

PROPAGANDA AND JOURNALISM

(IN CONTEXT OF THE SECOND KARABAKH WAR)

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Abstract

Propaganda has always existed; it only changed its forms. In the early days of media it first flooded the pages of popular periodicals and later when the media improved and clearly outlined their boundaries on the basis of international standards it became in opposition to journalism and was legally circulated without obstacles exclusively in party and religious media. Therefore it is regarded in journalism as a negative manifestation of fake creativity and gross evidence of information imbalance. However, has this ambivalent phenomenon really disappeared “law abidingly” from leading mass media and consequently what effect has it had on public consciousness and national security of states which are in zones of military confrontation? We are answering the abovementioned and similar questions in the article through the example of the analysis of key mass media in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia and Ukraine. Mediation of the conflict in Nagorhy Karabakh was purposefully chosen as the objective of scientific receptions but not the war in eastern Ukraine as it could be reasonable to expect with the aim to abstract ourselves from personal views and experiences and check objectively if there is any propaganda and how it works in the coverage of global military conflicts that directly or indirectly affect certain states. It was equally important to investigate whether the implementation of information standards contributes to settlement of intra-state and international confrontations. It has been found out that compliance with media norms is in inverse proportion to national interests. Finding a way out of these clear-cut situations opens up prospects for new research.

Key words: Nagorhy Karabakh, propaganda, ideology, media, armed conflict, state, information war.

INTRODUCTION

Since the term “propaganda” was used for the first time in the official documents dated back to the middle of the sixteenth century (Pontifical missionary congregation “The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith” or simply “The Propaganda Fide” was founded in 1622 [Skulenko M. 2009]), religious and secular authorities often use verification, manipulation, falsification, pamphlets etc. to form and strengthen canons, to shape opinions and fight against “heresies”. For a long time this art has been improved and today has risen to a level of excellence, using the methods of scientific modelling and analysis.

However, in Ukraine the outlined activity continues to be a set of dogmas as the trends of the past are still affecting it. Meanwhile, in Europe and the USA it is not only divided into the following segments such as propaganda itself, public relations and advertising but it is also classified by “shades”: white (official and open to verify), grey (with fraud, faked expert examinations, suggestiveness) and black (completely deceptive and pretentious). The academic “Large Explanatory Dictionary of the Modern Ukrainian Language” gives the following definition: “propaganda is propagation and constant, deep and detailed explanation of any ideas, views, and knowledge” [Busel V. 2005] (the lexical item “explanation” here should apparently be replaced by “intrusion”). In fact, propaganda is the ageless art of manipulation through psychology, minds and instincts of individuals and the masses.

Similar to ideology, propaganda is not considered as factual real information, because, no matter how it emerged: artificially or spontaneously, it is still not meant to be checked and does not require any verification (on the contrary, fact checking deprives it of any meaning) and does not explain the world in scientific terms. It is biased, unfair, simplistic and pseudo realistic and does not imply abilities of rational thinking. However, it is mainly related to strategies of its perception and in fact, the capabilities of recipients. As for the creators of propaganda, they create and design a highly anticipated multifunctional product made according to the transmission model of communication [Kosiuk O. 2012: 84–86].

The toolkit and methods of propaganda are particularly relevant not only in religious, political, economic and other cultural spheres but in the area of mass communication. It is here that they traditionally form the most sophisticated possibilities to influence the public consciousness, although most often contrary to the current legislation and modern media standards [Zakon Ukrajinj Pro informaciju, Article 28 2021]. Information wars can be extremely “bloody” [Pocheptsov G. 2006: 556–559].

Besides, in contrast to sensual propaganda, information warfare as its integral part is quite rational. Communication strategies, in fact, arose as transformations of the military sphere and have always been aimed to have a parallel impact on speedy solutions to armed conflicts: crusading wars, revolutions, wars etc. During the time when sermons, historical folklore, biographies and other forms were modified into newspaper publications media strategies have also changed [Kosiuk O. 2012: 51–71]: propaganda increasingly involves performance, psychology and tries to minimize straight impositions and avoids identification markers. However, Joseph Goebbels' main rule "A lie repeated a thousand times becomes truth" [Bohatko J. 2006] is still relevant today: when a thousand of media write as if someone was flayed alive or someone was killing babies, the vast majority of population will believe it at least for a while.

Propaganda is closely connected not only with ideologies of societies that have an active communication according to the appropriate models such as authoritarian, libertarian, socially responsible, communist-fascist etc. [Siebert F. 1984], but also with global intercontinental processes. According to experts, "Peace of Westphalia, the epoch of world wars, Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (signed at Montevideo), decolonization, Helsinki Act and globalization" significantly affected international relations and propaganda strategies. However, "territorial integrity and sovereignty are often challenged". "Internal competitors of the states are groups that consider themselves as excluded from political communication and claim their own statehood and international recognition" [Minakov M. 2019: 4].

