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Natalia Zhelikhovska
Institute of Journalism, Taras Shevchenko National University, Kyiv

Journalistic Discourse of Freedom of Speech in Ukrainian Media

Introduction

Freedom of speech as an axiological category shapes the feeling of dignity in people and offers them an opportunity to make conscious choices. Freedom of expression as an instrument of media provides citizens with an ability to speak out their attitude towards authorities, and to control their activities. The level of free speech in society fosters the emergence of a certain political system, and vice versa, every political system gives rise to its own scale of values. As Rizun reasonably points out, "truthful information which confronts the value system of imperfect society… is restricted, since it poses a threat for such society"[1]. Concerning Ukrainian society, Kvit states that it is experiencing the two forms of unprecedented pressure upon collective consciousness: "On the one hand, many political forces exploit relapses of totalitarian legacy. On the other, new technologies provide qualitatively different forms of manipulations with consciousness of masses"[2].

The objective of the present paper is to observe the gradual change in the state of freedom of speech in Ukraine during the two recent decades and define the basic denotations of the concept "freedom of speech" in the context of contemporary social discourse. The object of study is comprised of publications from Ukrainian mass media printed over the last two decades. In this paper we have used such methods as qualitative text analysis, which allows to obtain a credible image of how existent concepts are transmitted in journalism; critical discourse analysis to comprehend general tendencies and trends in the development of the discourse on the mentioned issues; and

[1] V. Rizun, *Osnovy zhurnalistyky u vidpovidiakh i zauvahakh*. [Outline of Journalism in Answers and Remarks]. Kyiv: Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, 2004, p. 47.

[2] S. Kvit, *Shcho take mediadoslidzennia?* [What is Media Survey?], [in:] *Ukrains'ka zhurnalistyka: umovy formuvannia ta perspektyvy rozvytku,* Cherkasy 2007, p. 338.

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comparative historical method to identify changes in context and in the interpretations of concepts within the mentioned period.

Free expression and social responsibility of mass-media are the points at issue for Ukrainian scholars L. Vasyslyk, N. Volobuieva, V. Hvozdiev, V. Zdoroveha, N. Zelinska, V. Ivanov, S. Kvit, I. Mykhailyn, B. Potiatynyk, H. Pocheptsov, T. Prystupenko, V. Rizun, N. Sydorenko, L. Snisarchuk, O. Chekmyshev et al. Considering freedom of media to be a political, legal, and ethical value, Prystupenko emphasizes that resolving violations of journalism ethics is in fact a matter of protection of freedom of speech, since "this problem concerns not only journalism and editorship, but also the audience of mass media, the culture and education of this audience etc. And most of all it concerns the right to objective and truthful information, to pluralism and balance of opinions"[3]. Ivanov asserts that freedom of speech is one of the most essential gains of the humankind. Therewith, he reasons that under certain circumstances the interests of society may demand a restriction of this freedom, especially in protection of public morals[4]. Mykhailyn, too, emphasizes the social responsibility of the journalist in using freedom of speech. The scholar is concerned with facts of arbitrariness, which testify to "exploitation of freedom of expression, granted by the Ukrainian state and absent in times of the USSR, for the suppression and ruination of this very Ukrainian state, or for the destabilization of its domestic life"[5]. In this opinion, this is an unconventional paradox of the domestic information space, impossible to occur in any other country.

V. Rizun points out that freedom of speech is a fundamental category for collective consciousness, while "journalists' rights and freedom lie at the core of understanding journalism"[6]. In his analysis of *Journalist of Ukraine* and *Telekrytyka* journals, Handziuk notes that freedom of speech is one of the most painful and burning problems for Ukrainian journalists: "Materials of specialized journals aim at detecting, publishing and condemning actions of authorities, which violate freedom of speech and prevent media workers from performing their professional duties"[7].

The urgent problem of ensuring freedom of speech and press has repeatedly surfaced throughout Ukrainian society's history. In particular, Snisarchuk points out harsh conditions in which Ukrainian press developed in Halychyna: "Laws on press, created and effective in the interwar Poland, as well as other legal norms, which regulated journalists' professional activity, significantly affected freedom of speech, 'improved' the

[3] T. Prystupenko, *Teoriya zhurnalistyky: etychni ta pravovi zasady diyal'nosti zasobiv masovoyi informacii*. [Theory of Journalism: Ethical and Legal Principles of Mass Media], Kyiv: The Institute of Journalism, 2004, p. 189.

