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FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN A POST-SOVIET UKRAINE AND KYIV-MOHYLA ACADEMY AS A MASS MEDIUM ¹

In article the author clarifies situation with freedom of speech in Ukraine, including consideration of the overall context, the peculiarities of political culture, the main challenges and trends in mass media, issues of professionalism of Ukrainian journalists. The author makes the claim that because the National University "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy" effectively serves as an independent public tribune, it plays a role as a means of mass communication in Ukraine.

Keywords: freedom of speech, censorship, new media, Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, journalistic community, journalism education, historical memory.

First of all, I will say several words about Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (KMA). Our university was founded in 1615. This is the oldest university in Ukraine, the oldest in the former Russian Empire, and in all of Eastern Europe, and among the South-Slavonic peoples. Many prominent intellectuals, philosophers, writers, political leaders, scientists and artists graduated from our institution.

The Tsarist and, later, the Soviet governments looked askance at this centre of liberal thought. In 1918, the Naval Political School was opened on the premises of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, although Kyiv does not have any sea nearby. In 1991, Vyacheslav Briukhovetskyi, Honorary President of KMA, reopened and revived Kyiv-Mohyla Academy as a modern university, fully integrated into the western system of higher education. It is the place where all innovations introduced into Ukrainian education were launched and tested. Later I will return to the subject of the role of KMA within the context of the development of freedom of speech.

There are two ways for me to present the freedom of speech issue in today's Ukraine. The first is much easier than the second. To start I can just to read off the list of various abridgments, violations, and bans that exist in Ukraine currently. The alternative, more difficult approach is also more academic and therefore more desirable for me.

I have already tried to characterize the system of media in Ukraine today elsewhere [1]. Freedom of speech does not exist by itself, nor can it be exported or brought in from the outside. It can arise only in those states where society wants to have it. I am convinced that Ukrainians are a nation that has an innate need for freedom of speech. With this in mind, I present to you my analysis of the current situation with freedom of speech in Ukraine.

Freedom of speech has a political meaning. This is what Ukrainian society worries about most of all. We still do not know for sure who was the assassin's paymaster in the case of Georgiy Gongadze, therefore, the journalists community considers the case unclosed. Here we can also mention different forms of preventing journalists from performing their professional activities, concealment of information, publication of political advertisement without any notifications, pressure on newspaper, television and radio journalists and editors from government, owners, and top-managers, journalist self-censorship.

Now it is impossible to hide information about such cases, but different facts of political repression more or less influence to freedom of speech issues. Sometimes journalists protest, and the society supports them. We can remember here, for example, actions by journalists of the information agency UNIAN, "Gazeta Po-Kyivsky" (a Kyiv newspaper), and "Kyiv Post". The struggle for unbiased news, first of all on TV, continues both at the professional level and in public discourse.

In Ukraine, it is impossible for the government to develop and implement a broad ranging strategy of pressure on the media, as was done in neighbouring Russia. There are a few reasons of this: firstly, Ukrainian society does not accept authoritarianism; secondly, state media do not have as significant level influence on the wide public as in Russia; thirdly, the variety of influential national and local media owners is rather considerable; fourthly, journalists and media specialists cooperate in order to defend their rights and professional values; and finally, the government is not bold enough to discard democratic rhetoric completely, so, it is obliged to carry on a dialog with society (this can at least partly be explained by the fact that Ukrainian state does not have extra money from oil and gas, which could be

¹ The basis of the article is the speech at the University of Adelaide (Australia): May, 4, 2012.

spent on feeding the national economy, and constructing an authoritarian polity). Therefore, in Ukraine a general rule may be applied: the government can take as much power, as society allows it to take.

In Ukraine we have official bodies that perform the function of censorship. I mean The National Expert Committee of Ukraine for the Protection of Public Morality. This is a governmental institution, and its functioning does not rely on principles of self-regulation. Its decisions are not based on any appropriate sociological or media research. So, The National Expert Committee adopts the functions of Church, which normally (in western societies) would speak on moral issues. But in reality, this Committee should be regarded as a weird (post-) Soviet anachronism. In the post-totalitarian conditions of today's Ukraine, it constitutes a menace to the very concept of freedom of speech.

