events sometimes depends on the way of coverage of those events. Probably every politician begins his day by listening to the TV or radio morning news or looking into papers and often his actions depend much on the information scooped from these sources. Misinformed politicians could act inadequately. At least, his actions and behavior could be foolish or meaningless, at worst he could act dangerously or hazardously. Certainly, every politician has an access to other sources of information besides the media, and the higher the position of a politician is in the structure of power the more sources of information he has and the more reliable and complete is the picture of events. This is the way it probably should be. However, reality is different because of at least two reasons:

First, not all those involved in politics are real politicians in a true sense of the word and even a flood of information will not make any difference for them.

Second, those other sources of information often pursue their own interests and could provide biased information (sometimes this is the conscious or subconscious desire of the leaders to hear what they want to hear). Nev-

ertheless, a trustworthy newspaper, a TV or radio program remains an indispensable source of information for a real politician. For the ordinary reader mass media remains the only source of information. The consequences of actions of an inadequately informed reader are not as dangerous compared with actions of those in power, but in the long term it could entail negative consequences. I could presume with a high probability that inadequately informed citizens will make an inadequate choice.

What is the adequate presentation of information and what does it require of journalists and mass media?

I am not going to discuss the most obvious: objectivity, reliability and promptness. I think that professionalism of journalists covering political issues implies not only a sound knowledge of the subject but also knowledge of a particular field. I would say that journalists who cover politics should be political scientists but by no means politicians. Politicians do not always say or stand by the truth and instead are guided by expediency, pragmatism as well as quite often by juncture and mercantile interests. Political scientist as well a journalist does not need and should not act against his conscience. Figuratively speaking, journalists vocation is to tell the truth, only the truth and nothing else but the truth. Any derivation from this course could turn the information into misinformation and distort the essence of journalism. As I mentioned earlier the journalist must know the subject, which is achieved by actually implanting him/herself into it.

I am astonished at the irresponsibility and obnoxious behavior of some journalists who write analytical articles about the supreme body of our state after visiting only couple of sessions of the Parliament. To understand any parliament one must permanently be in the midst of events, be in regular contact with the deputies from different factions and lobbies, know backstage intrigues and relations with the executive power. As an example of an appalling inadequate reflection of reality I would

like to present the following case. The President of Georgia presented the acting Head of the National Bank to be approved by the parliament according to the newly adopted law. It was believed that the pro-president majority would ensure a smooth approval for the candidate, as the only faction who was against him had only 25 seats in the parliament out of 235. However, during the voting the candidate failed to get the necessary majority of votes. In the report on that session, which appeared on the next day in one of the papers, the failure of the candidate was presented as a result of the actions of the opposition. Hence, as a result of basic unawareness regarding the functioning of the parliament where the opposition is the minority and cannot block the decision of the majority, the readers did not get any idea of how the candidate failed. In reality he failed because of the votes against him by the pro-presidential majority in the parliament, therefore it was more likely that the president himself decided to get rid of an unwanted candidacy with the «hands» of the parliament or the interests of that pro-presidential majority were actually much stronger than the obedience which it had shown to the president before. What were the interests, which proved to be stronger? The reporter could not even come close to this question as he already had taken a false start.

In this same case, the state (official) TV actually adopted the same approach to the coverage of events. The failed candidate had a very positive public and professional image, and it was not in the state interest to reveal that he failed because of the pro-presidential majority—a big blow to the president's image. The state TV created an illusion that it was the parliamentary minority of 25 who actually blocked the highly professional candidate. The TV did so by giving an unlimited airtime to the opposition group (something exceptional for the state TV) to criticize the failed candidate on screen.

In this example the same event was presented inadequately by both, the reporter and the TV, but the reasons to do so were different.

In case with the newspaper it was both the incompetence of the reporter who did not bother to learn more about the voting procedures and the negligence of the editor who published the wrong information. In case with the TV it was the deliberate distortion of facts in a shameful zeal to please those in power.

The inadequate coverage of international political processes is mostly a result of the insufficient knowledge of the issue.

According to my observations, not only journalists but also editors do not read other papers or efficiently use the resources of the Internet. To my great surprise journalists in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are more than poorly informed about the life of each other. We should not underestimate the seriousness of this problem and we have to start improving it immediately.

The current situation in Georgian journalism (I guess it is not much different at our immediate neighbors), I can state that it is characterized by an intense inflow of young people into the media. This is a positive process because the new generation is not poisoned with outmoded communist stereotypes. And it is natural that this new generation does not have an extensive experience in journalism and will gain it in the course of events. But the lack of basic skills of the craft such as the creativity of writing and the grammatical correctness are striking. This could lead to the devaluation of our profession as it happened with the politics and the parliamentarians, where there is an illusion that anybody can easily work in the parliament as well as in the paper. The lack of self criticism, absence of competition among the journalists within a paper and other organizational flaws define the more than a mediocre level of the press. I do not even consider it worthy to talk about the state television. Independent TV channels face too many obstacles on their way be it by the state TV not willing to have a competitor, or objective financial and staff problems. Thus they cannot play a real role in influencing the audience.

The hard situation in our journalism has a harmful effect on the audience which swallows anything of any quality coming across and forgets about it shortly after.

In Georgia the independent and opposition papers failed to influence the parliamentary elections even if they tried to work hard to do so. The low «qualification» is typical not only for the press but also for the majority of readers.

Here we witness an apparent feedback: the journalists accustomed the readers to a poor quality of publications and readers in their turn are not demanding towards the reporters. Recently I published a one and a half page long analytical material about the situation in Israel. I considered the article a success, as although having a remote geographical location this country is of some interest to our region because of many considerations. I suppose that this article was read only by my colleagues, one of whom noticed that I said a new word in the Georgian journalism but unfortunately no one heard it. Such a situation in independent media deprives it of the possibility to have a real beneficial influence on political processes. In civilized countries there is a closed circuit of political processes which consists of the following: the actions of the government; the adequate coverage of these actions in media; the formation of the public opinion and its influence on that political process.

However this chain in my country is disrupted due to the weakness of the second link and the practical absence of the third. This allows the authorities to ignore the independent media or use it only partly for their own interests. In other words the inadequacy produces a counter inadequacy.

We can conceal ourselves by the fact that our independent media is quite young and its flaws are explicable. But I suppose that the problems of independent and competent media are too serious to merely wait for better times. Along with the political pluralism the mass media is considered to be a key for the door leading toward democratic society, a key without a spare one. •

THE COVERAGE OF THE INTERNAL POLITICAL LIFE IN THE ARMENIAN PRESS

BY HOVHANNES GALADJYAN, POLITICAL COMMENTATOR OF «IRAVUNK»
(THE LAW) WEEKLY, YEREVAN

THE RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED BY
THE CLAN SYSTEM OF POWER.

I. What does «Internal Political Life» mean?

A full scale internal political life is probably only possible in a society based on the rule of law and it is quite natural that the internal political life in its classical sense is constantly distorted depending on the regime of power in a given state.

As a result of the falsified elections in 1996 the political power in Armenia became completely illegitimate, complete with an illegitimate constitution, president, parliament and local authorities.

The present regime in Armenia can be called clannish -authoritarian: all the power on all levels and some 80 per cent of the economy are divided between several clans which do not have any internal political orientation (rightist, leftist, centrist or other) and view the preservation and perpetuation of their monopolistic positions as their main goal.

Under these conditions the attributes of internal political life remain only symbolic. Consequently, all the political parties and non-governmental organizations which possess a real political orientation are ousted from the structures of power and are in opposition to the current system of power as they are not able to exist and function within it. Hence, today in Armenia there is only an anti-system opposition.

