

5. Aidar Botagarov

“ The Role of Kazakhstan mass media in a struggle against corruption, and its impact on formation of population awareness.”

I. Introduction

Mass media plays important role and makes great contribution in prevention of corruption. It highly influences the views and awareness of the population about the general political, economical and social life within the society. Thus, whatever mass media informs the people about leads people to think in the same way.

Since in most developing countries most media are state owned or state controlled, mass media does not make a lot to change the existing situation. Kazakhstani media, in most cases is not objective, rarely helps in curbing corruption, and even sometimes assists its development, so that people view the situation as stable, and as taking steps toward democracy.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the reasons why mass media reports unreliably and the forces that influence informational space of Kazakhstan. Particularly, I am going to discuss the impact of mass media on people's opinion, and its consequences and then give general overview of media in Kazakhstan after disintegration of the USSR. Then, one of the most important points of my research will be to define the regulation process of media ownership. And finally, I will analyze the law on media, whether it guarantees freedom of speech and of the press, or not.

II. Mass media in struggles against corruption, its impact on people's awareness and on formation of public opinion

Mass media plays huge role in recovery of society from corruption. They expose corruption and make open its hidden mechanisms. At the same time media methodically decreasing shadow vital environment of the corruption that deprive it of favorable conditions, and of factors of successful development. By revelation of journalist's investigation and by giving publicity to the facts of corruption, mass media gives hope to society as all hidden things are becoming obvious and that a punishment, at least by publicity, is irreversible. They carry out special mission by providing freedom of expression to each citizen, and the rights of the society to objective and reliable information. (Yerkinbayev, 2001)

Public opinion is one of the manifestations of mass political consciousness, where citizens' opinion about political, economical, cultural, and social life within a country is formed on the basis of obtained information and its objectivity.

Even a well educated person cannot find his feet in the right way in complex processes of everyday life without the radio, television, newspapers, and magazines. Mass media broaden his outlook, and make the whole world visible. (Rosen, 1999)

During the former Soviet Union, the state completely influenced the people's consciousness, and people were forced to do and believe what the state said. By using propaganda, various local authorities kept the whole country in obedience. All mass media were controlled by the state, and informational flow was subjected to censorship. Mass media did not contain any critic or other information that could cast a shadow on those in power. Thus, people were unaware of what was happening in the highest echelons of power; either it was corruption or other illegal actions, and that's how public opinion was formed. (Uderbayeva, 2000)

Years passed and people, by getting accustomed to a transitional period and to consequential changes, became more active participants in the life of the country. Experiencing democracy, at least its first signs, Kazakhstani media started to be more liberal and public opinion was formed based on their information. However, this period did not last long, and media was once again exposed to the influence from the side of the state.

III. Situation and changes on mass media sphere after disintegration of USSR

Social-political changes formed at the beginning of 1990s, after disintegration of the USSR

and formation of sovereign Kazakhstan was a condition of appearance of independent mass media. (Duvanov, 1999)

Independent mass media started competition against the state owned. Many TV/radio stations and channels gave full creative freedom to the journalists and by not restricting them through ideological and political frameworks; they quickly became successful in the society. It can be said that they formed public opinion in these years in Kazakhstan. (Data of Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Research, 1996) Impartial critic of state authorities, ridicule of deficiency in Government policy, and letting opposition representatives speak, fully presented in air of commercial stations. All these things made authorities, who had lost control over their informational space and who couldn't countervail anything to a wild outburst of publicity, worry. To overcome this crisis the state started to force Russian and local independent mass media out. In addition to two existing state channels, the state created the third one – "Khabar"(News). The next step was cessations of Russian TV-radio channel (RTR) broadcast and decrease of Public Russian Television (ORT) broadcast because they usually showed critic and cases of corruption of high state officials. Then, the Government announced a "tender on frequencies", and formed special commission, which only consisted of public officials who had a right to seize or to leave the frequency at their discretion. Thus, about 20 independent stations out of 48 were forced to close down. The remaining ones commonly specialized on music and entertainment programs, or video.

As a result, the Government decreased the volume of broadcast of Russian channels, closed down most independent television stations, and created new competitive state channel "Khabar" for itself that enjoyed financial support from government. Secret contract between the remaining mass media and the state, where the state does not disturb mass media and vice-versa, was signed. After some years, media became more independent in its actions, but still they are influenced by the state and do not show the information that is considered by the Government as inappropriate, that is, exposure of illegal actions.

IV. Media ownership in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstani legislation does not regulate distribution of ownership in mass media sphere. In reality, the ownership of main kazakhstani mass media is long ago distributed among some big industrialists and the loyalists to the President. These owners constitute strong financial-industrial groups that have big influence on the state. Moreover, they are a part of the system of power.

According to the experts of social foundation "Transparency Kazakhstan" the main monopolist that concentrated important part of national media resources in its hand is the media holding of the President's daughter, Dariga Nazarbayeva and his son-in-law, Rahat Aliyev. Saying that major national mass media belongs to them is formally obscured; however it is obvious to those who are acquainted with the real situation with Kazakhstani media space. (Project of "Transparency Kazakhstan", 1999)

"Second level" groupings, who also control noticeable part of media market are:

1.Ex-minister of economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan Muhtar Ablyazov; 2.Financial group of Kazkommerzbank; 3.Eurasian Bank group of Alexandr Mashkevich; 4.Ex-mayor of Almaty region (the largest region in Kazakhstan) Zamanbek Nurkadilov's group.

