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CADRUL INTERNAȚIONAL PRIVIND SIGURANȚA REPORTERILOR DE RĂZBOI ȘI ASPECTE ETICE VIZÂND RELATĂRILE DIN ZONE DE CONFLICT ARMAT

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Specificul muncii jurnaliștilor costă în faptul de a se supune diferitor riscuri în situațiile în care muncesc în condiții extreme - relatează din zone de conflict armat, din epicentrul protestelor în masă, de la locul producerii unor catastrofe, accidente sau incidente grave, etc. În acest sens, asociațiile din teritoriu și organizațiile internaționale se implică activ în a asigura protecția jurnaliștilor și întreprind un șir de măsuri pentru ca reporterii se activeze în siguranță. În prezentul articol științific ne-am propus să analizăm și să evaluăm subiectul protecției jurnaliștilor din perspectivă legislativă pe plan național și internațional și să identificăm provocările etice cu care s-au confruntat reporterii de război din Republica Moldova care au relatat din zone de conflict armat.

Cuvinte-cheie: *jurnalism, război, etică, corespondent de război, convenție, situație extremă, conflict armat*

THE INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE SAFETY OF WAR REPORTERS AND ETHICAL ISSUES CONCERNING REPORTING IN AREAS OF ARMED CONFLICT

The specificity of the work of journalists means that they are subject to various risks in situations where they work in extreme conditions - they report from areas of armed conflict, from the epicenter of mass protests, from the place of catastrophes, accidents or serious incidents, etc. In this regard, associations in the territory and international organizations are actively involved in ensuring the protection of journalists and undertake a series of measures for reporters to work safely. In this scientific article, we aimed to analyze and evaluate the subject of the protection of journalists from a legislative perspective on a national and international level and to identify the ethical challenges faced by war reporters from the Republic of Moldova who reported from areas of armed conflict.

Keywords: *journalism, war, ethics, war correspondent, convention, extreme situation, armed conflict.*

Introduction

Reporting from war zones is a stressful, irregular schedule, situations with a strong emotional impact, insecurity and constant pressure. It is a risk taken, so that people will know the truth. Every year dozens of journalists around the world lose their lives working in extreme conditions, being captured or killed. In 2020 alone, more than 30 percent of the total number of journalists who lost their lives represents deaths in countries such as Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan and Iraq [1]. The job of a war correspondent is one of the most complicated in the world. In addition to the real danger faced by journalists who go to conflict zones, armed only with cameras, they also have to face psychological trauma. It seems surprising, but no one has dealt with the emotional impact of traumatic situations on journalists. Rescuers, policemen, firefighters receive psychological counseling, and journalists are left to deal with stressful situations on their own.

However, many media professionals go to report from conflict zones, to see with their own eyes what happens there, to provide truthful and well-documented information, especially in this information age, when propaganda and manipulation has reached its peak, and anyone can publish anything on social networking sites. A military journalist is an eyewitness to people's pain, it is he who exposes the stories of armed conflicts, visualizes the price of war and brings out facts and truths.

During a war, the media also becomes a battlefield, essential for maintaining freedom of expression. When in a conflict zone, a journalist is constantly at risk of being killed, kidnapped, detained or accused of espionage. Attacks against journalists are acts aimed at neutralizing or reducing freedom of expression,

which is a fundamental right. In this sense, organizations and international associations undertake numerous measures to ensure the protection of journalists.

Context

From a legislative perspective, the subject of journalists' protection is contained in the 4 Geneva Conventions, which regulate various aspects related to people's lives during wartime. International humanitarian law defines war journalists as ,,persons who follow the regular armed forces (...)", without being part of them. Therefore, war correspondents qualify as civilians. For example, art. 79 of Additional Protocol I from 1977 of the Geneva Convention, signed in 1949 and entitled ,,Measures for the protection of journalists" provides the following: ,,They shall be protected, in this capacity as war journalists, in accordance with Conventions and with this Protocol, on the condition that they do not take any action that would be contrary to their status as civilians..." [2], status defined in art. 50(1), so that journalists traveling in the conflict zone benefit from the guarantees stipulated by International Humanitarian Law in relation to civilians: the right to be given medical care, to accompany the armed forces, without taking up arms, the right not to be kidnapped and tortured, the right not to be humiliated, killed, and condemned in the absence of a fair trial. If war correspondents are detained by enemy forces, they are given ,,prisoner of war status".

Well, the Convention of July 27, 1929 regarding the protection of prisoners of war refers, through art. 81 and for correspondents: ,,persons who follow the regular armed forces, but who are not part of them, such as: correspondents, reporters and their auxiliary staff, in case of their detention by enemy forces enjoy the status of prisoners of war, provided that they have on them the permit issued by the responsible bodies of the armed forces they follow and which confirms their accreditation" [3]. It is worth mentioning that the journalist's ID card, which is referred to in point 3 of art. 79, to which I referred above, do not give the holder a special status, but only confirms the status of a journalist.