The so-called «constructive» opposition has a rather formal character and cannot play the role of a real opposition in the system of clans. When talking about the coverage of the internal political life in the Armenian press we mean the coverage of the following processes:

1. The struggle among the clans for re-division of spheres of influence, the re-shuffling of high positions within the clannish system of power, the role of the president of Armenia in the settlement of inter-clannish disputes.
2. Formal events of the internal policy life: the work of the Parliament, government, presi-

dential administration and local authorities, inter-party relations, inner-party life, etc.

3. The confrontation between the authoritarian clannish power system and the anti-system opposition.

4. Spontaneous public disturbances acquiring a political meaning.

II. The Coverage of the Inter-Clan Struggle.

The struggle between the clans for the re-division of spheres of interests is covered in different ways by different papers. The official press and the press organs of the different departments of the government plainly deny the existence of the clan system. Nevertheless, the struggle between the clans in these papers is reflected in the form of criticism and revelations of this or that official. Naturally, these articles touch only upon the «small fish» of the clan and do not touch the «sharks.»

In the so-called «independent» i.e. non-governmental and non-party press, the inter-clan struggle is usually reported in the form of staff re-shuffling, governmental decisions and adopted laws. The holiest of the secrets of the clannish system i.e. the real proprietorship of a certain branch or enterprise is usually not covered or covered allusively, since these papers are quite vulnerable to arbitrary decisions of the system and the sponsors (the representatives of the business circles which sponsor them are very careful in their relations with the system).

At its fullest, the inter-clan struggle is covered in the opposition press. The journalists of this press often intrude into the spheres defined as a taboo by the clannish system. This phenomenon is explained by the fact that the opposition papers are backed by the opposition parties and are better protected from the arbitrary actions of the system.

III. The Coverage of Formal Attributes of the Internal Political Life

This issue is covered in the Armenian press quite widely and versatile because this is a

sphere of minimal risk. Events connected with the local administration make an exception and are covered by the local press in the manner of «Soviet times» reflecting the squabble between the local micro-clans. The central press covers those events only when the local scandal grows into a big one.

IV. The Coverage of the Confrontation Between the System and the Anti-System Opposition

The irreconcilable confrontation between the authorities and the opposition is quite widely covered in our press but mostly from extremely polarized positions. The pro-authority press is striving to take advantage of any small slip of the opposition to disparage it and publishes, with rare exceptions, purely propagandistic materials.

In its turn the opposition press strikes back by publishing sensational revelations of illegal or simply immoral actions of the authorities. Though somehow biased, the opposition press is rather objective and can by no means be compared with the extremely biased pro-governmental press.

As for the «independent» press it encompasses a whole spectrum of evaluation of the confrontation between the authorities and the opposition. The widespread analytical materials concerning the necessity of a dialogue between the authorities and the opposition are the result of a widespread illusion in the journalistic circles. The essence of the illusion is that a dialogue between the opposition and authorities is only possible if the latter is consistently weakened which is not yet possible. Nevertheless, at the peak of confrontation between the authorities and the opposition (Presidential election in fall 1996), the «independent» press managed to make a correct evaluation of the situation and form an adequate public opinion.

V. The Coverage of Spontaneous Public Disturbances

Spontaneous demonstrations of cheated investors of pyramid schemes, refugees demanding more humane living conditions or other socially vulnerable groups with different demands, are common practice in Armenia. These rallies, in form of demonstrations, petitions and meetings are usually objectively reflected in the opposition and «independent

press» and sometimes in the pro-governmental press.

VI. Restrictions Imposed by the Clannish System on the Coverage of the Internal Political Life

An absurd legal act adopted in Armenia holds journalists responsible for publishing information containing state or military secrets. In practice this law is rarely used and strangely it is mostly the state press which fails to actually keep secrets. Our bureaucrats appear to be quite relaxed with the national security of the country.

Most severely the authorities react to publications regarding the division of spheres of influence among clans and the shadow proprietorship of large businesses. In such cases the authorities use all possible methods including open criminal violence to put pressure on the given media or journalists.

The most radical in publishing this type of information is the opposition press which is better protected under the roof of the opposition. As to the «independent» press it does not have sufficient financing and highly depends on sponsors, which often appear to be affiliated with this or that clan. We will not even talk about the state press, which is under the direct control of the authorities.

VII. The Influence of the Press on the Internal Political Life

So far the press has had little influence on the internal political processes, but this influence can hardly be considered insignificant. To some extent the press shapes the public opinion a fact which cannot be totally ignored even under a clannish-authoritarian regime. We avoided the establishment of a dictatorship and the elimination of the opposition on September 25, 1996 (after the riots against the falsified presidential elections) partly thanks to the press.

We witness a positive tendency among our journalists: a slow increase in numbers of journalists respecting their own signature on the material. This tendency has touched even the state and pro-governmental press.

These tendencies allow us to hope that the «fourth power» and the first institution of civic society is under gradual formation in Armenia. •

THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF AZERBAIJAN

BY ELMAR HUSEYNOV; EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE MAGAZINE «MONITOR», BAKU

What is the role of press in the political system of Azerbaijan? The question is of course rhetoric. Several conditions are necessary for the development of the press and first of all it is the freedom of speech, which is considered to be the basic element of culture in any society. It cannot be declared or introduced by a decree or law. Our authorities insist that there is complete freedom of speech in Azerbaijan. The opposition in its turn argues that this is not true given the numerous examples of political censorship in the opposition press. To some extent both sides are correct, but the absolute truth is that freedom of speech is an indispensable process for the development of a society within the democratic tradition. Truncated or shortened freedom of speech is a parody of the rights and freedom of citizens. The relationship between the press and the political system can be seen in the relationship between the press and the power, which under an authoritarian regime has a rather formal or declarative nature but in our case they do not interact at all. Probably this is the way it should be as there is no dependence between the power and the people, so the press cannot play the role of a bridge to the society. In many countries the press is called only the fourth power even though its strength often exceeds the executive power. Our press mainly plays an informative role and its main goal is to inform people about what has already happened rather than to influence the political situation in the country. The press itself has rather weak democratic traditions and the world of journalism is ruled by the struggle of ambitions and strive to monopolize the truth. Authorities today rarely react to the press and this is the main difference between them and previous authorities. There had been only two cases recently, when

the authorities lost their patience and both times the reasons were quite serious. Even if we accuse the authorities of limiting freedom of speech they rarely make an effort to react to any publication in the press. Their behavior regarding the press can be characterized by a saying: «The moon does not heed the barking of dogs». Besides, the authorities dispose of a huge propaganda machine of the National TV and tens of pro-governmental papers. Usually the power and the press interact only during boisterous scandals and even then the authorities chase the reporters off like importunate flies. Compared to the local press, the foreign press is viewed in quite a different manner. It may sound strange but sometimes the local press finds out about important developments, which occurred in our country from the foreign press agencies. By all possible means the power barricades itself off the press erecting obstacles in their way. That is why the press is forced to publish scandalous but insignificant materials. The attitude of the power to the press cannot be described as indifferent, there is no attitude at all. But the same we can say about the relation between the press and our society. The society does not want the press to express its interests.

The vast majority of newspapers and magazines have a political rather than a social trend. The majority of editors is totalitarian in their creativity and has a high level of inner censorship, which is sometimes higher than that required by the authority. In a strive to solve their problems editors of magazines and papers censor their own materials not to provoke the discontent of the authority. Although there was no direct attack on the press from the side of the authorities, the general tension in our society is hanging over the press like the sword of Damocles.

By the way, besides the inner censorship there is a functioning real one which seems to exist and do not exist at the same time. In their attempts to achieve a positive international image our authorities suppress any critique of human rights in the mass media instead of improving them. For this purpose they use a wide variety of anti-democratic actions including economic pressure, political censorship and demonstrative trials of journalists.