According to M.Minakov, "the collapse of the USSR led to the emergence of fifteen recognized states and four unrecognized polities such as Nagorny Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhasia and Dnisterian Moldovan Republic". "These political entities have their own particular type of legitimacy and their own political economy that is system dependent on the sponsoring states (Russia and Armenia)". These "de facto polities have become a source of secession practices and ideologies extending far beyond their region" [Minakov M. 2019: 5].

To maintain objectivity in this research, we consciously take the problem of modern propaganda strategies of the mass media beyond the national military problems and, in general, beyond the information space of Ukraine to the territory of Transcaucasia because it is the latest, painful and current story that, in our opinion, is directly related not only to Armenia and Azerbaijan but to Russia, Turkey, our country, in general to the USA and Europe, West and East. It means that we assume that the armed conflict in Nagorny Karabakh is suitable to show the latest propaganda

methods in the global information space and to witness the presence of unexpected contextual manipulations not only in opposition Armenia vs. Azerbaijan, but also in oppositions Azerbaijan vs. Russia, Armenia vs. the USA, Ukraine vs. Russia etc.

We agree with the statement of media expert Roman Horbyk that the combination of historical knowledge and numerous media platforms for its sharing opens up “an era in mediation of history which made the memory archive more network-based and more hybridized”. However, we are going to check carefully whether it really leads to vulgarized, simplified multimodal narratives [Horbyk R. 2019: 129].

We also share Svitlana Chunikhina’s ideas that while studying the media special attention should be paid to processes and events that “take place in real time and are of great importance for social development and well-being, but for some reason they turn out to be pushed out to the periphery of the collective consciousness”. In this case, politics is really “aimed at preventing the pathological processes of otherization and can be considered as a metaphor or a certain analogue of collective psychotherapy” [Chunikhina S. 2020: 317].

Doing the research by applying content analysis, comparison between fixed propaganda and modeling of its possible interpretations etc. we will try to examine the most top-rated independent media of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Ukraine and Russia consistently and identify their level of freedom of speech and compliance with journalistic standards amid production and dissemination of information about war in Nagorny Karabakh.

1. PROPAGANDA IN THE AZERBAIJANI MEDIA

In Azerbaijan the situation with independent mass media is dramatic; this fact is attested by 168th place (out of 180) in the international rating of freedom of speech [Gumanitarnyj portal 2021]. However, for us this info space is the very appropriate study object, because, as a rule, the less journalism there is, the more propaganda they have.

Almost all mass media in Azerbaijan are financed by the state. Consequently, there is no strong opposition or free-will voting (it is out of question). Dissenters are still able somehow to make public and post via social media, but their opinion does not get into traditional media: any discussions are even technically impossible and comments are shut down.

In the national information space the following agencies are mainly operating such as “Vesti”, “Day”, “Interfax-Azerbaijan”, “ECHO”, “Aze”, “Minval”, “Zerkalo”, “Sputnik”, “Sputnik Azerbaijan”, “Trend”, “Turan”, “1news”, “Oxu”, “Report” etc. They are those that provide services to other means of communication and control and dose ideological influence.

The national agency Azer Tag [Azer Tag 2021] as the mainstream media provides its services in the national language, Russian, English, German, French, Spanish, Arabic and Chinese and offers a wide range of information. It has its branch offices in 21 countries of the world. Along with the established sections on health, politics, economy, regions, world, culture, education, sports the agency offers some unconventional ones, for example, “Blood Memory” [Pamjat' krovi 2021], which contains stories without authorship but with the possibility of a covert discussion at the link below. The section is rarely updated; the last publication “Montenegro media outlet published an article on the anniversary of the Azerbaijanis’ genocide” was on April 1, 2021 [Montenegrinskoe izdanie opublikovalo...2021]. It is about the 103rd anniversary of “indiscriminate killings” of Azerbaijanis who died during the military operation, committed by the Armenian terrorist party Dashnaksutyun, in particular, it is emphasized that “the genocide of the Azerbaijani people committed by armed Dashnaks and their followers claimed the lives of tens of thousands of civilians whose only guilt was their ethnic and religious origin. Murders and bashing were committed not only against Azerbaijanis but also against other peoples. Muslim houses were engulfed in flames in Baku, Shamakhi, Quba, Khachmaz, Lankaran, Hajigabul, Salyan, Kurdamir. All that then continued in Karabakh, Sangezur, Nakhchivan, Geiche and other regions” [Montenegrinskoe izdanie opublikovalo...2021].

In general, the original project “Blood Memory” contains data not only about the modern “self-proclaimed” Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, but also about more long-standing Khojaly genocide in 1992 [Kryvavi storinky istoriji 2021] and other debatable issues. However, the ambivalent crusher effectively overlaps with the president’s quotations, addresses to the nation, official records and is used exclusively in the interests of the head of state and the ruling elite. The abovementioned publication “Montenegro media outlet published an article on the anniversary of the Azerbaijanis’ genocide” also ends with the words: “By the Decree of the President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev from March 26, 1998 “On the genocide of Azerbaijanis” these crimes received a political and legal evaluation and were called genocide. Since then, March 31 has been commemorated annually as Day of Azerbaijanis’ Genocide [Montenegrinskoe izdanie opublikovalo ...2021].

