

JOURNALISM TODAY: BETWEEN INFORMING AND PROMOTING ACTIVITY

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Abstract

The journalistic activity in recent years is often subject to a wave of criticism, often coming from the specialists themselves, but also from analysts in various fields, politicians, active members of civil society, etc. They question the fairness of exercising journalism nowadays, considering the fact that ethical standards of this profession are often ignored, criticized or violated knowingly, which represents a necessary analysis of the situation in the field. It appears as a deviation from the profound journalistic work and its supreme mission - informing all the citizens about promotion, advertising, lobbying and others that contradict the principles of ethics in the media. In this regard the theorists and researchers in the field show an attitude of concern for the perspectives of development in this field in the coming years.

Keywords: *promoting, lobbying, advertising, law, imagemaking, political culture, journalistic ethics, new media.*

The journalistic activity in recent years is often subject to a wave of vehement criticism, often coming from specialists in the field, as well as from analysts from diverse fields, politicians, active members of civil society, etc. The latter ones question the fairness of the exercise of the profession of journalist, since the deontological norms of this profession are often ignored, criticized or even knowingly violated, which is a sufficient and grounded reason for analyzing the situation in the field, taking into account the profound deviation of the journalistic activity from its supreme mission, the information of the citizen, to promoting, advertising, lobbying and other activities that contradict the ethical principles of journalistic activity, radio or television, known to the general public until recently. Thus, it is no longer a secret that the citizen's confidence in the media has been eroded year after year, and, concerning this fact, the latest surveys speak about too, where the media institutions tend to lose those top positions

occupied until the other day, concerning the trust and perception of society on the fairness on pursuing the journalistic activity. In this respect, the theorists and researchers in this field have an uneasy attitude towards the prospects of the evolution of this field in the future, in the Republic of Moldova, but also in other countries, including the Western ones, where the journalist's job succumbs its place, although subtly and often dimly to the job of *promoter*, whose interests do not always coincide with the objective information of the citizen, but rather to the polishing and brushing up of the image of the person who openly or secretly finances the institution or the journalist himself.

The term *promoting* refers to the action to promote, although we must mention that the explanatory dictionary of the Romanian language has not yet introduced this word that comes from English. However, there is no Public Relations or media specialist who would not be familiar with this term and who would have used it in the English version rather than the term *promotion*, the equivalent in Romanian. We do not deny the necessity and usefulness of promotional actions in which media is often involved, but these actions should relate to the promotion of the rights and freedoms of all citizens, including through the media, but not at all to the creation of a favorable image, the promotion and the lobbying of the interests of some politicians or political parties, as it is undoubtedly happening in the Republic of Moldova. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that through the use of these faulty practices, the media ensures, first of all, its existence, taking into account the fact that the owners of the press institutions are precisely the representatives of the Moldavian politics, or this

fact essentially compromises , the image of the press structures. This aspect has been pointed out by several international institutions, including the Reporters without Borders organization, which has already been certifying for several consecutive years, a descent of the Republic of Moldova position on the freedom of the press (Association of Independent Press, 2016).

According to the above-mentioned source, "the most serious problems the press in our country is facing is the concentration of media ownership in the hands of oligarchs, the restriction of access to information of public interest, the lack of a favorable legislative framework for the development of independent press, the lack of pluralism of opinion, the censorship and the self-censorship in press institutions etc.". Thus, the belonging of the media to certain Moldavian oligarchic structures, which undoubtedly managed to capture not only the classical press but also the online press, is one of the first and most serious problems that managed to contribute to the loss of the reputation of the mass-media in front of the simple citizen, as an independent power, the fourth in any democratic state, but unfortunately not in the Republic of Moldova, where the media has made a deal and an alliance with the political power, a more serious situation being hard to imagine. The explanation is simple. Such a reality speaks of the lack of democracy in the country, and even of a rapid slip in a form of political dictatorship, established including with the support of the press. Obviously, such a reality erodes the principles of fair, objective and equidistant information, transforming the process of transmitting information to a carefully constructed, a conscious and deliberate one, so that the citizen receives precisely that information that is convenient and acceptable to the power that directs the information flow.

Things are all the more serious as alternative sources of information almost do not exist or have reduced covering possibilities over a broader territory with a transmission signal for the electronic press.

Another study conducted on the media in our country demonstrates an equally pessimistic reality. According to the *Freedom House Report*

for 2016, the Moldavian media is frequently used to promote the political and business interests of their owners. In this respect, the journalists working in media institutions controlled by politicians had to self-censor their material to keep their jobs and even worse, not to be subsequently persecuted and harassed by the authorities, including through criminal cases, which can be manufactured overnight, on any occasion, at the request and insistence of the Moldavian politics (FREEDOM HOUSE, 2016).

According to researcher Brian McNair, the above-mentioned trends are extremely dangerous and harmful to the political process, the author noting that one of the causes of this fierce desire of politics to subdue the press is that "the politicians have become more sensitive to public opinion ...the prisoners of this opinion. The political integrity is undermined, and the image is considered today more important than it used to be" (MCNAIR, 2007). At the same time, the author mentions that the politics should be made by politicians and not by the increasing number of specialists in public opinion polling, to which category can be included the journalists who daily interact with the opinion of the masses through the process of documentation for the production of press materials.

Undoubtedly, the *promoting* action is associated with another notion, the so-called *imagemaking* activity, a compound term, as well known to those involved in direct or tangential media activities.