[4] V. Ivanov, *Zhurnalists'ka etyka*. [Ethics in Journalism], Kyiv: Vyshcha Shkola, 2006, p. 73.

[5] I. Mykhailyn, *Zhurnalistyka yak vsesvit: Vybrani media doslidzhennia.* [Journalism as a Universe: Selected Media Surveys]. Kharkiv: Prapor 2008, p. 24.

[6] V. Rizun, *op. cit.,* p. 59.

[7] V. Handziuk, *Osnovna problematyka praktychnykh fakhovykh vydan' dlia zhurnalistiv Ukrainy*. [Main Problems of Specialized Practical Editions for Journalists in Ukraine], [in:] V. Handziuk, *Masova komunikaciia: istoriia, syohodennia, perspektyvy*, Lutsk 2012, p. 67.

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content of periodicals, and decided the journalists' fates"[8]. To relieve the harassment, Ukrainian sociopolitical printed media were forced to introduce a post of 'sitz–editor' in their staff: a person who would take punishment in case of claims from the authorities. On the Ukrainian territories in the Russian empire, Ukrainian editions could by no means overcome severe censorship of the Valuev Circular of 1863 and the Ems Ukaz of 1876. Nevertheless, according to Potiatynyk, "in scale and amount of persecutions of the Ukrainian language," the 20th century "surpassed all the previous ages together. They reached their tragic apogee in the Holodomor of 1932–33, when the deletion of unacceptable words in the text transformed into deleting millions of unacceptable carriers of those words from life"[9]. Studying the ideological and problematic parameters of the concept of freedom in the *samvydav* journalism of the 1960–80s, Vasylyk reasonably notes: "Valuing freedom as a crucial concept, the press should remember that only the synthesis of internal and external freedom makes nation existent and thus capable of making history, able to show itself in a worldwide meta text of the epoch; that a free state is impossible without a spiritually unbound personality"[10] [10, c. 67].

Dominant Meanings of the Concept 'Freedom of Speech' in Journalistic Discourse

As the history of our country`s development during the independence period shows, Ukrainian society is ready to stand up for its rights when it faces danger of losing freedom of speech. Both attempts to suppress democratic freedoms ended in mass protests: the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity of 2013–2014. Direct connection between these events is obvious from the data of sociological surveys, which indicated the worst condition of free speech in 2002–2003 and throughout 2013. Thus, sociological survey by the Razumkov Centre (2002) showed that freedom of speech appeared to be the key problem in the country's social and political life. The vast majority of journalists (86.2%) admitted the presence of political censorship in Ukraine and pointed out its attributes: "self-censorship, caused by fear of repercussions after publishing certain materials" (57.3%), "editorial exclusion of politically undesirable fragments from authorial texts; editing which essentially shifts political accents in the text" (54.8%), "'explanatory conversations' with journalists, in course of which executives describe the desirable character of covering certain political events and the activities of certain officials and politicians" (54.5%).

Nearly every other journalist (48.3%) had faced threats caused by his or her professional activity. Psychological pressure ranks first among threats (79.2%), followed by

[8] L. Snisarchuk, *Pravovi normy funktsionuvannia ukrayins'koi presy Halychyny 20–30–kh rokiv XX st.* [Legal Functioning of the Ukrainian Press in 1920ies–30ies in Halychyna], [in:] L. Snisarchuk, *Tvorchi ta orhanizatsijni osoblyvosti funkstionuvannia suchasnoho medijnoho prostoru,* Vol. 2, Ternopil' – Lviv: Piramida 2008, s. 284.

[9] B. Potiatynyk, *Media: klyuchi do rozuminnia.* [Media: Keys to Understanding], Lviv, p. 71.

[10] L. Vasylyk, *Kontsept svobody v ukrains'kij publitsystytsi oporu (1960–1980)* [The Concept of Freedom in Ukrainian Resistance Non-fiction (1960–1980)], Kyiv 2008, p. 67.

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economical sanctions (75.7%) and physical violence (47.5%). The danger of journalism is recognized by the society: almost 80% of citizens consider journalism a dangerous profession, with the highest percentage (86.6%) shown in the East of Ukraine. Importantly, almost a half of the population (49.9%) are ready to support journalists in their struggle against censorship. One-third of Ukrainians (34.3%), regardless their own material problems, are ready to support journalists financially (by the way, this was proven after the launch of internet-based project Hromadske TV).

