



Georgian Mass Media and Russian-Ukrainian War Challenges

Policy Paper

Zviad Avaliani, political scientist, journalist, 2020-2022, National Communication Commission' Media Academy, Head of Media Critique Department

As part of the GPPAC South Caucasus Dialogue Programme 2022, the International Center on Conflict and Negotiation (ICCN) continues to develop and present Policy Papers intended for both peace organizations, government agencies, and the wider audience.

In the light of the War and consequent developments in Ukraine in 2022, the Policy Papers are mainly devoted to this topic in both a regional and national context.

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A brief summary

The Russia-Ukraine War has occupied an important place not only in the media, but also in the agenda of information policy-oriented non-governmental organizations that periodically publish their own notes, reports, and recommendations related to the conflict, as well as war-related propaganda and other threats.

Given these circumstances, today, three months after the start of the War, it is already possible to summarize the trends, specificities, and problematics which have been outlined in the Georgian information space in the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine War, as well as the remarks issued by NGOs.

Such an analysis will allow us to find out how much the existing media coverage patterns comply with professional standards and interests of the public, on the one hand, and determine what it is the role and purpose of the non-governmental sector in this process, on the other. What actual influence do they have on the media and how fair and objective their attitudes are.

It should be noted that most of the Georgian media from the very beginning of the conflict took a strongly pro-Ukrainian position, which can be considered completely natural, given the attitudes of the majority of the country's society proceeded from their Euro-Atlantic orientation.

Recommendations

Today of course it is difficult to predict how long the military confrontation in Ukraine will last and how and whether the international community will manage to localize the War. However, the Georgian media bears special responsibility during the War in order not to contribute to the extension of the conflict to the detriment of Georgia's interests.

For this purpose, Georgian media must first avoid some problematic moments that have been revealed over the past period. They include the following:

1. In the process of coverage of the war-related events, media should avoid covering personal stories of the Georgian volunteer fighters in Ukraine with excessive PR component, if such coverage can jeopardize safety and personal security of the very figurants of these stories and being used against the state.
2. The media should not attempt to use the Russia-Ukraine War as an instrument of domestic struggle in Georgia - any attempt to disrepute the government from this point of view, almost always negatively affect not only the ruling party but the whole state.
3. The media should separate the fact from the evaluation as much as possible, and moreover, from his own editorial position. In providing facts, it is desirable for the media to offer the audience the attitudes and views of all stakeholders associated with the specific event, no matter how unacceptable it might have been for the editorial staff.
4. The media should refrain from such coverage and from using the terms that may arouse and fuel mistrust or cause aggression on the ethnic or civic grounds. At the same time, it is absolutely inadmissible to use hate speech on the part of media itself. Instead, it is desirable for the media to stay as much as possible within the professional standards of coverage of the war and armed conflict, considering that it is entirely possible and natural for a non-war country.
5. The media should not discourage or suppress the audience by excessive accentuation of the harsh reality of war, and it should not turn a tragedy into an instrument of hatred. Instead, the media should try facilitating a constructive and diplomatic settlement of the conflict. For this purpose, first, the media must devote proper time to the facts of ongoing political negotiations and contacts between the conflict parties (e.g. exchange of prisoners, humanitarian corridor, etc.). Also, in addition to the examples of aggression, the media is expected to portray patterns of outstanding humanity shown by the people on different sides of the conflict, as well peace and public initiatives voiced in both countries involved in the conflict.
6. And finally - in the process of dealing with the ongoing heated conflict it's desirable the media to pay more attention to those organizations and institutions that directly work on the conflict issues, and do not limit itself to the recommendations that focused on the fight against propaganda. Coverage of the problems of the war-separated communities requires from media workers specific knowledge, ethics and measured accents. Journalists can receive skills and knowledge on these topics from the professionals of this sphere.