At the UNO session in Geneva in 2016, ten recommendations for media improvement in the Republic of Moldova were formulated. Among these are the following:

- to fully guarantee the freedom of expression and information by fighting against the formation of monopolies in the media;
- to ensure the respect for the pluralism in the media;
- to take the necessary measures to reduce the excessive concentration of media ownership and to develop as well a new regulatory framework for the creation of new media and the functioning of the existing media in order to ensure true freedom of expression;
- to adopt a comprehensive legislative framework in order to facilitate the access to

information, to stimulate the media pluralism and to protect the independent media;

- to continue the efforts to ensure a favorable environment for journalists;
- to continue to support the work of the civil society, in particular the human rights organizations and those that support the journalists;
- to continue the efforts to eliminate corruption in the area of access to public interest information (NOI, n.d.).

It is no longer a secret that the Moldavian media and the persons working within it must be looked upon today as active co-participants in the creation and realization of the political agenda in this country. The press is no longer on the other side of the barricade, but it actively contributes, in tandem with the politicians, to promoting and spreading of ideas that are convenient to political organizations, but not to any, only to those that financially stimulate and support the existence of these means of communication. As an argument to the above mentioned, the recent presidential election campaign in October-November 2016 could serve as a clear indication of the position of the partisan media, which it would be about 90% in the Republic of Moldova, achieving a boldly, unjust, unfair campaign against most of the candidates participating in this electoral race but, at the same time, favoring a single candidate who, thanks to the subjugated press, succeeded in gaining the power. In this context, we can highlight the API report on the electoral campaign, in which periodically, during media monitoring, it was mentioned that TV stations with national coverage deprived the viewers of pluralistic electoral information at the hours of maximum audience and that although some TV stations were sanctioned by the CCA, their editorial policy has not changed. At the same time, according to the same report, the CCA was apathetic, and some media structures used falsification, denigration and manipulation through headlines in this electoral campaign (ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT PRESS, 2016).

The means of communication can be considered democratic when the journalists observe the ethics of profession concerning the objectivity and fairness when reporting about political events, and the objectivity involves a

clear distancing of journalists from the opinions expressed by the politicians in the debates. What happens, de facto, in the Moldavian press is, on the contrary, the promotion of the politician's opinion, its emphasis, its repetition in different forms in at least a few daily programs, inviting the biased analysts to speak favorably, promoting the politician's opinion in debates, and many other processes used by journalists to justify the massive funding of the media institution they are part of. Can we speak about information? All this happens to the detriment of the simple and impartial presentation of the facts, in order to inform the citizen so that the latter, may form an opinion about those facts. The danger also lies in the fact that the citizens are being robbed of this right of their own conclusion, turning them easily into incapable, semi-intelligent and lacking any critical capacity. Or, is not that what a totalitarian leadership wants?

It is worth mentioning that the media legislation in the Republic of Moldova, including the media activity in electoral campaigns, is democratic and fair to all participants in the electoral exercises, but the reality denotes a lack of compliance with the law, an ignorance of the competent authorities in the monitoring process of these campaigns, but even a consciously achieved alliance of the press with politics in order to reach that *win-win* situation, but which inevitably leads to the damage of the main taxpayer's interests to the state budget - the simple citizen. Paradoxically, but precisely in the desire of any governing political power to accumulate as much revenue as possible in the state's treasury, the political power in the Republic of Moldova attacks and strikes in the possibility of the citizens to achieve themselves in the most diverse domains, creating unbearable conditions of existence in their own state, in order for the active population to focus their attention on geographic areas that are socially, politically and economically more attractive.

In the context of political partisanship activity, and hence the *promotiong* activity, successfully carried out by the native media, we can mention the names of the most popular domestic TV stations or which re-broadcast Russian television stations and which for the last eight years have praised the parties in power for a period of time or another.

The danger of these activities lies also in the lack of information alternatives for the simple citizen, as long as the Moldovian press is at the mercy of the ruling parties or the opposition parties. Real independent media elements DO NOT exist in the Republic of Moldova. In the previous works we reminded about the crass difference between the media activity of the Western countries and the one in our country. This consists in the open, argued, and financially disinterested press of the Western countries over the political sympathies of a other media structure or other, while the Moldavian press vehemently denies that it would protect the political interests of any political party, declaring its total independence from Moldavian politics, but in fact being financially supported by the political structures in a hidden and extremely sophisticated manner.

Peter Gross, in the well-known work *Mass Media and Democracy in Eastern European Countries*, notes that unlike the West, "East European media is deprived of two aspects: the function of public good will service and journalism professionalism, a controversial but essential subject. At the end of the 1990s, the media became subordinate or appropriate to a large number of various, predominantly political and commercial interests" (GROSS, 2004). The situation remains critical, although we are almost two decades away from the findings made in Gross's research. Another aspect not negligible at all, emerging from the attitude of political parties that are not governing and possibly do not have press structures, is the well-founded criticism brought to the representatives of the non-equidistant media, but at the same time the ardent manifestation of the desire to be covered as much

as possible by the media, to make themselves visible through the press, to be praised for the actions taken in the process of interacting with civil society, precisely in order to obtain those much-desired political bonuses that could eventually be turned into election capital during any election campaign. So, in the point of view of the political opposition, the Moldavian press has deficiencies and weaknesses in its autonomy and relation to the government, but these deficiencies could easily disappear if the media massively, rapidly and in a favorable way, without criticism directed its attention to the politics opposed to the government. In this context, we wonder whether, it really can be achieved, in a pragmatic way, the desire to have a free press in the Republic of Moldova, without it being constrained by obscure political and commercial interests? The question remains a rhetorical one. For now...

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