The section “Blood Memory” is not intrinsically valuable. It contains carefully collected materials from all media of Azerbaijan which “properly” cover conflicts with neighboring states, chiefly with Armenia. In other words, it is the propaganda in its most traditional form.

The three-language agency “Turan” (the national, English, Russian) seems to be the least dependent in Azerbaijan [Turan 2021]. In addition to news, it produces analysis and allows having a discussion in comments; however, it gives a side note that the opinions of readers and editors are not always identical. Last year in May after the publications about violations of opposition rights the site was first cyber attacked and later it was completely closed. However, in November the international organization Reporters without Borders protested the decision and forced to unlock the resource immediately.

Yet production by Turan, in our opinion, is also not balanced enough. For instance, recently they released the biased article “Joe Biden distorted the historical truth about the events of 1915 – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan”, in which with reference to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan it is said that “the events of 1915 should be studied by historians not politicians. However, Armenia which wants to hide what is happening and try to present itself as oppressed, did not accept Turkey's offer to investigate the events of that period by a joint historical commission. It is unacceptable to falsify history, try to "rewrite" it and use it for political pressure. Joe Biden distorted the historical truth on the occasion of Armenian Remembrance Day" [Dzho Bajden iskazil... 2021].

The agency “Trend” also positions itself as independent [Trend 2021]. Supporting the communication in five languages such as Azerbaijani, Persian, Turkish, English and Russian, it is really all-encompassing. However, its political and ideological dependence is noticeable immediately and very clearly, even at the level of chaotic editorial classification which at first sight creates an illusory perception of many voices, in fact, it is full of para-governmental information that is repeated and overlapped with publications covering Ilham Aliyev's activities. This observation is supported by the following headings such as “President Ilham Aliyev: Turkey and Azerbaijan have strengthened their capacities in the region, our role, influence has increased and will grow further” [Aliyev I. 2021]. There is also a special section called Exchange of letters with the President (“Prezidentə yazırlar”) which is overfilled with epithets and comparisons with Allah [Prezidentu pishut... 2020].

“Trend” produces over a hundred news items per day (what’s interesting is that international news are released at night and the national events are during the day). Some of them (it is not hard to guess which ones) are highlighted with bold black and red fonts. Of course, commenting features are deactivated. The situation is not even improved by existence of official pages on social networks like “Facebook”, “Twitter”, “Youtube”, “Telegram”, “LinkedIn”, RSS distribution (because there are no discussions there either) and access to digital distributors Android and iOS that are active only on the territory of Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, not all publications are available. Some of them are the object of the sale-purchase and the price of the annual subscription (at the exchange rate for January 2021 it costs 46956 UAH) speaks for itself.

Since the beginning of the resumption of Karabakh conflict, on September 27, 2020 international computer network “Internet” stopped working in Azerbaijan. Consequently the slightest chances disappeared to discuss freely these issues on social media pages and in the blogosphere. As a result, it was impossible to obtain reliable information about the participation of Turkey, Syria, Russia, etc. in the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict.

Now you can see that “Trend” provides information only on the number of victims and casualties among the Armenians. You get the impression that the Azerbaijanis have not been suffering and are immune to bullets because “they are righteously fighting against the hated enemy of the human race”. The approved pseudo-patriotic strategy applies to all stories and publications, even foreign news. Thus, on November 8, 2020 there was a publication under the heading “Dirty provocations of Armenians in Estonia – unknown put pig heads in Islamic center” [Kochneva N. 2020], in which journalists note that this is not just a reckless act of a radical, but a well-planned provocation to incite inter-religious and interethnic hatred which offends all “true Muslims”.

On October 30, 2020 Asif Mehman published an article “The war showed Pashinyan’s true face” [Mehman 2020], in which the Prime Minister of Armenia is depicted as a follower of Hitler, who seems to be writing a “new history of fascism”. The material is accompanied by an editorial cartoon (obviously it was done to enhance the effect) with the face of fascism leader superimposed on the face of the head of the Armenian government. Needless to say, such publications immediately discredit the “independent” media.

Pro-Turkish publications are fraught with quite different markers (by the way, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is the only world leader who has openly been

supporting Azerbaijan since the escalation of the Karabakh conflict started). For example, on September 8 “Trend” quotes Mahharam Aliyev, Assistant to the President of Azerbaijan, Head of the Military Affairs Department, making a point that he is proud of having such a reliable partner as Turkey [Aliyev M. 2020] and in the process somehow he recalls the Greek-Turkish confrontation in the Eastern Mediterranean emphasizing that “the Turkish government is the guarantor of regional security for the Turks living in Northern Cyprus”. “In this case, as Aliyev specifies, each of us certainly stands in full solidarity with our brothers and the whole Turkic world is proud of the President of Azerbaijan who gives answers with diplomacy to those who are trying to use language of threats” [Aliyev M. 2020]. So, quoting Aliyev’s words and deftly manipulating the public consciousness in this publication Trend shows loyalty to both presidents and demonstrates its propaganda “patriotism”.