A range of new technologies is now used for denying freedom of speech and for misinforming mass audiences. After the Orange Revolution, which constituted also a journalists' revolution, together with positive changes in this field there appeared principally new technologies of "ultimate openness as a kind of total closeness". This phenomenon may be seen in many talk-shows which demonstrate long and fruitless discussions on seemingly important social issues, but are accompanied by vulgar hosts, and the behaviour of politician participants often leads to a result that is contrary to explication: instead of getting clearer, problems are hidden behind personal arguments and spitting. After the Orange Revolution, many important national and social projects were not realized, and the most important of these (in my opinion) is the establishment of Public Service Broadcasting [2].

Some questions for the journalist community itself continue to be important for understanding the freedom of speech issue in today's Ukraine, including the following: what percentage of journalists are prepared to receive bribes and live according to double standards, and conversely, what does freedom of speech mean for them? How familiar are these journalists with professional values; how many of them are participating in public, professional, and trade union movements, aimed at defending their professional reputation? These questions can be also addressed to sociologists.

The practice of the last two decades, after 1991, has shown that the public activity of journalists directly depends on the prevailing social mood in society. In other words, journalists influence their audience, but the audience influences them more. For today, we can state the existence of freedom of speech, free media and free journalists in Ukraine.

Nevertheless, all the time we have more and more questions and threats.

Regarding the development of new information technologies and media convergence: Ukraine has the fastest growing rate of internet proliferation in Europe, and is ninth in the ranking of overall Internet proliferation: 16 million 900 thousand (40 % of adults) are regular users of the Internet [3]. The role of new media and associate phenomena such as citizen journalism are becoming more and more important in Ukraine, and have resulted in accessibility of alternative sources of information and engagement of a broader public into the production of media content. New technologies are furthering the development of freedom of speech. The audience of video reels from the Internet is often broader than the regular audience of TV-news.

Now I will go back to the role of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in the struggle for freedom of speech in Ukraine. We have a unique School of Journalism¹ oriented in its work at western standards and best practices. The School offers a 2-years Master's Program, a PhD Program in Mass Communications, legal software, TV and radio studios, professional equipment, the Digital future of Journalism program (teaching new media to working journalists) and Digital Media for Universities (new media program for journalism schools teachers), and finally, a Media Reform Centre. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Kyiv-Mohyla School of Journalism considerably influences the development of professional standards and new forms of journalist education in Ukraine. Besides Ukrainian professors, experts from Great Britain, USA, France, Spain, Germany, and Holland contribute to the development of the Kyiv-Mohyla School of Journalism.

With respect to civil society activities aimed at the development of freedom of speech in Ukraine, Kyiv-Mohyla Academy has played a significant and generalist role by providing a liberal tribune for independent thought. Powerful civic movements including "Stop Censorship"² and "Honestly"³ were established in KMA, and our university was their co-founder. Earlier, the functioning of the Media Reform Centre⁴ before, during and after the Orange Revolution gave rise to a special term – "media reforms" in Ukraine. If one cannot find a liberal tribune, KMA is the first place a person would apply to. Every event held within our walls becomes a newsmaker immediately. According to our estimations, KMA was mentioned in different Ukrainian

¹ Kyiv-Mohyla School of Journalism. – Access mode: <http://en.j-school.kiev.ua/about/>.

² Stop Censorship. – Access mode: <http://stopcensorship.wordpress.com/>.

³ Chesno (Honestly). – Access mode: <http://chesno.org/>.

⁴ Media Reform Center. – Access mode: <http://www.mediareform.com.ua/>.

media more than 17 times per day during the previous university year. From this point of view in fact Kyiv-Mohyla Academy is an important Ukrainian mass medium.

Historical memory is an issue that is closely related to the issue of freedom of speech in Ukraine. This fact reflects the new political reality in our country after the 2010 Presidential election. As was the case during the Perestroika period, historical issues often go far beyond the framework of academic research. Now the Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine Dmytro Tabachnyk can deny in public the existence of a unified Ukrainian nation, he can deny the existence of a separate Ukrainian language, and of a common historical memory.

In an effort (one among many) to respond to this high ranked political nonsense, last year KMA published a book entitled “The Time of the Cheap Clown (Ukrainian Education: a Challenge through Pseudo Reforms)” (2011) [5]. “Cheap Clown” is an expression by a well-known Ukrainian Politician about the current Minister of Education and Science. KMA also publicly protested against Tabachnyk’s appointment for the Minister position¹, participates in ongoing discussions both around his persona, and the changes that he proposes, including providing public discussions about new “law on Higher Education” during last two years, defending the public interest of higher education, and asserting our rights through Ukraine’s courts.