Preserving the values of gained freedom from being transformed into a manipulative technology that endangers Ukraine's national security, political stability, and spiritual soundness is a challenge for the Ukrainian media which has to be overcome when the situation with freedom of speech improves. Enjoying freedom imposes specific duties and specific responsibility. In particular, we refer to certain restrictions of free speech, which concern other peoples' rights, reputation, national security, protection of the public order, and the population's health and morality.

According to Bekeshkina, scientific director of the Democratic Initiative Foundation, Ukrainian mass media do not support civil society, which should be their mission; instead, they side with forces hostile to this civic society. The sociologist names widespread venality of media as one of the main causes of this plague. Beside the problem of the so-called *jeansa* (biased content or subliminal messages in media) and pursuit of ratings and profits, there is a problem of concentration mostly on internal political realities, since it is mostly politicians who appear as biggest newsmakers in Ukraine.

Materials of Ukrainian journalists suggest that when freedom of speech in Ukraine is safe, the problem of responsibility comes to the fore. Journalists pay attention to the problem of qualified efficient use of gained freedom and call to give up the false interpretation of freedom as 'chitchat' or as 'struggle for various truths'. Freedom of speech is necessary to develop one`s own convictions independently from society, to form one's self-supporting standards and life goals. It is important not only to be free to discuss any social issues, but also to be able to use this freedom in making informed choices. If freedom is not balanced by responsibility, it turns into anarchy and leads to chaos. The publications of the mentioned period point to the necessity to upgrade political education in society as a whole and social responsibility among journalists in particular.

Rakhmanin believes that internal freedom and honesty is principal criterion for the journalist, and insists on personal responsibility for every word: "Nowadays, the journalist too often gropes through an informational minefield laced with tripwires of disinformation, antipersonnel mines of compromising leaks, and anti-tank missiles of engagement. Any wrong step can destroy the only real value: the good name, a hallmark gained by hard work". The author is convinced that freedom of speech is neither a material benefit nor a legal category, thus it cannot be given as a gift or assigned: "Maidan emerged as a result of free speech, not vice versa". He does not see danger in losing freedom, if it is not taken as a conscious social need: "Freedom of speech originates from the urge to speak. When there is nothing to say, there should be no fear of

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losing this freedom. Hypothetically, crackdown may be viewed as good, as an opportunity to feel the need for freedom again".

Significantly, almost 60% of Ukrainians think that the Ukrainian mass media still need some type of censorship (according to the data provided by Kyiv-based Horshenin Institute for Governance Issues). First of all, respondents opine that scenes of violence and cruelty, and propaganda of criminal lifestyle should be censored.

For Sikalov, "the type of soul that requires censorship" is left in the past and the yearning to introduce censorship reveals a distinctive Soviet mentality, because freedom of speech, an individual's right to freely express their opinion, is necessary as a social principle which covers every corner of collective consciousness. Yet the author accepts that the despotism of censorship should not be replaced with the despotism of permissiveness, since freedom of expression is now used as a "fastening pin that passes through the whole system and joins a TV commercial with literature, or a politician's speech with advertising slogan for pills or milk". Freedom of speech now transformed from situational and once urgent creative intention into a smart and reliable mechanism for protecting the market, economy, and authorities as a united enclave that works only for itself: "Freedom of speech is used to gag timid efforts to stop the idiocy or malice; freedom of speech is raised as a flag, when arguments capitulate; freedom of speech is used as a general denomination for intentionally biased paid information. Observation of various frightful things sanctioned by the freedom of speech motivates to question the value of doubtful ability to say anything, to publish any idea".

The issue of free speech, especially the question of its appropriate use becomes urgent in the run-up of every election in Ukraine. This is when the arsenal of political warfare is reinforced with partisan *jeansa*, corrupt deals between politicians and mass media, obstructions of journalism, unfounded dismissal of journalists, introduction of editorial censorship and new forms of the so-called *temnyks* (editorial lists of obligatory topics), prohibition of criticism, economical dependence, and new restrictions of journalists' rights. In particular, journalist investigations which disclose concrete names and concrete illegal actions end at the very stage of freedom of speech, never reaching their logical legal conclusion. Hrabovskyi observes that "abstract freedom of speech ends at the point where someone's concrete private 'cutlets' (*interests*) begin. Besides 'cutlets' you certainly cannot touch 'our guys'. Let them be bastards, but they are 'our bastards'"[11].