One can immediately feel the attitude to leaders of other countries on the site pages. For instance, besides the Armenian leader, the President of France Emmanuel Macron and his relations with the Turkish guarantor are negatively marked. On March 2, 2021 in the publication without authorship Trend makes a point that “in autumn and at the beginning of winter France repeatedly demanded that Turkey should clarify its role in the Karabakh conflict as Macron claimed that Paris had information about sending Syria’s fighters by Ankara to Nagorny Karabakh. He also threatened with imposition of sanctions against Turkey, if it did not abandon unilateral actions against Greece and Cyprus” [Prezidenty Turcii i Francii... 2021]. There is an ambiguous position concerning Vladimir Putin. Obviously, it’s the results of economic dependence, the common Soviet past and Russia’s long-standing ideological protectorate.

To create the effect of “world unity and conspiracy”, the site does not shun faked expert reports, particularly with links to unreliable sources. Sometimes fake creativity borders on the comic elements. Thus, on September 27 it published a piece of news (with reference to itself and social networks) that the Defence Minister of Armenia David Tonoyan emigrated from his own state. Interestingly, the news was spread by Minval.az, Salamnews.az, Inews.az, Zerkalo.az, Usavat.az and others. After the fake was identified, no denials were given [David Tonojan provel... 2020].

In the Ukrainian-Russian conflict “Trend” openly supports Russia. At the beginning of the Maidan protest movement in 2013 the agency intensively quoted Viktor Yanukovych and his press-conferences from Rostov-on-Don with links to RIA Novosti. Russia's involvement in the Maidan Revolution and the war in eastern Ukraine are widely denied, Trend points out that “mass protests, so called “Euromaidan” occurred throughout Ukraine, and in January they took shape of

clashes between the armed radicals and law enforcement authorities. The street clashes during which the opposition used fire arms and Molotov cocktails resulted in human losses” [David Tonojan provel... 2020].

The site interprets and represents the outbreak of war in eastern Ukraine as rallies of federalization followers arranged by “Donbas’ rebels” [David Tonojan provel... 2020] and they occurred without any external interference [Lidery stran ES... 2020]. As it is reported on the pages of Trend that “Russia constantly emphasizes that it is not involved in the internal Ukrainian conflict”, so it is inefficient to speak to it by means of the “language of sanctions” [Lidery stran ES... 2020].

Among all the current conflicts “Trend” (and apparently Azerbaijan) is the most impartial of the Arab-Israeli one. As a result all events are neutrally described and mostly given in the form of posts. On Trend’s pages the militant group “The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” is featured as “terrorists from the extremist group ISIL”. The explosion in the port of Beirut on June 4, 2020 is called “a freak accident”, “emergency”, “calamity” etc. They are actively publishing the denials of the Lebanese government about Israel’s complete nonparticipation in terrorism. In general, the number of victims is briefly presented, humanitarian aid is recorded and condolences are expressed by world leaders. However, they could not hold from focusing on the significant damage to the Armenian embassy or mentioning the participation of the Armenian-origin Lebanese in the Karabakh conflict (all these remarks and anything like that are completely inappropriate, because official diplomatic missions of the Russian Federation and other countries were also damaged no less, even the Netherlands’ ambassador’s wife perished, but Trend did not even mention those facts [Rezultaty poiska po: "Bejrut"... 2000–2001]).

As you can see, there is practically no journalism in Azerbaijan, instead, there is complete and utter propaganda, it is obvious and undisguised. Of course, these are not posters and postcards as it used to be in the last century, but the power of influence is similar. Social networks could have become the only mouthpiece of “independence” but in the extreme situations they simply do not exist.

2. PROPAGANDA IN THE ARMENIAN MEDIA

The current Armenian strategic problems are adversarial relationship in Nagorny Karabakh and non-recognition of Genocide in the Ottoman Turkey by the world community at the beginning of last century.

Armenia as all ex-USSR countries adhered to a single ideological doctrine for a long time, for this reason even freedom of speech, multiparty system and emergence of

advertising did not reverse the situation immediately. In addition, majority of Armenia's mass media are abroad (Turkish-language weekly newspaper "Agos Turkey", American newspaper "The Armenian Mirror-Spectator", Armenian-Persian newspaper "Arax", published in Tehran, Russian-language "Noah's Ark", "Newspaper of the Armenians in Russia" etc.). The Armenians of the Diaspora outnumber the citizens of Armenia three to one. Since 2012 prices of service providers have fallen sharply, so the Armenians as almost all peoples of the world are actively turning to the virtual reality.

The information space of the continental Armenia is represented by the following mass media such as "Herq", "Mamul", "1News", "Armenpress", "First Armenian Informational", a subsidiary of Sputnik information agency "SputnikArmenian", "PanArmenian" etc. At the beginning of escalation of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict these sites were suffering the most from cyber attacks of the Azerbaijani hackers [Ob#javlenie o nastrojke... 2020].