Such a policy hinders the democratic development of Azerbaijan and contradicts the international obligations taken on by Azerbaijan. We must condemn it ourselves rather than wait for the international community to do so for us. It is already more than three years that Azerbaijanian press has existed under the pressure of political and military censorship. After gaining independence the censorship was first introduced during the presidency of Elchibey in April 1993, when he declared a state of emergency owing to the occupation of the Kelbajar region. Introduced temporarily, the state of emergency has been abolished and re-introduced repeatedly after several unsuccessful attempts of a «coup d'état». The main arguments of supporters of the censorship are the warfare with Armenia and the necessity to protect state secrets. Thus the temporary censorship took deep roots and became a constant attribute of our political life. As it is said «there is nothing more permanent than the temporary.» Freedom of speech only exists on a very low level also because of the intrinsic fear of power in the Azerbaijanian society. People are not afraid of the laws, they just ignore them. Instead the people are genetically afraid of the punitive arm of the law-enforcement agencies.

Nevertheless the Azerbaijanian journalism functions under more favorable conditions compared to those in Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan. This is largely due to the aspi-

ration of the authorities to join the European structures. At least in official declarations freedom of speech is supported making it possible for the main part of our press to carry out its functions necessary for the public.

The search for alternatives for further development runs into political as well as economic problems. In a situation when the press does not play a key role and its opinion does not count, the economic problems come into foreground. The press itself does not possess enough resources for self-development. Besides, many journalists consider freedom of speech a possibility to write whatever they want and think. Ambitious citizens of our country create new papers increasing their number but decreasing the general quality of the media. On the other hand, the existing boundary between the openness and publicity probably creates a unique journalistic genre, with which a journalist manages to say everything even by not writing anything.

In spite of all the difficulties the Azerbaijanian journalism grows due to the presence of some premises. The only thing that rises apprehensions is the recently increased number of attacks on the press by the authorities. Many bureaucrats confuse their personal interests with those of the state and do not hesitate to accuse the press of violating state interests.

It is the right time to remind that freedom of press is not a whim of willful journalists but rather a guarantee for every single citizen to be heard and understood by the society. This is necessary not only for the press and the development of our society but also for improving the international prestige of the young Azerbaijanian State. In its final report on the state of the press in the World in 1995-1996, the International Committee of the Protection of Journalists' Rights identified Azerbaijan as a country with a particularly severe censorship. •

HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION AND MASS MEDIA

BY NINO GELASHVILI, CORRESPONDENT OF THE GEORGIAN SERVICE OF THE RADIO «LIBERTY» TBILISI

It is hard to say what role the Georgian press plays in the protection of the rights of Georgian citizens. Probably not a big one if viewed in the context of the whole country. It would be more appropriate to talk about the coverage of the human rights sphere in the Georgian press. Usually the non-official media spends more time and space on these issues, but it is also interesting to look at the pro-governmental, official press, as they start to talk about human rights when the government wants them to.

Ideally the citizens must be well informed about their rights (press may play a significant positive role in this case) defined by the international law, the Constitution of the country and local laws. At the same time the State has to protect them, otherwise the awareness of citizens can only irritate the society. The situation with human rights protection in Georgia is rather chaotic and our press just follows the events while being unable to significantly help the citizens to protect their rights.

In the course of time the topics change but the basic approach remains the same: the press usually covers cases associated with violations of rights of prominent public figures, politicians, businessmen, and scandalous trials.

Recently the rights of those detained are a hot topic mostly thanks to the Chairman of Parliamentary Committee on the Detained and the Penitentiary Reform.

The Georgian reader can learn about the violations of human rights in every issue of any paper. Recently, the newspaper «Rezonansi» published information obtained from the president of the Association of the Defense of Soldiers' Rights under the lengthy title «State

itself pushes young people to desertion. Duties of the soldier are defined by the law, while his rights are not». This article stated that only the offspring of the socially vulnerable class serve in the army and only the deserters who cannot pay the 50 lari bribe get into prison.

Newspaper «Akhali Taoba» (New Generation) and «Alia» actively cover the problems of the supporters of the ex-president, mainly those who are in prison.

Everybody remembers how thoroughly covered the hearings at the trial of the former «zviadists» were. This theme still lives on even after a verdict has been reached. Hence, if a person is not in prison or is not a member of the opposition party he/she has got almost no chance to find answers to his/her questions. The only way out of this situation is to study legislative bills published in the official press, but this is not a solution. The Georgian press often disseminates information about activities of various NGOs, such as the Coordinative Counsel of NGOs of Disabled or the Society for the Protection of the Dignity of Teachers. The disabled held meetings near the Parliament building and demanded that changes are made in the Tax Code and teachers held hunger-strikes protesting reforms in education system. It is worth mentioning that reporting those events journalists do not care much about the objectiveness of these demands and are more concerned with the fact that someone is discontent.

Among the most famous themes was the election of the ombudsman of the country, the abolition of capital punishment, a recent incident of a Georgian diplomat in the US, the resignation of the minister of the National Security, the incident with the Red Cross rep-

representative in Tbilisi. All these different themes are directly connected with human rights. After the last election of the ombudsman of Georgia the press still stays silent even if it is more than half a year that the last candidate was proposed for that post. This means that the government breached the law according to which, if a candidate fails to be elected, the next candidate for that post has to be proposed no later than in two weeks time. As to the case of the resignation of the minister of National Security I think the press overdid it. First there was some information that the telephones of the editors-in-chief of the newspaper «Sakartvelo» (Georgia) and other papers were bugged by the offices of the Ministry of National Security. Shortly after, President Shevardnadze appeared in his traditional radio interview and stated that in case this information is confirmed his decision is rigorous, because it hampers the development of democratic processes in our country. One had the impression that the President was more surprised than the journalists and readers, but after the interview the goal of this campaign became clear and shortly after that the minister of the National Security resigned.

Our press was very active in the coverage of the abolition of capital punishment. The main idea of this campaign was very primitive: Georgia will not become a full member of the European Council, unless it abolishes capital punishment. The European Council itself does not really clearly demand the abolition of capital punishment from candidate countries (see the Protocol of the European Council regarding the abolition of capital punishment, adopted in 1983, in Strasbourg).

Probably the whole country watches the «Video Patrol 02», a TV program of the Inte-

rior Ministry showing a criminal newsreel. Once this program showed an episode in which a grandmother and her granddaughter died as a result of a car accident and the driver escaped. But the reporter failed to mention a very important detail - they were crossing a highway to the airport where cars usually accelerate. In the same program it is common practice to show people detained the same day and talk about them as criminals, thus violating the innocence presumption.

After a car accident of the Georgian diplomat Georgi Makharadze that resulted in the death of an American girl, president Shevardnadze deprived this officer of our Embassy in the US off his diplomatic immunity. Recently in a similar car accident in Tbilisi, two young men died, when a Red Cross car driven by a Bulgarian diplomat overran them. However he did not hesitate to take advantage of his diplomatic immunity and did not allow the Georgian law - enforcement officials to carry out further investigation. The request of the Georgian Foreign Ministry to withdraw the diplomatic immunity from Mr. Marinov was denied. The press immediately remembered Makharadze, but nothing could have been changed. It is important that Georgia gains international prestige but do we need such a prestige more than the protection of the rights of our citizens? If a citizen is not protected by the laws of his/her own country, he/she could be easily ignored by the representatives of other countries, even highly civilized ones.

Our press still prefers to keep silent in regards to this issue and does not bother to analyze the situation. Our press cannot deviate from the stereotypes imposed by the authorities or certain NGOs. •

THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF PRESS IN THE ISSUES OF HUMAN RIGHT PROTECTION

BY ARMEN ZAKARIAN, «ARAVOT» NEWSPAPER; «YEREVAN» INFORMATION AGENCY, YEREVAN

The Armenian press pays quite a big attention to human rights issues but it is quite natural that in different countries the emphasis is put on different questions considering the difference in the realities of different social environments where events take place. Certainly, there are a great number of vulnerable areas in human rights issues in Armenia. Any articles, including those on human rights, do not and cannot play a crucial role in the shaping of the public opinion since the paper with the biggest circulation has «Irvavunk» (The Law) only 10,000 copies.