Even if journalists enjoy some protection under these Conventions, the provisions of these international documents are in many cases not respected. This is why the issue of the protection of journalists working in conflict zones is also of great interest to non-governmental organizations, such as the Committee for the Protection of Journalists, Reporters without Borders, the European Federation of Journalists (over 30 thousand journalists from over 45 countries are members), the International Federation of Journalists (members have an international press card, which gives journalists extra security). All these organizations have decades of experience in training journalists to operate in hot spots. Likewise, best practices on the safety of war journalists are contained in the International Declaration on the Safety of Journalists, signed in Geneva in 2015 by 70 relevant organizations.

What are the challenges of war journalism?

- Propaganda intensifies and a huge wave of disinformation news begins to circulate in the public space;
- Along with the actual war, the informational war is also intensifying, which is equally aggressive;
- The number of forgeries appearing in the media space doubles, triples;
- A lot of unconfirmed, unverified, and therefore erroneous information is injected into the public space;
- Journalists are invaded by information posted on social networks, which at first glance is good and seems to be of public interest;
- Journalists are not prepared to face the war, it seems that the war in Ukraine took the journalists in the area by surprise; they themselves admit that they have no special training in this regard;
- When there is war, information cannot be verified very quickly, because other rules apply, and a lot of information is classified, or, on the contrary, they try to misinform, the mass media being used as a tool by the parties involved in the conflict;
- It becomes a problem to work even with official sources, in the situation where YouTube is more credible than Tass and Ria Novosti, controlled by the Kremlin;
- In a war situation it is very difficult to be neutral, because journalists are also human and there are cases when the journalist cannot be equidistant;
- There are few journalists who are in the middle of the events, who can provide the information from the first source;

- In press materials, events are rarely placed in context, but the journalist must not only present what is happening, but also why it is happening and how things could evolve;
- The psychological traumas that the war creates, because the journalist is an eyewitness to many terrible scenes that remain behind the frame, but which infiltrate deep into the mind;
- The journalist can be kidnapped, tortured, humiliated or killed.

The state of war imposes very strict rules, which the journalist must know and respect. A journalist cannot go unprepared to hot spots, and the risk he exposes himself to must be assumed. In this sense, as a primary objective, the training of practical action skills is required to facilitate the work of journalists in conflict zones and to help them stay alive. The main aspects include: knowledge of war techniques, types of weapons and their effects; possessing orientation skills in unfamiliar terrain; knowledge of survival techniques; the rules for using the equipment and protective measures; of first aid measures; avoiding traps, including those with explosive charges, etc. There are areas where access is restricted or prohibited or movement is restricted at certain times of the day, and then the journalist's ID cannot help him, because bullets or shells do not make a difference. Also, the war journalist must know the cultural, legal and religious aspects that operate in the conflict zones, know how he must be dressed and equipped, what documents he must have on him, how to behave in case he is injured or abducted, how to avoid being abducted, how to behave if in close proximity to places where fighting is going on, etc.

Besides these, the job of a war journalist also involves a high degree of responsibility, but the journalist must not neglect the ethical aspect of his activity. There are journalists who see death every day and they are obliged to know the rules of interaction with the victims, with the civilian population, in order not to do more harm. Thus, the journalist will avoid:

- presenting the victims in moments of despair or in a state of shock or panic, because, as is known, in such situations there is no self-control of behavior and the journalist must not expose these people to risk. The journalist is away for a certain period of time, while those people live there permanently and following the statements they make in front of the camera, being in a state of affect, they can be identified and mistreated or killed by the combatants;
- transmitting images that would allow the location of military bases, this implies liability before the law, so he will be careful in this regard, because he may commit a blunder, without wanting to;
- visualizing or describe moments of torture or physical abuse, humiliation and present in detail the atrocities committed;
- bringing out the feeling of fear and horror among the population or the military or to discredit etc. He must present the stories of the people who live there, examples of stoicism and manliness, demonstrate empathy, promote a sense of solidarity among the population, present in his materials examples of helping the victims and place the facts in context, the war must not only be presented , the war must be explained. The journalist must understand the context and history of the countries involved in the conflict, he does not present the war and that's it. The conflict must be presented in a context of the country, of the area, it must be explained to the public what it is about and who those people are, the reasons and geopolitical interests that triggered the war must be analyzed. In the opinion of the Greek journalist Costas Onishenko ,,The press is not just an information channel without a backbone, but the central nervous system of society, which helps, among other things, to answer a key question: where is the good and where is the bad?" [4]

Based on this approach, the issue of keeping journalists away from the events taking place, to the point where they cannot be accused of lack of equidistance, is particularly current and important. The war in Ukraine went further than just training journalists to think critically and identify propaganda and manipulation techniques, it taught them not to think from the perspective of ,,maintaining equidistance at all costs." Can a professional journalist, in the context of the war in Ukraine, remain neutral, keep an even distance? As a journalist from Ukraine states, ,,Since you have already been labeled as a criminal for your articles, it is impossible to detach yourself. When your loved ones have been killed or imprisoned, it is hard to be neutral. When there is military aggression against your country, it's hard to be even-keeled […]. Without admitting the obvious… neutrality is unattainable here [5]. In crisis situations, media communication configures other characteristics, and one of the obvious risks to which the media is exposed in the media

coverage of armed conflicts is the reduction or loss of neutrality, combined with the unbalanced treatment of some events and situations.