In general, the Armenian web-based media are divided into Russian-language ("Novoe Vremia/New Time"), multi-language ("Herq", "Mamul", "1news", "Armenpress", "Aravot", "Yerkir", "Arka", "MediaMax", "First Armenian Informational", "Tert", "ArmInfo", "Pan Armenian", "Sputnik Armenian") and Armenian-language ("AZG", "Noyan-Tapan", "Armnews").

Since the declaration of Independence almost all media have been controlled by the state, political parties, entrepreneurs, although it is not recorded in any national register. The powerful media holding "Pan Armenian" (including TV channels "Armenia" and "Shant") was initially connected with the family of ex-president Serzh Sargsyan. In early 2019 the holding announced the termination of activities due to a change of shareholders. As a result the channel "Shant" became the property of financial mogul Mykhail Bagdasarov and now "Armenia" belongs to the pro-Russian leader of Prosperous Armenia Party Gagik Tsarukyan [Bedevian A. 2020]. "Yerkir Media TV" is associated with the revolutionary federation of the Armenian diaspora Dashnaktsutun. "H2" is sponsored by acting Prime Minister Armen Gevorgyan, "Yerevan" is supported by ex-Prosecutor-General Aghvan Hovsepyan [Law on Not.... 2020]. "AP TV" is owned by "The Grand Candy", the oligarch Grant Vardanyan's family company. And only public TS such as "Public service television Armenia", channel "Armenia" of media group "Pan Armenian" and the religious channel of Armenian Apostolic Church create fair competition in the media market.

The state's influence on media became particularly tangible after on October 27, 1999 TV channel "A1+" "improperly" showed the act of terrorism during which the Parliament of Armenia was shot away and the Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan was assassinated in the parliamentary chamber [Drachuk S. 2021]. Then the harassment

continued. On April 2, 2002 the channel was closed. Since then “A1+” has steadily taken part in competitions for the right to broadcast but without result. In 2018 the editorial group switched over to an online platform, creating a YouTube channel that nowadays have more than 170 thousand subscribers [A1+... 2021].

The 2017 elections were an enormous strain on Armenia’s media. Threats, reprisals, lawsuits and acts of violence were constantly listed on the reports of world human rights organizations. According to Reporters without Borders, 17 Armenian journalists became victims of physical violence at that time [Law on Not... 2020].

As a result, a number of legislative initiatives were implemented that have severely restricted access to information. Namely, according to the amendments, adopted by the Parliament on March 23, 2017, journalists are not allowed to attend the government sessions and the Ministers are banned to give interviews without the Prime Minister’s consent [Baghdasaryan L. 2019]. The changes also oblige journalists to obtain the consent of all, without exception, persons to publish any data [Bedevyan A. 2020].

Surprisingly, against the background of a very discouraging situation in which even Armenian public television is a supporter of government ideas and initiatives, investigative journalism continues to function and its highest-ranking implementation established in 2001 is online media “Hetq” (“Trace”) [Hetq 2021].

The internet newspaper, by the way covering events in the Armenian, Russian and English languages, is controlled by the following international organizations such as Global Investigative Journalism Network, Association of European Journalists, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project. Two-thirds of Hetq’s budget is funded by the OSCE. Editor in Chief Edik Baghdasaryan simultaneously performs the duties of the head in “The Armenian Association of Investigative Journalists”.

The newspaper is open for communication with readers: it gives an opportunity to make comments under publications (with a request to provide your personal data: name, e-mail and actually a text) and on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, RSS-feed works, the contacts of the staff and management are available.

The issues considered by “Hetq” are also available for public comment and they include offshores, privatization of land, illegal building activity, enrichment of influential people’s relatives etc. More practical aspects of economic activity are investigated and discussed including suitability and condition of water, quality of ice cream, sour cream, cheese, bread, chicken and others food as well as operation and production of precious metals, export of animals, devastation of forests etc.

Hetq logo presents a target. Obviously, it is a hint: everything that gets in the cross hairs of journalists will be revealed. In addition to investigation files, the online newspaper offers breaking news, picture shots, and interviews. The newspaper is particularly active in criticizing the team of ex-president Serzh Sargsyan and is diligently investigating unlawful acts of his supporters.

They keep a prudent balance in presenting information about the new government, for example about the prime minister Nikol Pashinyan, they highlight the lawyers' protests demanding to institute criminal proceedings against Pashinyan [Mamulyan A. 2016], but official PR is also provided which is pre-printed on the government website [Pashinjan N. 2020].

A large selection of materials is dedicated to Nagorny Karabakh on the site. There are 76 publications as of 04.05.2021 [Rezultaty poiska po: "Nagornyj Karabah"... 2021]. It is possible that at the height of the crisis the publications form a separate section. By the way, the website offers more than a thousand publications with search word Artsakh [Rezultaty poiska po: "Arcah"... 2021], that is the national equivalent of lexical item Nagorny Karabakh. It is no coincidence that the online newspaper is one of ten Armenian media outlets that suffered cyber attacks on September 27.

