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„Corruption in the Print Media in Uzbekistan, Privatization and the case of Self-Regulation“

What do we understand under the term “corruption”? Like any complicated social phenomenon, corruption does not have a well-established, canonical definition. Experts in the sphere of corruption point to several cases that can be labeled by the term “corruption”. In this report, I will speak about corruption in THE print media that can be defined as the misuse by a journalist of his position for personal interests. I

Am going to describe to you facts about bribery in Uzbek Print media that I found. They are just examples about how the print media in particular, and the whole mass media in general work in the former Soviet Central Asian republics.

I am going to explain what a very important and responsible role the mass media must play in the struggle with corruption and its role in the democratic society our states aspire to. In order to realize these two functions, the media must be free of control from the side of authorities and from the side of oligarchy.

I am going to demonstrate the strategy for change, which in my opinion can be successful under the condition that the forces are to be combined, co-coordinated and Have a long-term character. I will be able to touch just a small part of the problems relating directly or indirectly to the corruption in the Uzbek press, but I intend to do it carefully and effectively. My purpose is to not just show the facts of corruptions presence, but excite your curiosity about this problem and discuss all possible strategies for changing this situation.

If one distinguishes the top level and grassroots forms of corruption, I intend to speak about the latter as a widespread and destructive phenomenon existing in our society. Grassroots corruption is deeply entrenched in the everyday life. By the opinion of the experts from the “INDEM Foundation” who made a report on the issue of corruption in the Russian Federation, the “Attractiveness of grassroots corruption is explained by the fact that with a minimal risk for both parties it possesses a specific value not only for the person accepting (or exhorting) a bribe but also for the person who offers this bribe,. A bribe helps to solve permanently emerging routine problems. It serves also as a modest payment for minor violation of laws and regulations” or, it must be added, sometimes violations of moral and professional ethics because is mostly the case when we examine the press. “Wide-scale grassroots corruption is extremely dangerous. - Continues the expert. First, it creates a favorable psychological background for the existence of other forms of corruption and second, it nurtures "vertical corruption." The latter is a launch pad for the emergence of organized corrupt structures and groups.” †

The spheres mentioned as the most corrupted ones in the report of “INDEM Foundation” include:

- housing and communal system;
- law-enforcement bodies (especially, highway militia);
- taxes and custom fees;
- conscription to the army service.

In our case with the press, the situation and the reasons nurturing bribery are a bit different. Interaction of journalists with the representatives and officials of firms and organizations in illegitimate ways occurs in two types of cases.

The first case takes place when journalists are offered a bribe for preparing and publicizing the information which the would be client is interested

in. This form of bribery is very widespread. Every firm tries to have its own "journalist." It is desirable that he or she works for several newspapers and magazines and has good initial connections in the sphere of the chief editors, in order to publish periodically information about the firm's activity or whatever would satisfy the clients. This can be thought as advertisement strategy, but such articles do not have the label "advertisement". A well developed advertising industry would help to meet some of the needs that create the kind of corruption. Journalists receive supplementary amounts which they sometimes share with their chiefs. Newspapers and magazines are filled with such examples.

The second case occurs when journalists do not publish facts that would criticize, compromise or in other ways negatively affect the prestige, career or reputation of the client, and receive a bribe for this omission. The second CASE occurs more often in the publications of the regional newspapers. In a typical example, a correspondent receives a task to prepare an article about the conditions people are working and living under in a rural area, for example, in a village in the territory of a farm or a factory. Obviously, there are not just unfavorable but even disastrous conditions that the directors of the region have "closed their eyes" to. After receiving a bribe, the correspondent shares this with his chief and they also "close their eyes" on this topic. But, in order to have an opportunity to make "this bribery business", the publication must have "the instruction" from the top and that is not always a simple thing to get.

Those facts I found during interview with journalists working in different newspapers and magazines. They agreed to tell me that just because they are my old teachers and colleagues. (I had been working as a non-staff correspondent in the Republican newspaper for two years and I have some initial connections in the journalists' sphere). The journalists themselves explain their corrupted behavior as a necessary one. Low wages in most cases define their choice of behavior. For example, the wage of an average journalist is \$10-12 American dollars per month. From this point of view, the list of the factors and conditions creating corruption must begin from the

- economic collapse which began before the fall of the Soviet Union.

"Impoverishment of the population, inability of the state to ensure a decent existence to its servants (in our case – media servants) push both sides to violations of law which result in mass-scale grassroots corruption."⁴

One of the key measures of the anticorruption program in Singapore was TO increase of wages of the civil servants. Why it cannot be considered as a key Measure of the anticorruption program in press sphere? The way I find the most effective and most realizable solution under the today's conditions is the privatization of a part of mass media. Let's discuss it through the example of the press. Private ownership of the press would solve the problem as readers want the changes I describe and private ownership would be very willing to make in order to increase their share of the readership. Private press has more chances and much more incentive to be more objective, to be more interesting for its readers, to draw more consumers' attention and consumers' money than the state press where the popularity of the issues does not influence on the journalists' wages. Private press has a chance to improve the living of its workers. Speaking about privatization, it is obvious to mark the necessity of developing the legislation that will be able to defend the press sphere from corruption. Because from the other hand, the business elite began to become aware of the power of mass media and of the fact that

a political profitability of large-scale investments may result in economic benefits. In Russia we ARE witnessing fighting between different clans for information channels. Absence of norms regulating juridical and economic relations between journalists and their press owners creates widespread shadow and even corruption-based relations in this sphere. One of the most important requirements of democracy and free market is free press, free from anyone's control. (The press will always be under some form of control. the important point is that this control be operating in a competitive market which forces the control to be 'enlightened' and responsible of risk losing 'market share' or overall readership). Private issues have more opportunities to be free than the state ones.