Ex-Prime minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin is also applying to these groups. He controls opposition media such as "XXI Century", "SoIDat" and "451 Fahrenheit" newspapers. Thus, we see that the largest and most important media is held by either politicians or highly influential commercial groupings. (Bufalova, 2000)

At the same time, lots of former state editions, even those that have joint-stock status, are fully depending on executive branch of power because 100% of their shares belong to the state. Being kept under account of the budget, and eulogizing the highest state officials, they do not have full decisive influence on public opinion and do not reflect reality. Mass media, which are under control of the state keep silence about information that does not correspond to the state policy, or interpret it in necessary for the state direction.

Therefore, monopolization of informational space is basically completed. All largest electronic and printed mass media fell into the hands of people who are either close to the President, or a part of the government. The remaining, relatively independent media, are experiencing economic pressure and are subjected to administrative and legal prosecutions. (Otchet Almatinskogo Helsinskogo komiteta o situatsii s pravami cheloveka v Kazakhstane v 1999 godu, 2000) By publishing the articles about corruption, most journalists' use already closed and completed suits, and most heroes of these publications are not main ones who committed corruption, but merely rank-and-file public officials. In most cases, anti-corruption publications are orders of the mass media owners, or are the ways of settling of accounts between owners of the media and particular groups of power. (Project of "Transparency Kazakhstan", 1999)

Thus, it could be said that such ownership produces a kind of corruption within the mass media itself, because ownership is primarily distributed between those who hold power and take advantage of their position.

V. Regulation of mass media and consequential level of censorship

In general, legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan that regulates the existence and activities of Kazakhstani mass media and of journalists is primarily consisted of Article.19 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article.20 of Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan currently in force, which guarantee freedom of speech and prohibit censorship. Next, most important and more volumetric, part of National legislation on mass media is the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On mass media" currently in force that was adopted on July 23, 1999. (Sviridov, 2001)

According to the opinion of the majority of media experts, legislative laws that guarantee freedom of speech are not carried out in practice. For example, divulgence of state of health of the President, or commercial activities of his family members is prohibited. According to the law, it is considered the state secret and a penal action, and officially is not available for the journalists. Usually, courts impose huge fines upon journalists and mass media for this crime. Most suffering media are opposition ones, such as "XXI century" and "SoIDat". One after another, both of these newspapers were turned down to publish in all printing-houses of the country, suited in the court supposedly for an insult of honor and of dignity of the President, and consequently they were prohibited to sell. The possibility of shutting down of mass media that undermines national security, restrictive norm that prohibits participation of foreign capital in creation and financing of Kazakhstani mass media in a capacity not more than 20 percent of its cost, mandatory broadcasting in the official language (the Kazakh language) not less than 50% of total broadcasting volume that is considered as illegal attitude toward private ownership, and a lot of other requirements, limitations and threatening punishments were included in Law "On mass media".

At the end of October 2000, the Government introduced a number of amendments to the Law "On mass media", and in May 2001 they were adopted. In the opinion of Victoria Kozina, journalist of "Argument & Facts Kazakhstan" newspaper, these amendments not only unleashes hands of the state officials in limiting of disagreeable newspapers and of electronic mass media, but also violates the rights of ordinary citizens in receiving information about events within the country.

Among main amendments that worsen position of mass media is registration of web sites, establishment of limits on re-broadcast of foreign channels, and responsibility of authors for the publication of opinions and evaluative judgments. (International Foundation for Speech Defense “Adil Soz”, 2001)

According to the new law, web sites were rated to mass media. The journalists think that registration gives possibility for Government to control content of information about corruption of authorities and critic of the Government policy. It is done for the avoidance of several scandals, as it happened when web site “Eurasia” (supported by opposition) had published an article of foreign and Russian media about acceptance of bribery by higher governing bodies of Kazakhstan with the President at the head, from gas-and-oil producing companies. (www.cpj.org/attack00/Kazakhstan.html)

Limitation of foreign broadcasting will inevitably drive independent broadcasting companies into severe financial situation because of high cost of the creation of their own programs. It is easier for the Government to have some TV channels that are completely under its control, rather than having independent and uncontrollable television in each city, which re-broadcast and re-print Russian, European, and American mass media that could publish critic materials about situation in Kazakhstan. Thus, a kind of censorship for foreign media was ensued.

And finally, according to the third amendment, the author and respondent take responsibility for the publication of information, as well as, editor or owner of the media. Hence, media is forced to publish only those messages and opinions with which the Government agrees, or information that does not touch anybody’s interests, especially interests of authorities. These amends strengthen self-censorship of Kazakhstani media some more in pleasing direction for the Government. A question arises, what is the value of assurance that the press is an instrument for curbing corruption, while owners implement self-censorship, excluding particular materials that are considered as calumny, in order to evade penalties, both financial and criminal. Additionally, in accordance with law, audio and video records of officials shall be taken only with their permission, and in case of refusal these actions shall be stopped. This prohibition completely cancels the possibility of journalists’ investigation development, which is almost undeveloped in our mass media.

Thus, since legislative limitations were very huge the role of Kazakhstani media in curbing corruption was initially too tiny. So as to abolish these limitations, a new law was adopted that made the role of media more fractional.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, once again, I would like to say that media is the most important tool created by people to influence and to form public opinion. Since, media is called to expose illegal actions, particularly corruption, people believe in information objectivity and thus, behave in a corresponding way. That is, they are supposed to accept the situation within the state, as the media inform them.

By observing the situation in mass media sphere in Kazakhstan, it can be said that usually, conditions of media existence force them to be not objective, and mainly follow political actors because they own most media. Kazakhstan media do not fully and truly brighten the situation in the country, including different criminal actions implemented primarily by high state officials, who are called to serve for the welfare of the society. Media unwilling to cooperate with the Government are either close down, or become loyal to it. So, we have democratic, transparent state in shape, but authoritarian in content.

Thus, Kazakhstani mass media remains the sphere to be developed, in order to be a strong tool in curbing corruption that could have an influence on social consciousness.

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