News about the armed hostilities is delivered more or less as unbiased and informed stories. The headlines are without manipulation unlike Azerbaijan's Trend. There are no links to social networks or unreliable sources. Writing about settlements after the latest shelling, journalists give only cold facts: "Private and other buildings and cars were damaged as a result of artillery shelling in the capital of Artsakh Stepanakert", "citizens suffered from the shelling", "the child was injured" [Kazarian D. 2020]. However, the newspaper also mainly covers Azerbaijani military losses ("Six Armenian servicemen were wounded in the resumption of hostilities as a result of the Azerbaijani provocation. On the part of the enemy, there are dead and wounded [Protivniku udalos'... 2020].), although, as a rule, the information is reduced to citing official sources ("The Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Armenia strongly condemns the provocation carried out by the Azerbaijani armed forces. The current situation has nothing to do with the key requirement for a ceasefire signed by the presidents of Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan, and threatens the fragile peace achieved through the direct efforts of the Russian president," the statement of the Defense Ministry said [Protivniku udalos'... 2020]).

Nagorny Karabakh is not the only hotspot of tension in Armenia. A similar "dispute" over the region exists with Georgia (Javakhs is a territory of Georgia which is 97% inhabited by the Armenians). There is a large collection of news stories devoted to

this conflict on the site [Rezultaty poiska po: "Dzhavahk"... 2021]. After the resumption of the Nagorny Karabakh confrontation, the section came to life and was filled with materials about the Georgian government's obstacles to the citizens of Javakhk who took part in the Second Karabakh War [Sargasjan M. 2021].

Territorial conflicts continue on the borders with Turkey. Investigations into the Turkish government's illegal activities often appear on the site, for example, about transport of terrorists and weapons to Karabakh via Turkish airports [Sarukhanyan V. 2021].

In "Hetq" propaganda is sometimes present where it "should" not be noticed. Particularly, in the publications devoted to the Ukrainian Euromaidan. The editorial board unequivocally and uncompromisingly condemned the Russian intervention, calling it "a desire to restore the empire within the Soviet "Eastern bloc" and published an open letter "Long live Ukraine!" [Khaj zhyve Ukrayna... 2013], signed by influential representatives of international organizations. Thus, the editorial board expressed support for the protesters, although it apparently violated journalistic standards at the same time.

But there is a manifestation of certain intransigence on the site. For instance, in Marine Madatyan's photographic report "Between Maidan and European luxury" (Madatyan, 2013): the journalist simultaneously shows the difficult situation with provisions for the Maidan and in contrast, a lavish press conference at a five-star hotel.

Hetq covers the Israeli-Lebanese conflict objectively with operational reference links to official sources of opposition states. For example, the newspaper also reports in detail on the explosion in Beirut on August 4, 2020, it conveys different narratives operating with official sources [Martirosyan M. 2020].

Obviously, the Armenian media will have a long way to go in the struggle for independence and transparency, but it is worth noting the positive transformations: from 2018 Armenia rose by 19 steps in the ranking of freedom of speech and received 61st position in 2020.

3. PROPAGANDA IN THE UKRAINIAN MEDIA

The Press Freedom Index of Ukraine is 96 (it is one point higher than last year). The representatives of the national media activism at the international level are "Dzerkalo Tyzhnia" (Mirror Weekly), "Ukrainska Pravda" (Ukrainian Truth) and its sister projects as well as conglomerates like radio "Svoboda" (RadioLiberty) etc.

On February 18, 2021 one of the most top-rated news sites in Ukraine "Dzerkalo Tyzhnia" offered 186 news stories on the topic "Nagorny Kharabakh" by

internal search [Rezultaty poshuku za: "Naghirnyj Karabakh"... 2021]. The latest news dated 02.02.2021 with the heading "Armenia makes a complaint against Azerbaijan to ECHR" is a small news item that contains the lead "Baku is accused of violating a number of conventions" [Khmylevsjka, V. 2021]. It gives reference links to official sources (Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan... 2020) and obviously big expert publications "The Price of Peace" by Volodymyr Kravchenko and "Prisoners in the Caucasus" by Yevgenia Haber.

In the newspaper story "The Price of Peace" the main figure of insights made by V.Kravchenko, the international policy columnist in "Dzerkalo Tyzhnia" is neither Azerbaijan nor Armenia, but Russia and its role in resolution of the conflict. The core statement of the story is "Moscow still managed to push through its plan and save the CSTO ally, to strengthen its influence on Yerevan and Baku as well as shore up the position in the Southern Caucasus" [Kravchenko V. 2020].

The columnist is trying to find out what arguments the Russians put forward to convince Azerbaijanis and Turks: "Prospects for increasing international pressure on Baku in the event of a continuation of the military operation in Karabakh? Compromising dirt about the Aliyevs? Promises of new arms supplies? Or threats to stop the import of Azerbaijani fruits and vegetables?" Being unable to find answers to the questions, V. Kravchenko states: "Russia still managed to gain leverage over Azerbaijan and almost completely make Armenia dependent on itself, discrediting Pashinyan and punishing the Armenians for the 2018 revolution. But the price for this was the deterioration of its image in the Armenian society. However, this is insignificant for the Kremlin. After all, they think that Armenia will not get anywhere from Russia" [Kravchenko V. 2020].