It is an obvious fact that the majority of mass media investors are less oriented on gaining profit than on the ability to influence public opinion. Losiev accuses an irresponsible practice of selling airtime to political parties and NGOs, which exists on many state-supported channels: "TV chiefs for reason unknown wash their hands of the content on air, since the deal has been struck and the client is free to do as he pleases with his purchase, without burdening himself with morality or the Constitution".

[11] On the Peculiarities of National Editing, see: // http://www.ji.lviv.ua).

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Conclusions

An analysis of the condition of free speech in last two decades shows that the aggravations of political and economical censorships are closely intertwined. Obviously, freedom of speech for Ukrainians is equivalent to the matter of survival as a nation. A looming permanent danger of losing freedom of speech or discrediting its meaning makes journalists address this issue over and over again, reminding the society about important priorities. Firstly, considering freedom of media as a political, legal and ethical value, authors point to unconditioned necessity of free speech for journalists to b able to perform their professional duties. Secondly, freedom of speech is defined as a principle of social life, a conscious necessity, and a fundamental concept in collective consciousness. Thirdly, the emphasis is put on the responsibility of journalists, whose professional duties include assuming responsibility for the information they communicate. And last, but not least: it is important to distinguish freedom from permissiveness, since in case of substitution or imitation of concepts free speech becomes a powerful instrument of manipulating collective conscience and concealing real state of affairs from the society.

Ukrainian society shows persistent demand for freedom of speech, which creates corresponding context for social discourse. The main tendency in the evolution of discourse on free speech is related to the search for effective strategies of protecting and preserving the value of gained freedom from changing it into a manipulative technology. Journalists provide an abstract concept 'freedom of speech' with real content by performing the function of enlightenment, which is a dominant feature of contemporary discourse on the freedom of speech. Interpreting this concept has a practical meaning for awareness of its sense and appropriate usage, since freedom of speech is an effective instrument to influence society and authorities. Studying discourse on the freedom of speech allows to trace the relationship between the condition of free speech and political situation in the country, and to determine prospects for the development of not only mass media, but society in general.

Abstract: The article studies the dynamics of the freedom of speech change in Ukraine in the past two decades. The author analyzes the main semantic accents of the concept «the freedom of speech» in the context of contemporary public discourse, where journalistic texts serve primarily educational function. The freedom of the press is viewed by publicists as political, legal and ethical value; the freedom of expression is the vital principle of public life and fundamental category of social consciousness. Publications emphasize the importance of distinguishing between the freedom of expression and total permissiveness and stress upon the social responsibility of journalists whose professional duty is to take responsibility for the accuracy of their work.

Key words: freedom of speech, concept, social responsibility, publicism, manipulative technology.

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Dyskurs o dziennikarskiej wolności słowa w mediach ukraińskich

Streszczenie: Artykuł poświęcono analizie dynamiki zmian w kwestii wolności słowa na Ukrainie w ciągu ostatnich dwóch dekad. Autor analizuje główne semantyczne akcenty pojęcia „wolność słowa" w kontekście współczesnego dyskursu publicznego, w którym teksty dziennikarskie służą przede wszystkim funkcji edukacyjnej. Wolność prasy jest postrzegana przez publicystów jako wartość polityczna, prawna i etyczna; wolność ekspresji jest podstawową zasadą życia publicznego i podstawową kategorią świadomości społecznej. Publikacje podkreślają wagę rozróżniania między wolnością słowa a całkowitą liberalnością i naciskami na społeczną odpowiedzialność dziennikarzy, których zawodowym obowiązkiem jest wzięcie odpowiedzialności za rzetelność ich pracy.

Słowa kluczowe: wolność słowa, koncepcja, odpowiedzialność społeczna, publicystyka, technologia manipulacyjna

Дискурс о журналистской свободе слова в украинских СМИ

Аннотация: Статья посвящена анализу динамики изменений в области свободы слова в Украине за последние два десятилетия. Автор анализирует основные смысловые акценты понятия «свобода слова» в контексте современного публичного дискурса, в котором публицистические тексты в первую очередь выполняют образовательную функцию. Свобода прессы воспринимается журналистами как политическая, правовая и этическая ценность; свобода выражения мнений является основным принципом общественной жизни и основной категорией общественного сознания. В публикациях подчеркивается важность проведения различия между свободой слова и тотальной либеральностью, давлением на социальную ответственность журналистов, профессиональным долгом которых является принятие ответственности за добросовестность их работы.

Ключевые слова: свобода слова, концепт, социальная ответственность, журналистика, манипулятивные технологии.

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