The other, not less popular papers have a circulation of 2-3 thousand copies. For our country with a population of 3,5 million people those are insignificant figures, but the state TV and Radio which have the most numerous audience do not even think of covering human rights problems.

Formerly, the Armenian National TV was regularly airing programs such as «The Reception of the Lawyer» and «The Man and the Law» which were explaining and clarifying the rights of citizens by answering their questions live on air.

At present these programs are replaced by a new one under the title «The Law and the Power» which quite obviously demonstrates its connection to the Power but does not reveal anything common with the Law.

Probably this is the general scenery of the environment based on which we should gauge the role and influence of press and other media in the coverage of human rights and other issues.

Let's turn to the reality of human rights in Armenia. Because of certain internal as well as external factors, some important aspects of human rights have come out to the political

arena. The most extreme judgments on the issue are made by those who overestimate the importance of the external factor viewing it as an intrusion of the mighty (the Western democracies) into the private affairs of the weak (countries in transition).

Recently the vice-speaker of the National Assembly of Armenia Ara Sahakyan stated that «if all the convicted in Armenia who consider themselves political prisoners would have been considered as such, then even in this case their number would be insignificant when compared with the number of political prisoners in Azerbaijan and Georgia, most of them being high ranking officials before the detention.

Meanwhile, some Western countries, which continuously speculate about democracy and human rights, ignore this situation. By the way, this position of Western countries is criticized by both the government and the opposition.

A prominent opposition politologist, former head of the Armenian service of Radio Liberty, Edward Hovhannisian, once expressed the idea that the case of Armenia, the international community would try to oppose human rights to the rights of a nation.

Some theorists argue that by giving Human Rights an absolute status we promote complete freedom for various religious sects or groups which could endanger the national security of Armenia, as it is a well-known fact that some missionaries disseminated false pacifistic moods among the residents of the frontier zone and tried to penetrate and influence the army servicemen.

We should not conclude that the Armenian press cannot perceive the importance of human rights, but often fundamental human

rights issues go backstage giving their place to the human rights associated with hot topics of the day which cause a big political discussion at the moment.

If the problem of the refugees from Azerbaijan in its human rights context was a priority in 1990-1991, the problems of political prisoners and tortures in prisons became a priority in 1995.

Since September 1996 the issue of presidential elections has been discussed in our press. After the parliamentary elections in July 1995, when the international observers called the elections «free but not fair», our press put into circulation the idea of deprivation of our citizens of their right to govern by voting, carried out by our authorities during the elections. The Presidential elections in 1996 were classified by the international observers as even a bigger setback, and the press expressed its attitude in even harsher words. The authorities were accused of forgery and theft of votes of citizens and the elections themselves were called a mass violation of human rights and the consequent arrests were considered a political action. Already then the issue of political prisoners was not a new one in Armenia. The respective materials on this topic were first published in December 1994 covering the trial over ARF (Armenian Revolutionary Federation) «Dashnaktsutsyun». Later on the press informed about the poor living conditions in prison cells, moral and physical pressures on the convicted. It is hard to say what role the press played in the mitigation of these conditions in cells as one of the detained «Dro» members soon died in the cell.

From time to time our press comes back to the problem of refugees but in different contexts. If in 1990-1991 the problem was a forced deportation from Azerbaijan, today more attention is paid to providing the refugees with a proper social status. The problem of ethnic minorities which is the most vulnerable human rights topic in many countries is completely absent in Armenia.

So what role does the press play in human rights protection? Certainly, in its capacity of

the fourth power the press is rather influential. The following story illustrates my assumption: our citizens were allowed to privatize their apartments for free. The deadline for free of charge privatization was July 1, 1997. Those who failed to privatize in due time were demanded to pay a bribe amounting to 400 USD. When this case was reported in the paper «Aravot», the Mayor of Yerevan appeared on TV the next day and demanded that the subordinated offices settled the matter. And indeed it was settled in a short time.

It is necessary to mention that this matter was not politicized and consequently a solution was found rather quickly. But as I have already mentioned, all the problems in Armenia regarding human rights are highly politicized, and as a result are usually solved in a political rather than a legal way. The hidden political or financial structures, which stand behind the majority of media in Armenia, disseminate their views in these discussions through the press.

Sometimes it seems that the press predicts certain political decisions but in reality it more often just reveals certain hidden ideas. Of course these ideas are considered more or less, or are refuted straight away. This tendency can be illustrated by the recent discussion in our press about the abolition of capital punishment. The discussion over this issue was not a reflection of a public opinion but was intended to shape it instead. Some political forces tried to take advantage of the situation and gain political dividends by reminding that the abolition of capital punishment was already included in the adopted Constitution of 1995 and it is just a matter of time until it starts working.

I want to conclude by stating that the majority of problems connected with human rights in Armenia are highly politicized and the press has little influence over these issues. It is usually called to play its role in shaping the public opinion at a certain stage of a political process. But if the problem raised by the press avoids becoming politicized, it is solved rather quickly. •

THE ROLE OF THE PRESS IN HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVITIES

BY KAMAL ALI, «EXCLUSIVE», INFORMATION AGENCY
«AYNA» DAILY PAPER, BAKU

The course of events in all post-Soviet republics comes to prove that it is not possible to carry efficient human rights activities without the participation of the independent media. It is not surprising that the official media avoids publicizing human rights violations in the country because these violations are often carried out by the state apparatus. Articles on human rights are also vital because the information about violations reaches the international community mostly from the papers, even if some human rights organizations have their monitoring services on site. Understanding the importance of media and journalists most of these organizations have included in their agendas specific activities directed to the promotion of journalists. For instance, the Azerbaijanian Institute for Peace and Democracy motivates journalists with an annual award for the best journalist covering human rights issues. Unfortunately the current situation of human rights in Azerbaijan keeps journalists very busy.

After getting its independence Azerbaijan has already changed three presidents but the sole achievement in the field human rights was the signing of several international conventions and the suspension of capital punishment for these years. At present there are several organizations in Azerbaijan working full time in the field of human rights. The most prominent of them are the Center of Human Rights protection of Azerbaijan and the Institute for Peace and Democracy both mentioned in the Annual US State Department Human Rights Report. Other well-known organizations are the Azerbaijani national committee of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly and the D. Alieva Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Women.

None of these organizations are registered at the Ministry of Justice up to this day (except the last one, registered by the previous government). Instead the Ministry has registered a number of «puppet» human rights organizations created by pro-governmental groups. All the human rights organizations periodically publish bulletins and distribute them among the media. This is the most common way for this type of information to get to the broader audience. The other way of dissemination is the press conferences.

Sometimes the press might play a crucial role in saving a human life as in the case of the arrested former Foreign Affairs Minister Tofiq Gasymov. After learning about the severe deterioration of his health in jail, a human rights activist Leyla Yunusova organized a press conference and urged the journalists to do all they can to save Gasymov's life. And indeed, in a short time the journalists managed to tune the public opinion accordingly and the authorities were forced to release Gasymov.

Speaking about the positive role of press in human rights protection we must not forget the negative role it can play, too. Putting pressure on human rights activists is common practice, but these campaigns are often carried out by the official media. For example when the chairperson of the Azerbaijanian national committee of Helsinki Citizen's Assembly Arzu Abdullaeva appealed with an address urging the observation of human rights of Armenians living in Azerbaijan, all the official, pro-governmental and the majority of opposition press displayed a surprising solidarity in condemning her by all means. A similar campaign is waged against Leyla Yunusova, the chairperson of the Institute of Peace and Democracy. The «yellow press» accuses her even of espionage.

nage. Cases like these reveal the negative role of the press in human rights activities.