Another topic is activated simultaneously that is about the election victory of the new US President Joe Biden, who, according to Kravchenko, "is ready to struggle for support of democratic ideals rather than helping Russia destabilize the world situation". Then the examination becomes even closer to the problems of Ukraine: the columnist makes a point that "Putin's Kremlin has been claiming for a long time that Russian opposition activists like Navalny are just tools by means of which the hostile West is implementing its "anti-Russian program". The Russian media often say that the United States stimulated "color revolutions" throughout the former Soviet Union" [Kravchenko V. 2020]. Thus, Ukraine comes into focus of discussion "effortlessly".

The article "Prisoners in the Caucasus" written by Y.Haber, Vice-Principal at Hennadii Udoenko Diplomatic Academy of Ukraine, also starts with the lead "Are there winners in the war for Nagorny Karabakh and what role does Turkey play in the Southern Caucasus" [Haber J. 2020].

The article seems to be about the role of Turkey. But it is also mostly about Russia. The author makes a point that “in the statement on ceasefire in Nagorny Karabakh there is not a single word about Turkey’s role and its further presence in the region, in contrast to the deployment of the "peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation along the line of contact and along the Lachin Corridor" [...]. The presence of Russian military men “along the barricades” can hardly be considered a victory for Azerbaijani (and Turkish) diplomacy” [Haber J. 2020].

According to Y.Haber, taking into account the complete defeat of the Armenian army on the battlefield, in order to reach such a compromise, the Kremlin had to use “arguments from various negotiating baskets”, “there is no shortage of which in the region”. Still, “the question remains open to what extent the expulsion of NATO allies from the region and Moscow's growing military-diplomatic presence meet Ankara's far-reaching interests” [Haber J. 2020].

As we can see all the discussions in the “Dzerkalo Tyzhnia” are reduced to the ambivalent policy of the Russian Federation. And it is related not only to the context of the Second Karabakh War. We offer you more detailed information about it in our author chapter “Transformations of military journalism from the perspective of the present time” in the Ukrainian-Polish multi-authored monograph “The role of technology in the socio-economic development of the post-quarantine world” [Kosiuk O. 2021: 54–65].

4. PROPAGANDA IN THE RUSSIAN MEDIA

Four years ago there was the Russian-language publication by Oleksandr Zhelenin but with the heading in Ukrainian “Are there any independent media in Russia and why does Putin need them?” at news website LB.ua and the story runs that journalists got together in one of the western diplomatic missions in Moscow to discuss the problem of Russian independent media. First of all, they announced a list of a limited number of media outlets that can still be considered independent, namely “Novaya Gazeta”, radio “Echo of Moscow”, “Novye Izvestia”. However, it immediately became clear that the last outlet had already gone into liquidation, because it did not survive in difficult conditions [Zhelenin A. 2017].

It is further stated that, if desired, the list can be expanded including the information agency “Rosbalt”, newspapers “Kommersant” and “Vedomosti”, because these media are quite objective, although limited in their ability to function. They are “allowed” to present accurate information but in a measured graduated way: without a direct criticism of Putin but instead use “the Kremlin”, “authorities”, “the Russian

leadership” as an alternative; or in the following manner “well that’s good that we occupied the Crimea. But [...] we should have moved further!” [Zhelenin A. 2017].

International experts compared Putin's Russia to fascist states, because "both here and there we are dealing with the regimes pursuing repressive policies inside the country and expansion ones outside", "at the head of both regimes are unchangeable authoritarian leaders", "in both cases democratic scenery is used" [Zhelenin A. 2017].

However, according to experts, keeping in mind the experience of predecessors and the new "fashion", the Russian president no longer wants to really look like a despot. "Putin needs the remnants of “independent” media to maintain this reputation pulling the carpet out under his more ideological opponents”, and they, by the way, occasionally also "create a positive image of the regime abroad" and in Russia: “information “leaks” made by the Russian leadership via them always look much more convincing and less fake” [Zhelenin A. 2017].

According to “Ukrainska Pravda” with reference to Novaya Gazeta and DW, a year ago 25 media united for independent broadcasting in Russia such as Novaya Gazeta, TV channel “Dozhd”, web portal “Takie Dela”, radio station “Echo of Moscow”, online media outlets “Meduza”, Znak.com, “Bumaga”, “Taiga.info”, TB2, “YuGa.ru”, 7x7, Chernovik, “Severopost.ru” and others and they established “Syndicate-100” [V Rosiji 25 ZMI ob'jednalsja... 2020].

It is difficult for us to objectively assess the situation, so, focusing on both of the above lists, we are going to analyze the current content of Novaya Gazeta because it is the very media that is the visible initiator and leader of positive transformations of Russia's information space. Let's see how this media covers the events in Nagorny Karabakh.