In this sense, certain events, classified as incidents, are transformed into crises that induce fear and panic among the population. We will refer here to the news that reported about the fragments of a Russian missile, which fell on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, in the northern end of the town Naslavcea, a missile shot down by the Ukrainian anti-aircraft system. This topic became part of the news bulletins for 6 consecutive days, during which shocking headlines appeared that panicked the citizens, including: „The war has crossed the border at Naslavcea", „Last hour! A Russian missile fell at Naslavcea", „Just don't blow up the dam and flood us!", „A missile launched by the Russians was aimed at the hydroelectric plant on the Dniester", etc. Thus, some journalists rushed to launch assumptions, which did not come true along the way and induced a state of artificially created panic. In the opinion of the researcher Simona Ștefănescu, during conflicts, „a new type of journalistic practice" is configured, whose main attribute is the „attachment" of journalists to one cause or another, their tendency to stop being not only objective, but also neutral [6].

As researcher Georgeta Stepanov states in an extensive study on the journalist's behaviour in crisis situations „The tragedy of the moment and the vulnerability of the population force journalists to exclude the implicit and uncertain contexts and to approach the situation from the citizen's perspective and in the citizen's understanding" [7].

Results of research

In the context of the mentioned, the purpose of the case study initiated within the limits of this research was to identify the particularities, from an ethical and deontological aspect, of the work of journalists from the Republic of Moldova who were in Ukraine and covered the war. It is worth mentioning that the vast majority of media institutions in the Republic of Moldova took a firm position against the war that broke out in the neighboring country Ukraine, at the end of February 2022, but there were few journalists who risked going to the conflict zones, to present from the scene what is really happening there. Among them are TV8 television station reporters Viorica Tătaru and Andrei Captarenco, who had two trips to the conflict zones. They broadcast live from Bucea, where they saw dozens of corpses, thrown into mass graves, also from Mykolaiv under full bombardment, from the streets of Lvov and Irpin, and from the basement of a building in Kiev, where Ukrainian citizens took shelter, to save themselves from the ravages of the Russian military. They were there, among the common people, to be able to follow the scenes of the war up close, to explain what was really happening, while the media outlets subject to the Kremlin were presenting a completely different reality.

The war caught Viorica Tătaru in Ukraine, as on February 23 she went there on a simple business trip, together with a team of journalists, and was unable to return to the Republic of Moldova, as she had planned. As she herself stated in an interview „(...) there I saw for the first time a bombed house, people mistreated and killed, children killed and people who for 35 days were in the basement, without water, electricity [...]. I saw wounded people, their bodies full of shrapnel from bombs, I saw a man with a hole in his head, it was clear that they did not accidentally hit him, but he was specifically shot to be killed. I saw the graves of people in Irpin, buried in the park near the house, the grave of a mother and her child, shot just because they came out of the shelter" [8]. Following and analyzing the way in which the journalists interacted with the civilian population, the way in which the questions were formulated, the contexts in which the victims of the war were presented, helped us to find that the reporters showed professionalism and respect for deontological precepts. I did not see in their materials people who were scared and panicked, even if it was the people who left everything behind, fleeing the war, I saw citizens who remained at war - extremely sad, but optimistic, confident in victory and determined to fight for their country.

Viorica Tătaru made a series of materials about the women of the war in Ukraine, in which she talked about the women who sewed bags for camouflage combat equipment, ensured order at checkpoints, carried sandbags and built barricades, made Molotov cocktails or prepared food for the civilian population. From the reports made, it is visible that the journalists were very attentive to the characters of the materials and did not aim to ensure the sensational aspect. There was no emphasis on shocking details, no heroes were

shown in moments of despair, and images with a strong emotional impact were blurred every time. Also, from the angle of approach chosen by the journalists, one can see the feeling of compassion and the attitude of solidarity shown towards the protagonist of the journalistic materials. In the opinion of Andrei Captarenco and Viorică Tătaru ,,Before acting, we were always thinking about how close we can get to people, what we can ask them and what we can't [...]. In such moments of crisis you realize that life has priority, and in addition to all journalistic qualities, you must also have compassion for the person next to you. You have to get involved, you can't remain indifferent" [9].

Conclusions

In conclusion, we specify that war journalism is not limited to displaying the suffering and death of people on television, it has the task of forming an image of the conflict, presenting the context of military altercations, showing the horrors and senselessness of war , so that people think about what they are doing. Journalists must show who is to blame for the horrors committed and human misery, and must report in such a way as to convince people. These are the essence and the purpose of war journalism.

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