

Forum: 1st Committee (Human Rights)

Issue: Balancing Journalism Ethics and Freedom of Mass Media

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Introduction

The main goal of mass media nowadays is to ensure the right of citizens to truthful and important information, which allows them to form adequate impression about social processes, their essence and importance, and about the situation in the modern world. Mass media freedom is one of the major guarantees of the freedom of speech, an obligatory element for ensuring other civil rights and freedoms. The freedom of the press involves the possibility to freely discuss and criticize the activities of both the authorities and civil and private structures. Journalists contribute to the realization of the right to express unpopular opinions or agree with the point of view expressed by the majority.

However, the possibility of mass media to express any opinion freely may result in some journalists to express thoughts that may be indeed extremely offensive or insulting to a huge number of people. Therefore, the necessity of keeping the balance between the journalistic freedom and ethics should be considered.

Moreover, it is no secret that mass media nowadays has a huge effect on people's view on the world. Media should always remember that it has influence on people's view of life, so it is its obligation to give only true information. Otherwise, media must be taken under the government control. The government may also see some threat in the absolute freedom of mass media since there can be some information that may be considered by the government to be kept secret for the protection of national security. That is why it is necessary to find compromise between society, which wants a free flow of information in mass media, and government, that sees danger in independent media.

Definition of key terms

Mass Media (MM)

Diversified media technologies that are intended to reach a large audience via mass communication. The technologies through which this communication takes place vary.

Media ethics

The subdivision of applied ethics dealing with the specific ethical principles and standards of media, including broadcast media, film, theatre, the arts, print media, and the internet.

Journalistic ethics

The subset of media ethics.

Background information

The question became more significant as the influence of MM has increased. The reason of increasing is the development in the area of technologies. The government now has control after almost all types of media, except the internet. There is dissemination all over the media and sometimes it is displeased and unbeneficial to the state. As there is no control over the internet, it is impossible to restrain what people read and watch there. It might cause a spread of terrorism and extremism. However, if there is a full control of the media, there will not be any democracy in a state. The result can be some marches, protests, and complaints of the public.

The journalists should not only do their job, but also be well behaved, respectful to people of different nationalities, religions, to cultures, governments, and other journalists. Otherwise, journalistic intolerance might arise, and this may cause conflicts between cultures, countries, or journalistic agents. As a result of a disrespectful article or wrong interpretation of some kind of information a totally new conflict may emerge.

Major countries and organizations involved

Mass media is spread over the whole world and there is no way not to be involved in this issue. All countries take part in this problem in different ways. Some of them, for example, are trying to take under control all types of media, while others are not concerned about this issue. For example, China and North Korea have the entire control of media.

Relevant treatments and UN resolutions

This issue is rather new to the world, so there are not so many treatments that have already been discussed or adopted. Furthermore, there are not many resolutions concerning this very question. Although, there are other resolutions, which contain clauses related to it. For example, "First Resolution on Internet Free Speech" was

adopted in July 2012 in Geneva. In this resolution the right to freedom of opinion and expression is mentioned. In 2013, “Resolution on Freedom of Expression” was accepted. In clause 4, subclause g it is written: “To respect freedom of expression in the media and broadcasting, in particular the editorial independence of the media;”

Previous attempts to solve the problem

There were some attempts to solve this problem in several countries. The absolute control of mass media was achieved in countries such as, but not limited to: Arabic countries, China, North Korea. If not taking into account resolutions related to this issue, other actions were taken to take media under control. For example, there were some limits of freedom accepted, which satisfied both government and representatives of media. Some countries with strict control of media have created their own websites, limiting people in their access to information. However, there have been no attempts to resolve the issue of balancing freedom of mass media and journalistic ethics.

Possible solutions

The solutions of the discussed problem are not that obvious and should be carefully considered. It is significant to take into account all the aspects discussed, such as respect towards the freedom of speech, respect towards other people when expressing an opinion by press members, and the need of governments to protect national peace and security.

Most of the steps in guaranteeing the observance of the freedom of press and people’s right to information should be taken by the Member States governments, as well as monitoring possible severe insults to different ethical, religious, and other groups in order to prevent their emergence, and also developing possible ways of punishing those responsible for publishing offensive materials. The situations in which such punishments could be used should as well be carefully considered and described.

The main goal of the UN is to consider and discuss possible ways of maintaining balance between freedom of press and journalistic ethics, and develop instructions and solutions for Member States to implement.