Per request search “Nagorny Karabakh” Novaya Gazeta offers 400 publications on February 27, 2021 (06.05.2021 for some reason there are only 20). The last but one publication is interesting, it is a satirical article by Irina Petrovskaya called “Our Fatherland calls for heroic deeds” (Big group concerts on TV as an act of patriotic upbringing) [Petrovskaya I. 2021], which in a peculiar form represents Russian propaganda and ideological underlying message of Nagorny Karabakh's problems as a "relay" phenomenon. At first the author cites Volodymyr Voinivych’s anti-utopia “Moscow 2042” and draws comparisons between strategies of the Soviet state and “independent” Russian Federation, then she makes a point that “Big group concert is not just singing and dancing but a serious act of patriotic upbringing, demonstration and affirmation of the main state staples in the minds of Russian citizens” [Petrovskaya I. 2021]. Later on there is a comment and the beginning of the main text: “on the big screen heavy wheat stalks are sprouting, spaceships are rocketing

up, latest aircraft carriers are sweeping the sea". "The President of the Russian Federation is personally welcoming the combat units. The domes of cathedrals, the ringing of bells, and the bright face of Jesus Christ were added to the traditional symbols of power. ... On the stage, there are military bands, the Russian flag and... completely unexpected for the action of this genre announcers appeared" [Petrovskaya I. 2021].

Before moving to Nagorny Karabakh, in the songs performers mentioned Aleksander Nevsky as he embodies all the best that is in the people of Russia, Peter the First who, as we should expect, "opened a window to Europe", Gagarin who opened a road to space for mankind. Afterwards a "peacekeeping" contingent from Nagorny Karabakh contacted the concert hall and shared a report on the work done, and Tamara Gverdtsiteli and Lev Leshshenko devoted them a song "We are the prolonged echo for each other". Finally, the "connection of time" is illustrated by portraits of veterans and the song "My dear, if only there was no war".

Between the concerted items young presenters "sincerely" talk about how peaceful, friendly and full of universal love the Russian people are (unfortunately other people don't understand it because "Russia is baffling to the mind") and after the high phrase "... it is only possible to believe in Russia" the military choir sings "The steppe is wide" and the Kuban Cossack Choir performs the song "My Grass, Grass" (as the author of the article points out that the name of the song "seems to be a bit innuendo within the context of other staples").

The "grand action" ends with lyrical "hits" performed by completely "societal glue" Rostorguyev, Rozenbaum and Valeria, "it is impossible to imagine the cultural life of modern Russia without them". By the way, entry into the territory of several "friendly" states, including Ukraine, is prohibited for them. Finally, the author of the publication literally exclaims: "My God, could it be that nothing will really change in this country" [Petrovskaya I. 2021]?

As far as it can be understood from the report of Novaya Gazeta on March 6, 2021 [Ministr prosveshhenija... 2021], that on the whole territory of Russia the access of schoolchildren to "harmful" information was technically blocked. Having no doubt, any truth about East Ukraine is implicitly "harmful", consequently the younger generation will not obtain it, although information about the Nagorny Karabakh conflict and related political problems (for some reason mostly Armenian) appear on the pages of Novaya Gazeta constantly.

In particular, the "News stories" section deals with low-quality Russian weapons as the reason for Armenia's recent defeat in Nagorny Karabakh and as a result, the resignation of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is possible. However, at

the end of the publication, with reference to the Russian Foreign Ministry, a conclusion is drawn that “none of this type of missile system was used during the Nagorny Karabakh conflict, and all missile ammunition is in the warehouses of the Armenian Armed Forces” [Pashynjan protiv voennyh... 2021].

Each article in the newspaper ends with a request for financial assistance: “In the country where the authorities constantly want to ban something, including the ban on telling the truth, there must be media that continue to do real journalism. Your support will help us that Novaya Gazeta will continue to be such a real news outlet. Make your contribution to the independence of journalism in Russia right now [Delaem chestnuju zhurnalistiku... 2021].

Thus, objective journalism and independent thought exist in Russia, although it is often necessary to read the truth from contexts. As a consequence, the press freedom index is 149 out of 180.

CONCLUSIONS

As we can see, propaganda has not disappeared – it has only been modified to the urgent needs of today. In the field of media, its simplicity still strives to be maximum (as, for example, on the pages of Azerbaijani media outlets), however, it is no longer absurd for intellectuals, because with the development of new technologies the percentage of those who think critically is growing rapidly. As a result, high-quality Armenian and Ukrainian journalists do not work for state-building policy, and Russian journalism is forced to resort to forms of allusion and indirectness.

The information space of the states directly or indirectly involved in the Second Karabakh War is radically different. And it is confirmed by annual press freedom index (Armenia – 61, Ukraine – 96, Russia – 149, Azerbaijan – 168). Propaganda is closely dependent on expert labels, but the correlation, as we see, is inversely proportional: the higher press freedom index is (which means a clearer separation between propaganda and balanced journalism), the worse situation with functioning of state-building ideologies is and it is no use denying it with independence of these states as agents under international law and players in the international arena.

Thus, the problem of distinction between journalism and propaganda remains open. As experts in the field of mass communication do not cope with it, in our opinion, it would be appropriate to involve philosophers, historians, political scientists and legal theorists in finding its most optimal solution.

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