Unfortunately some human rights activists do not consider the press as their ally and as a result face a great deal of difficulties. This happened with the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, which got into conflicts with almost all of the press and part of the press boycotted the party by not publishing anything from them. Personally, I do not publish any information about this party up till now because of a lawsuit brought against me by one of their members. Recently the Head of the Department of Human Rights of the Institute for Peace and Democracy, Saida Godjamanli, offended me with an unfair reproach and thus I do not have any desire to cover their activities.

By presenting these facts I would like to emphasize the moral inadequacy of these kinds of «journalists sanctions». Human rights activists also face the difficulties characteristic of societies with a free market economy. In the competition for the reader and the circulation, the information on human rights loses to other more popular topics. The development of the Azerbaijanian economy has led to an increased interest in economic topics. Criminal chronicles are also very popular among the readers - therefore the editors of some papers and agencies often do not really encourage their journalists to cover human rights issues. It is hard to find a way out of this situation even if human rights activists repeatedly appeal to journalists to cover this issue more professionally. Still another reason for the refusal of some editors to publish such materials is the fear of repression from our, in many aspects, totalitarian state. The Azerbaijanian Center for Human Rights possesses information about using the short-term detentions of journalists' relatives for putting

pressure on their political opponents affiliated with the papers. Two brothers of a prominent activist of the Azerbaijanian Society for Women Rights Protection and journalist of the paper «Muhlifat» (Opposition) Natella Bayramova were detained only to be beaten up and released shortly after. The international journalist community became aware of the beating of some of the parliamentarian correspondents of the newspaper «Zerkalo» («Mirror») and «Turan» information agency. Some of our papers avoid covering human rights issues because of a severe censorship. The law «On Mass Media» defines that MM can be censored only if they divulge the state or military secrets, but our censors also censor information on human rights issues. It is necessary to mention that together with an obvious meddling of political censors in the form of white spaces of withdrawn materials, there is also a hidden censorship when the editor is obliged to cover the censored space with another article of the same volume.

At the same time the absence of a direct ban on materials on tortures gives the reporters the possibility to avoid their censorship, except, of course, if the material contains the names of high-ranking law-enforcement officers.

The decision of censors also depends on the political affiliation and influence of the paper as well as how dramatically the paper has presented the material. As a result of such a differentiation sometimes the information slips off the censors eyes. The problems of Azerbaijanian journalism and human rights activity are closely connected with the development of democracy. The only gratifying aspect of this situation is that democracy in our countries is inevitable and materials of this seminar will be of some interest to our children in a historical sense. •

NEWS FROM THE TRANSCAUCASUS

WHO GOT THE FOREIGN ASSISTANCE?

As informed by the Chairman of the Constitutional Court of Armenia Mr. Gagik Harutyunyan, according to the information posted on the Internet, the USAID has allocated 1 million 800 thousand USD for the development of independent media in Armenia over the period of 1996 - April 1997. Mr. Harutyunyan thinks that it would be appropriate if the press, which does not depend on the assistance of international organizations, would raise the question of whom, how and most importantly why these organizations have donated that much money. The US Embassy in Yerevan denies the existence of such big funds. During his last press conference the President of Armenia also expressed a desire to know which mass media have received this assistance. So far nobody has responded to the call of the Yerevan Press club to publish all grants received during the last two years.

The Chairman of Yerevan Press Club Boris Navasardyan informed journalists that YPC has received a total of 170'000 USD from five organizations and spent it on several programs in two years. •

NEWSPAPERS AND THEIR PROBLEMS

According to the newspaper «Golos Armenii» (The Voice of Armenia), the state printing house «Periodika» was privatized at the end of August with the director of the publishing house getting 66 per cent of shares leaving only 34 per cent of shares to the government. What will happen with another part of this complex, the House of Press? Certainly, this House should be privatized in such a way that the organizations, which have nothing to do with the press publishing, leave the building.

During recent meeting of the managers of the mass media with the deputy head of the Department of Information Edik Saroyan, participants discussed the problems of privatization of the House of Press and the relations of papers with the «Armpechat» (Armpress) press distribution agency. Under the previous director this agency indebted several million drams to newspapers. In the meantime the newspapers were not able to pay for the printing services. With the coming of a new director «Armepechat» has changed completely. The newspapers get their money at the end of each week and cover their debts immediately. But the main problems for the Armenian papers are the taxes and the printing paper. •

WORTH TO BE LISTED IN THE GUINNESS BOOK OF RECORDS:

THE SECOND PRESS-CONFERENCE IN SIX YEARS

On September 26, the president of Armenia Levon-Ter Petrossian held the second press conference for Armenian journalists in the past six years. For the first time a press conference was on the Internet enabling all the interested people to ask questions through the interactive feature of the net. Through a direct phone line with Los-Angeles the editors of various papers were also participating in the press conference, and as a result of this the President received and answered 35 questions in two hours. The president did not forget the journalists and commented on them talking about the coverage of the Karabakh conflict. Noting that for the solution of the conflict the parties have to have enough courage to make mutual concessions, the president said: «You journalists are so courageous and brave now,

I would say the most brave in our society. You can curse, discredit and sink whomever you like. Have the courage then to organize such a discussion. Figure out where we will find ourselves in five - ten years if this situation continues. It is not difficult to realize. From our part we have already realized this and the conclusion is that Armenia will not become a normal state and we will not live better until the Karabakh crisis is solved and the blockades are lifted. •

A DRAFT- LAW ON TELEVISION IS UNDER DISCUSSION

Newspaper «Respublika Armenia»

Today more than 150 TV-Radio companies are registered in Armenia; however, the document which regulates the relations of these companies with the state and society that is «Law on Television and Radio» does not yet exist. The fifth session of the Parliament discussed a proposed draft, but it needed serious corrections and was sent back for revision.

At a meeting organized by the «National Press Club» within the framework of the «Mass Media and Democracy» program, a member of the Parliamentary Commission on Science, Education and Youth issues S. Yeritsian presented the newly revised bill. He stated that 80 per cent of introduced suggestions are already included in the bill and the rest is under the consideration of the government, which does not agree with some provisions and tries to develop new approaches.

The two most controversial articles of the bill were «The language of the TV and Radio Programs», and «The National Commission on TV and Radio»

According to the «Law on the Language» the Armenian language is considered the official language of TV and Radio programs and the respective article of the bill regulates the duration of educational programs broadcast in foreign languages (no more than 45 minutes per day). Songs in foreign languages are allowed to be broadcast without translations! Another provision of the bill states that «during the three coming years it is allowed to

broadcast feature films and cartoons on foreign languages.» One can conclude that after the adoption of this bill we will be deprived of documentary and popular science films on foreign languages. Obviously it is rather difficult to find funds to cover the translation expenses but it is more difficult to produce anything locally. Hence the time limit of three years will definitely be extended.

As to the «National Commission, on TV and Radio», the charter of which is to be approved by the Parliament, it will presumably consist of a chairman and ten members appointed by the President from a pool of candidates consisting of the candidates presented by the President, by the Speaker of the Parliament, the Prime Minister and Art Unions.

Could this Commission turn into a political body and would it be better to include only professionals in this field? That is the question today.