The issues of the national liberation struggle for independence and national state of the Ukrainian people are now almost officially forbidden. Ruslan Zabila, a historian from Lviv, was even arrested for his professional activities, but released soon after mass protests by civil society (historians, writers, journalists, different public organizations, and others). Interestingly, he refused the offer to become a politician with an almost full guaranty of being elected to Parliament. Another historian, Volodymyr Viatrovykh, who was the Head of the Archive of the State Security Service of Ukraine until 2010, and declassified the documents of the Soviet secret service, was fired. Now he is the head of the KMA Centre for Researching the History of State Development of Ukraine.

Another example of research, exhibits and presentations that are considered “controversial”, because it challenges the official position of Ukrainian State, which is denying the nature of “genocide” of the Great Famine known as the Holodomor of 1932–1933. In such areas, KMA carries on its own research, publishing, and media policies. For example, in October 2010, the well-known Ameri-

can historian Norman Naimark presented his new book “Stalin’s Genocides” (Princeton University Press). Kyiv-Mohyla Academy obtained rights to translate it into Ukrainian and publish it, and in the spring of 2011 the Ukrainian edition of “Stalin’s Genocides” was presented in Kyiv with the participation of the author, who also held several meetings, public lectures and press conferences. These events were highlighted in Ukraine’s press and they provoked discussions on professional and political levels.

What is the logic of the state refusing its own historical memory? Such losses are the most painful foe any European country. Nevertheless, the main rhetoric grounding every important state decision continues to be Pro-European. Here we are dealing with the phenomenon of a soviet person, a person without motherland, who, being part of the Ukrainian political elite, in order to be understandable to their electorate, use rhetoric that proclaims the goal of bringing Ukraine closer to joining the EU, espousing European values, and conformance with, if not political then certainly economic standards of Europe.

In the midst of this, attempts of some public politicians to build their activity in the Pro-Russian trend look even weirder. They are speculating on the “common” history, lasting for several hundreds of years, and the victory in the Great Patriotic War (the name given to the Second World War), emphasizing the common history of Ukraine and Russia within the USSR. Actually, this rhetoric is connected with a naïve hope to someday gain access to cheap Russian gas. Recently, these illusions have started to disappear, and rhetoric regarding Russia has rather quickly changed from one of “brotherhood” to unconcealed hostility.

The situation in Ukraine today is somewhat dangerous. For the first time since 1991, the Ukrainian field of humanities has been given up to those political forces that see their aim as a struggle against Ukrainian independence. This explains common (positive) references by such politicians to the authoritarian/totalitarian “Russian model” of governance and the (post-) Soviet style of thinking of many Ukrainian public figures. That is why the concepts of freedom of speech and independent media irritate these politicians so much. Therefore, freedom of speech is becoming the cause of the great battle for the Ukrainian independent statehood.

Nevertheless, the situation in Ukraine continues to be very dynamic. Ukrainians feel themselves Europeans in the meaning formulated by Denis de Rougemont who called Europe “the cradle of creative dissent” [4]. And this fosters our hope and our self-confidence.

¹ KMA President’s Appeal. – Access mode: <http://kvit.ukma.kiev.ua/2011/04/naukma-president%E2%80%99s-appeal/>.

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Сергій Квіт

СВОБОДА СЛОВА В ПОСТРАДЯНСЬКІЙ УКРАЇНІ ТА КИЄВО-МОГИЛЯНСЬКА АКАДЕМІЯ ЯК МЕДІУМ

У статті з'ясовано стан справ із свободою слова в Україні, зокрема розглянуто загальний контекст, особливості політичної культури суспільства, основні загрози і тенденції у мас-медіа, питання професіоналізму українських журналістів. Автор висуває твердження, що оскільки Національний університет «Києво-Могилянська академія» ефективно виконує роль незалежної публічної трибуни, він фактично є засобом масової комунікації в Україні.

Ключові слова: свобода слова, цензура, нові медіа, Києво-Могилянська академія, журналістська громада, журналістська освіта, історична пам'ять.

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