But in realizing all of the mentioned above, we are faced with the primary reason that hinders the development of the print media in particular, and the whole media IN general as a consequence the development of the democratic state. I am speaking about censorship as a form of state control over information. A similar situation exists in most of the states of the former Soviet Union.⁵ In the case of Uzbekistan the press is full of sold/bought materials, it loses its readers, it loses its function as a source of objective information and a megaphone for the general public. Moreover, it is more correct to say that the word "lose" is inappropriate in this case, because it has never been a source of objective information, it has never been a megaphone for the general public for at least the past seventy years. IT had been just a tool of manipulation of public opinion, a tool for the propagation of the ideas convenient to the authorities. Unfortunately this model continues to influence our media even today.

Speaking about the situation with the press on post-Soviet territory, I can refer to the article of Oleg Fyodorov, published in the Russian "Nezavisimaya Gazeta" ("Independent newspaper") from 29. MARCH.2000.⁶ By his opinion, Uzbekistan is one of the states with the most controlled press. There is no common sense

to speak about the violation of freedom of the press in Uzbekistan since there is no free press. State censorship remains AS TO WHAT goes over the air or in print. However, there are several independent TV and radio channels and magazines, but they do not interfere in the political life of the republic.

Independent newspaper and magazines touch only economic and commercial topics.

Uzbekistan urnalists are deprived of an opportunity to criticize the economic policy of the authorities. However, the change in the public opinion that inevitably occurs during the change towards democracy

produces A deep interest of Uzbekistan citizens to the problems of the "forth power".

Today's situation of mass media is an example of how inefficient the most progressive legislature can be. The adopted laws and regulations in the sphere of media, clearly proclaim the freedoms which are now allowable in practice. The reason is that the laws "Defense of the professional activity of the journalist", and "Guarantees of free access to information" are based on the same postulate formulated in the Article of the Law IV"

Mass Media": "In the Republic of Uzbekistan censorship over the mass media is not allowed. No government body has the right to demand a preliminary permission for the publishing materials, and also the change of the text or their full exemption of the press". The Constitution proclaims practically the same.

The mechanism of the censorship was developed during the Soviet times. Censors scrutinize every article of every newspaper and magazine... Moreover, the authorities are able to not just prohibit but "pressingly recommend" materials... Inaccessibility of many of themes leads to the press inability to exist as an institute of public control of execution of laws.⁷ The numerous facts approving presence of state

control over the media in the Central Asian republics can be found in the article by Oleg Katziev, the head of Internews Network in Kazakhstan, IN THE bulletins of Internews Network in Uzbekistan, AND in the reports of Human Rights Watch/Helsinki. These organizations such as Internews work towards development of private press and elimination of censorship, but they certainly feel considerable pressure from the authorities. 8

Here it is necessary to point to another factor creating corruption. these are:

- problems related to the overcoming of heritage of the totalitarian regime;

the main problem is to overcome the intermingling of power and economy, which is specific to totalitarian regime with A centralized system of economic management.

In order to be more objective I must point TO other factors creating corruption. A second problem is an

- underdeveloped legislature and
- inefficiency of the power institutions.

I will try to draw your attention to the role mass media play in anticorruption programs. Their task is not only to inform the society about concrete cases

Of corruption, but also to promote the anticorruption program, to announce its achievements, to train the audience to the basics of anticorruption behavior, to form new norms of the public responsibility. At the same time the mass media are to be supported by legislative protection.

It may prove expedient to revise some current legislative norms, in particular, those concerning the source of information. The situation when the state-owned mass media depend exclusively upon the executive branch of power (which is apparently not the single state-power body) need to be altered. In the current condition it is unrealistic to speak about "glasnost" in fighting with corruption.

To continue the list of the factors nurturing grassroots corruption and print media corruption in particular it is necessary to point to

- weakly established democratic traditions;
- weakness of civil society and alienation of power from society.

Corruption may be defeated only with the involvement of the institutions of civil society since the latter is the most interested in such a victory. It

Is even more urgent in the conditions of deep alienation of the state from society. The state drawing public organizations into full-fledged cooperation in the solution of the corruption problems gets a chance to gain trust of the citizens and, hence, a chance for achieving the established goals. Grassroots corruption cannot be restrained without involvement of the people since corruption entrenched at the low level of authority is almost insensible to the authoritative pulses going downwards from the top. However corruption can be held back by pressure from below, by the combined efforts of the citizens and the institutions of civil society. That's why the authorities, when implementing the anticorruption program should actively involve the public and, first of all, the entrepreneurs and the independent mass media. Special attention should be

paid to forming the law-based and civil conscience and to training the basics of behavior in a democratic and law-based society, in particular, basics of the anticorruption behavior. 9The population of Uzbekistan scares one by its passivity. Mass media functions include the task of raising the participation of the population in the political and economic life of the state. There is no state where corruption cannot be restricted and Uzbekistan is not as exception. The most interested in this victory is the population, although they may not realize just how important this is to their future as free and independent citizens of a developing democracy. Thus, let's struggle and look: who wins?

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