During discussions a rotation principle of membership was proposed (according to the project members are to be elected for four years). The tasks of the Commission are also disputable and are similar to those of the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Communication, hence the reasonability to create a new body with the same functions is doubtful. There is also an apprehension that gradually this agency could assume censorship functions. As mentioned the Deputy Head of the Department of Information Mrs. Tarkhanyan, the bill does not include provisions regulating the regional and public TV companies and lacks guarantees for the development of private television and their responsibility towards society. The bill does not define the rights and obligations of TV and radio journalists. This is being justified by the necessity of a separate «Law on Journalists». •

RADIO LIBERTY IN GEORGIA

It is already the third month since the branch of the Georgian service of the Radio Liberty started functioning in Tbilisi. Programs of RL are broadcast by the State Radio and Evrika independent radio station. Thereby the size

of the audience of Radio Liberty has increased significantly. •

MINISTER BANNED THE PUBLICATION OF «FORUM» INDEPENDENT PAPER

Turan Information Agency

The Minister of Information and Press Sirus Tebrizli has banned the publication of the paper «Forum» due to come out on September 19. The first issue of this paper was published on September 12, 1997, but according to the oral order of the Minister, all the copies of this paper were collected from the all the newsstands. During a meeting with «Forum» editor-in-chief and founder Safar Alysharly, the Minister justified the ban by the «opposition trends of the paper.» •

A CALL TO ABOLISH CENSORSHIP IN AZERBAIJAN

CPJ, New-York

The Committee to Protect Journalists has urged the President of Azerbaijan Heidar Aliev to eliminate the restrictions imposed on the independent press in Azerbaijan because of imposed military and political censorship. CPJ has asked Aliev further investigate the cases of assault on journalists, registered by CPJ and by local journalistic organizations. During Aliev's visit to the US, CPJ also appealed to President Clinton to emphasize the importance of freedom of press and journalists' rights in his meetings with Aliev.

The expert on Caucasian press, Nicolas Daniloff, visited Baku and Yerevan on an investigative mission from CPJ in July 1997. His report revealed that the leading independent media in Azerbaijan continually faces censorship. Many journalists were beaten in connection with political events in 1996-1997. The death of the Azerbaijanian journalists who worked for Reuters TV and Turan News Agency has not been investigated at all. Recently CPJ protested against arbitrary decisions of the Speaker of the Parliament to deprive journalists of accreditation, the beating of journalists and in connection with the case when the American reporter Iren Lasota was stopped

and searched for recordings of her interview with an opposition leader in the Nakhichevan region.

Azerbaijan is Among Five European Countries with Serious Violations of Freedom of Speech

Azerbaijan is the first in the list of five European countries with grave violations of freedom of speech. The list was presented in a resolution adopted by the international seminar under the title «Europe for Strengthening of Independent and Pluralistic Mass Media» which took place in Sofia, Bulgaria, on the 10-13 September. The seminar organized by UNESCO and the UN Department of Information stated that Azerbaijan is the only European country where censorship still functions.

Belorussia is ranked second in this list as the country with the biggest number of arrests and beatings of journalists. Turkey is ranked third as a country where as many as 70 journalists are in jail. Bosnia-Herzegovina is distinguished by a state legislation, which strictly impedes freedom of speech. Serbia concludes the list as a country where conducive conditions for freedom of speech are absent. This information was reported to Turan news Agency by the chairman of the Independent Union of the journalists of Azerbaijan «Yeni Nesil» Arif Aliev, who represented Azerbaijan at this seminar.

This seminar was the fifth since 1990 and was organized on one of the five continents each time. 40 countries and the largest world media corporations participated in this seminar discussing the free flow of information in Europe, other problems of journalists and possible ways of overcoming them. The seminar adopted a Declaration on the Principles of Free Journalism in Europe. The Declaration included a proposal to establish a World Bank of Press Fostering and support the independent press by granting non-interest loans. The Declaration will be presented for consideration to the UN in October 1997. •

GEORGIA

In the near future, the Georgian Parliament will discuss a draft-law on «Free Access to Information Sources». The draft-law was prepared by the editor in chief of newspaper «Rezonansi» Malkhaz Ramishvili and Zviad Koridze, the head of the Information Department of the TV company «Rustavi-2». The draft law was greeted by Western experts and is widely supported by journalists of the independent press. It is expected that the adoption of this law will facilitate the obtaining of information from the state structures. •

COURT AND MASS MEDIA SEMINAR

A seminar under the title «Court and Mass Media», supported by the Soros Foundation was held in Tbilisi on September 13-14. Journalists accredited in the Parliament participated in this seminar. The Chairman of the Supreme Court Mindia Ugrekhelidze and the member of the Justice Council Lado Chanturia talked about judicial reform. The Deputy Secretary of the Security Council Rusudan Beridze discussed human rights issues with the journalists. A report by the attorney Zviad Kordzadze entitled «The Court Reform as Viewed by an Attorney», and a report delivered by the professor of the department of Journalism Elza Lomidze on the issue of «Journalistic Ethics» provoked a great interest among the participants of the seminar.

At journalists' request, the next seminar will be dedicated to the discussion of the draft law on «Freedom of Religion», which is due to be discussed by our Parliament at the end of this year. •

TRANSFORMATION OF THE STATE TV INTO PUBLIC TELEVISION

The problems of transformation of the State TV into Public Television were discussed at a seminar held in Gudauri on 4-5 October. The seminar was initiated and supported by the Soros foundation and the National Democratic Institute, a US organization. The seminar was attended by managers of the state and private TV stations, members of the Parliament, rep-

resentatives of presidential press-service, and Western experts. At the same time a seminar on the «Relations between NGO and Press» supported by ISAR was held in Kazbeki. •

AZERBAIJAN SUSPENDED THE BROADCAST OF IRANIAN TV

By ANS Press Agency

Since June 22, the re-broadcasting of the programs of the Iranian National Television has been suspended in Azerbaijan. According to the Head of the State TV-Radio company Nizami Khudoev, this is a temporary suspension and will be resumed only after the verification of the concept of Iranian TV programs in order to avoid the dissemination of provocative programs distorting historical facts. As an example a Sunday program was cited dedicated to the language resemblance of ethnic udeins and lezgins living in Azerbaijan. According to Mr. Khudiev the Teheran TV programs contain forged materials of anti-Azerbaijani and provocative orientation. Mr. Khudiev stated that one of the conditions for resuming the broadcasting of the Iranian TV programs in Azerbaijan is a similar commitment by the Iranian side to broadcast the programs of the Azerbaijanian TV. Embassy of Islamic Republic of Iran in Baku, refused to admit the above mentioned causes of broadcasting suspension and pointed out solely technical aspects. Moreover, talking about the possibility of broadcasting the programs of Azerbaijanian Television to Iran, the head of the press-service of the Iranian Embassy motivated the refusal to do so by stating that there are only 23 million out of 60 million Iranians who speak the Azerbaijani language and thus there is no need to broadcast in Azerbaijani. •

CONTROVERSIAL BROADCAST OF IRANIAN PROGRAMS IN AZERBAIJAN

«Millyat», June 24, Baku.

newspaper «Zerkalo» («Mirror») June 26.

Recently, some programs of the Iranian TV were trying to show that the population of Absheron and Shemakha regions of our re-

public have Persian origin, speak Farsi and are the indigenous population of Azerbaijan. «These attempts were stopped decisively after a respective warning. We cannot broadcast TV programs contributing to the division of our society on ethnic or regional ground», stated the political commentator of the Azerbaijanian TV Gulu Magerramli. •

NINTH CONGRESS OF ARMENIAN JOURNALISTS' UNION HELD

Yerevan, November 21, Armenpress

The Union of Armenian Journalists held its ninth congress November 20. Chairman of the Union Astghik Gevorkian reported on the activities of the Union since the eighth congress held in 1992. Along with changes in the political system, shifts have taken place also in mass media, the complex process of press market formation has started. Getting freedom of speech, the mass media realized the necessity of legislative field and currently there is a need of new law on mass media. According to the speaker, the press needs help. Ways should be found to organize a centralized sale of paper to editorial staffs, to consider the territories occupied by the editorial offices as their property or to regulate the lease payments, to equal their communal, communication expenditures to those of state-run enterprises.

The Oversight Committee also made a report. The delegates discussed the draft code on journalists' professional ethics. The speakers spoke on mass media problems, issues on raising the level of journalists' professional skills.

The congress elected Astghik Gevorkian Chairman of the Union. Board members as well as Oversight Committee members were also elected.

4. Sales of Newspapers in the Underground to Be Regulated

The Tbilisi municipality has lifted its recent ban on selling newspapers in the underground by teenagers. The sales, however, will be governed by some regulations. Teenage newsvendors can now work freely only in the surface stations. As to the underground, there

must be only two of them per each station, obliged to wear uniforms and not to enter trains. •

*«Kavkasioni» No. 203, November 21, p. 3
CIPDD, November 21, 1997*

ARMENIA'S MASS MEDIA GO ON ONE-DAY STRIKE

Yerevan, December 1 (Noyan Tapan).

Armenia's authorities, showing understanding of mass media's problems, from time to time promised to solve them on different levels, but no real measures were taken. Meantime, the growth of tariffs for electricity, transportation and communication, prices of paper and its delivery, production and dissemination of printed media entails increase of their cost accompanied by the fall of people's purchasing ability. The consistent aggravation of the situation led to a catastrophic decrease in the circulation of newspapers and magazines.

To defy Armenian press's problems was a stable tradition of all governments, which succeeded one another in recent years. The leaders of state enterprises-monopolies in the production and dissemination of printed media foist cooperation agreements suggesting shackling obligations. Several news stalls were torn down in crowded places of Yerevan, in order to be allegedly replaced with new ones. Nobody wanted to think that even 1,000-2,000 unsold newspapers is an unrecoverable damage for the newspaper and readers. The newspapers are delivered in the regions without any regard to the real demand.

In order to ensure the citizens' constitutional right to information and freedom of speech, as well as independence guarantees of mass media, Armenia's journalists demand that the authorities should take measures aimed supporting mass media on the state level. Among such measures are the following:

1. To improve the policy and activity of the «Haymamul» media-disseminating agency all over the republic, pay all sums resulting from subscription and selling, as well as cover immediately all the debts.
2. Exempt from taxes, including the VAT and income tax, customs and other dues of the whole complex of goods, services and activity

of legal entities involved in the production, dissemination and selling of mass media production.

3. Discount communication and transportation tariffs and rates for mass media.

4. Free rent of premises mass media use for their work.

We demand an immediate consideration and legal approval of our proposals on the state support of mass media.

As a token of protest against unprecedented attitude towards mass media and defying of our interests the editorial boards of our editions announce a one-day strike: the next issue of our newspapers and weeklies will not be issued.

We reserve the right to resort to other measures, to defend our lawful demands.

The statement was signed by the editorial boards of the following newspapers and weeklies: «Azg», «Hayastani Hanrapetutiun», «Golos Armenii», «Ayzhem», «Hayastan», «Iravunk», «Football-plus», «Hayots Ashkhar»; union of journalists of Armenia, mass media association, the Yerevan press club, national press club, network of independent TV companies of Armenia, «Hayk» radio-program, Agropress, radio «Lasto», news agencies Yerevan, Arka, Noyan Tapan, Snark.

We call on the editorial boards of all newspapers and magazines to join our action, news agencies to disseminate information only abroad, radio and television to cover in details the action.

A press conference of mass media leaders who undersigned the statement will take place on December 3 at the Union of journalists of Armenia. •

EURASIA ANNOUNCES TENDER FOR GRANT UNDER NEW PRINTING HOUSE

Yerevan, November 24 (Noyan Tapan).

The «Eurasia» Foundation Yerevan Office announced a tender, the winner of which will be given a grant under establishment of a modern printing house. At present there is only one printing house in Armenia, which belongs to the state-owned publishing house

«Periodika». On November 21 a workshop to train in preparing project proposals was held at the «Armenia» Hotel in Yerevan. During the workshop 23 organizations which submitted their applications were distributed necessary documents and a U.S. expert William Canino described those present the order of preparing business plans.

An organization selected on a competitive basis will get a modern printing system in form of grants and loans which will enable to carry out printing of newspapers, including color ones. Its capacity is supposed to be 15,000 copies per hour, which meets the requirements of newspapers with average circulation.

«The sector of periodicals printing need to be developed in Armenia. The readership of Armenia, which used to issue newspapers with multithousand circulations, has been artificially deprived of the opportunity to read different, accessible and high-quality newspapers. We hope that after an organization which wins the competition gets a printing system, that problem will be solved in Armenia,» Director of the Eurasia Foundation Transcaucasus Office Lawrence Ayvazian said.

The application deadline is December 26, while the winner will be known on December 31. Earlier the Eurasia Foundation had implemented similar projects in the Eastern Europe, Russia and Belarus.

The project by the Eurasia Foundation gives hope that the problem of newspaper printing will be finally settled and the monopoly of the «Periodika» publishing house which many times led to conflicts will be eliminated. •

JOURNALIST SEVERELY BEATEN IN DAGESTAN

(RFE/RL, 26 November).

Police in Dagestan took the editor-in-chief of the newspaper «Dagestanskaya Pravda» to hospital after finding her unconscious on the steps of her house, Russian media reported on 25 November. Galina Beibutova had been badly beaten and sustained severe back and head injuries. Interfax reported that «Dagestanskaya Pravda,» which is widely read in the republic,

recently published an article denouncing organized criminal groups allegedly active in the republic. Ruslan Gitinov, a top police official, and two other people were wounded in a bomb attack in Dagestan recently. Gitinov had pledged to step up the fight against organized crime in Dagestan. •

MORE VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS IN AZERBAIJAN

(RFE/RL, October 1)

Four Baku police officers on 22 September beat two correspondents for the newspaper «Mozalan,» one of whom is still hospitalized, Turan reported on 30 September. The journalists were investigating irregularities in reg-

istering residents of a hostel run by Baku transport authorities. •

AZERBAIJAN DEMANDS EXTRADITION OF RUSSIAN JOURNALIST

(RFE/RL, October 2)

Anatolii Naumov, a member of the editorial staff of the St. Petersburg newspaper «Chas Pik,» is being held in solitary confinement awaiting extradition to Azerbaijan on charges of extortion, according to «Segodnya» and «Izvestiya» on 1 and 2 October. A Russian citizen and graduate of Leningrad State University, Naumov had worked as deputy editor of a Russian-language newspaper in Baku. He returned to St. Petersburg in December 1996. •

THE ECHO OF THE 4TH “CMSP” CONFERENCE, HELD IN TSAKHKADZOR (18-20 OCTOBER)

IN THE ARMENIAN NEWS AGENCIES PUBLISHED IN ENGLISH

4TH CONFERENCE OF JOURNALISTS HELD IN TSAKHKADZOR

YEREVAN, October 21 (Noyan Tapan)

The 4th conference of journalists of Transcaucasus was held on October 18-20 in Tsakhkadzor (Armenia). It was attended by journalists from Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, as well as their colleagues from Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Osetia.

The conference was run in fringes of a program to support press in Transcaucasian states and projected by Vigen Chiterian (Geneva). The program is aimed at expanding the frames of communication and cooperation among journalists of Transcaucasus and was sponsored by the Helsinki Assembly. It was planned to organize 4 conferences in the three Transcaucasian states, but as reported by program coordinator in Armenia Hakob Asatrian, no conference was arranged in Azerbaijan, because its authorities disagreed.

Three conferences were organized in Georgia and discussed issues concerning the press only. The OSCE mission to Georgia took part in the fourth conference, thanks to which journalists from Abkhazia and Osetia managed to arrive in Armenia. That, in its turn, allowed to speak of conflicts in Caucasus, which has not been discussed at the previous conferences.

The fifth conference to take place in Geneva will be attended by one representative from each republic. Besides, there will be organized courses for young journalists from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, for which one representative from each republic will be selected: They will be given the opportunity to learn the public, political and journalist systems of Switzerland. By the end of the year Vigen Chiterian is planning to issue a book summarizing the results of all previous conferences.

Considering the strengthening of mutual trust among journalists of the three republics to be the main success, Vigen Chiterian stressed the

importance of Azerbaijani journalists' presence at the conference in Armenia, hoping that such meetings will be organized in Baku as well. •

SEMINAR ON ISSUES CONCERNING MODERN JOURNALISM CONCLUDED

Yerevan, October 22, Armenpress

The October 18-20 seminar in Tsakhkadzor, Armenia, attended by journalists from Georgia, Azerbaijan, South Ossia, Abkhazia, Nagorno Karabagh and Armenia, was devoted to issues concerning modern journalism and mass media protection in the Transcaucasus. Vigen Chiterian (Switzerland), author of the project on «Support to Mass Media of the Transcaucasus,» appraised the seminar and voiced the hope that it will broaden relations among the professional journalists of the Transcaucasus.

This was the fourth meeting of journalists within the framework of the project and its organization was supported by the Foreign Ministry of Switzerland.

During the three days of the seminar, the participants discussed topics like «New Journalism in the Transcaucasus,» «Journalists' Training and Prospects for Activities,» «The Role of Mass Media in Conflicts, Transcaucasus in Particular.»

It was for the first time that an Azeri group of journalists had arrived in Yerevan. •

4TH CONFERENCE OF JOURNALISTS HELD IN TSAKHKADZOR

By Rita Karapetian

Yerevan, October 23 (Noyan Tapan).

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Considering the strengthening of mutual trust among journalists of the three republics to be the main success, Vigen Chiterian stressed the importance of Azerbaijani journalists' presence at the conference in Armenia, hoping that such meetings will be organized in Baku as well. •

THE SHORTEST WAY TO RESOLVE THE KARABAKH CONFLICT LIES THROUGH DIRECT TALKS, PM SAYS

Yerevan, October 23 (Noyan Tapan).

Prime Minister Robert Kocharian met Monday with those attending the conference «Support to the Press in the Transcaucasus» held in Tsakhkadzor held within the framework of the Swiss Program. Among them were mass media representatives from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia. The conference was organized by the Helsinki Assembly, the OSCE mission in Georgia and the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

Kocharian was reported to have referred to the importance of such meetings from the point of

view of immediate contacts and possible exchange of opinions.

Answering questions of Azeri journalists, the premier stressed the need for direct contacts between Karabakh and Azerbaijan to create an atmosphere of mutual trust between the parties to the conflict. According to Kocharian, it is only through direct talks that a mutually acceptable variant of resolution of the Karabakh conflict can be found. •

ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN TO BUILD THE CAUCASUS FREE FROM RUSSIA, AFTER RESTORATION OF PEACE, AZERBAIJANI REPORTER BELIEVES

Yerevan, October 23 (Noyan Tapan)

A conference of journalists from the Transcaucasus recently ended in Tsakhkadzor (Armenia). The conference brought together journalists from almost all parts of the Caucasus and Transcaucasus, including those from Azerbaijan. A representative of the Azerbaijani delegation, member of the Milli Majlis (Azerbaijan's Parliament), reporter for the «Zerkalo» newspaper Kemal Ali, who for three years fought in Karabakh, agreed to give an interview to NT journalist.

Question: *Is it possible to be an independent journalist in Azerbaijan?*

Ali: There are dependent journalists in state-run media outlets, while journalists of parties' publications also cannot be viewed as independent. However, there are also independent reporters who submit to nobody except for their editor. But there is also another problem. The point is that Azerbaijan's economy is rapidly developing and this is why there are many advertisers. In such a situation independent journalists have to become dependent on advertisers. For instance, this spring we had heated debates regarding the ban on tobacco and spirits advertisement in Azerbaijan, and independent journalists being pressured by their editors could not just issue information which would go contrary with the position of major U.S. tobacco companies operating on our market. In fact, there are no independent journalists and, probably, the de-

pendence on such companies is the worst of all forms of dependence.

Question: *Is there censorship in Azerbaijan?*

Ali: In Azerbaijan censorship is first of all imposed on military information. This is also a political censorship. In Azerbaijan censorship depends much on a political situation. In 1993 after Heydar Aliyev came to power the censorship «cut» much of what impeded the propaganda of ideas and political aspirations of the current president. As is known, during the last three years Azerbaijan like Armenia and Georgia is actively elbowing its way to the membership in the Council of Europe. And our leadership, which is still too much totalitarian, has to admit requirements of the Council of Europe which considers the censorship to be a nonsense. So, our censorship has restricted possibilities. At present we have no right to write articles criticizing Heydar Aliyev or concerning his family. There is a law which bans «to smear» the president who is a symbol of state power. But, unfortunately there is no clear border between «smearing» and «criticizing» and the courts seem to abuse this law.

Question: *What are your impressions of Armenia?*

Ali: I was sure that coming here we will not face any problems. We met with acquaintances and strangers, questioned people in streets, telling them that we are from Azerbaijan. Of course, there was an element of shock from an unexpectedness, but everybody was extremely glad, it was a pleasant surprise for them and no bad word was said to us. I hope that Armenian journalists will arrive in Azerbaijan on a return visit. I am sure that they will also get convinced that there is no animosity between our nations. Some politicians and reporters want to make a mountain out of a molehill, when there is even no molehill. This is one of the most important impressions, which I take with me.

Question: *Are you going to write about your impressions?*

Ali: Certainly. Some of newspapers have already ordered me articles. I have met with many people,

and am going to write about political and economic situation in Armenia, the Karabakh problem and the public opinion regarding this problem. These are three subjects, which are of particular interest to our public. I am sure there are newspapers which have already got ready to write about us as traitors, but I have braced up for that. Fools can be found everywhere, but wise people are much more in number, and they understand that our visit is the historical necessity. War always ends in peace and normal relations.

Question: Can the current visit entail some dangerous aftermath personally for you?

Ali: For a journalist who is close to the opposition this may be a good advertisement. On the other hand, our visit was not agreed with our government. Coordinator of our program Shain Rzayev applied to the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry, but got no response. Perhaps, upon arrival we will be detained for the purpose of checking whether we have been recruited by the Armenian special services or not and extract some data about the Armenian army. But I'll say that judging by all that I have seen, Armenia's army does not even slightly differ from Azerbaijan's.

Question: How the Azerbaijani leadership took a statement by the Armenian authorities regarding concessions in the matter of the Karabakh conflict settlement?

Ali: The latest statements by the president of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrossian and the president of self-declared Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Ghokassian were not left unnoticed and were gladly welcomed in Azerbaijan. Analysts believe that objective realities such as international laws, international community's opinion make leaders of Armenia and Nagorno

Karabakh correct their position. There are also other opinions, although they may be not dominating, that this is another tricky move of the Armenian leadership, which wants to deceive the international community after a defeat at the Lisbon summit. We had direct talks with authors of the aforementioned statements, Robert Kocharian and Arkady Ghokassian. I think, that the positions are becoming closer. Two weeks ago Azerbaijan's State Advisor on Foreign Policy Vafa Guluzade came up with a statement in press that Azerbaijan was ready to conduct direct talks with Nagorno Karabakh on condition the issue of Karabakh's independence is not discussed at them. I told Mr. Ghokassian about that and he was pleasantly surprised.

Question: How do you think, will Azerbaijan take steps in return to soften its hard line?

Ali: I think that the Azerbaijani leadership will agree to direct talks with Nagorno Karabakh as they have already made such a statement. Azerbaijani leadership knows about direct talks between Chechnya and Moscow, Abkhazia, Ossetia and Tbilisi. Besides, the Constitution of Azerbaijan adopted in 1995 granted a status of an autonomous state within Azerbaijan to the Autonomous Republic of Nakhijevan, which was a surprise for us. Analysts believe that that step was made to demonstrate Nagorno Karabakh that Azerbaijan can grant such a status to Karabakh as well. I think that this option is a compromise as before that Karabakh was an autonomous region. Under that status Karabakh will have the right to come out on foreign market and set up its own army. I think that as a result of mutual concessions a peace agreement will be signed and everyone will have a happy life. Armenians will get an oil pipeline and the living standards here will grow at least to the level of that in Azerbaijan. We shall build the Caucasus independent from Russia together. •