

RECOMMENDATIONS

of Media Self-Regulatory Organizations Network

Regarding the Spread of Propaganda in the Media

National media self-regulatory bodies, members of the Media Self-Regulatory Organizations Network (MSON), are concerned about growth in the amount of propaganda materials disseminated by both national and international broadcasters and publishers, including state-owned, public and private outlets. Within the context of this document, propaganda refers to journalistic materials of any genre, which:

- contain hate speech, discrimination, racism, chauvinism, glorification of war or terrorism, spread of xenophobia;
- resort to manipulation of facts for political purposes;
- exploit themes of prominent public interest and take advantage of the trust people have towards media in general and in journalism and journalists in particular;
- persistently present controversial issues in a stereotyped, one-sided way.

The problem of propaganda particularly affects the countries selected as a subject where foreign media that initiate propagandistic influence have a traditionally stable audience.

MSON members note with deep concern that the threat of the widespread dissemination of propagandistic materials in the media, i.e. in the area of the professional responsibility of editors and journalists, presents a serious danger for both the freedom of expression as well as the information rights of citizens. The use of the media as a propaganda tool is seen every day. At the same time, the propaganda itself is becoming more fierce and cynical.

MSON members have concluded that the media and their members are increasingly being drawn into aggressive propagandistic campaigns by disseminating openly manipulative content that runs counter to the generally accepted standards and ethical principles of the profession in traditional and new media under the guise of original and editorial materials, thus undermining the audience's trust in editorial independence as well as in the honesty and responsibility of journalists.

MSON members believe that no objective justifies manipulating public opinion or spreading blatant lies or half-truths that mimic accurate facts or opinions.

MSON members proceed from the assumption that the violation of the fundamentals of journalistic ethics will inevitably lead not only to increased distrust among citizens in responsible media as well as professional journalists and journalistic organizations, but also to enhanced government influence over the media and political interference in the activities of specific editors up to and including the real and significant restriction of the media's right to freely disseminate information. A situation where the media are directly or indirectly involved in propagandistic machinery poses a direct threat to the security of the media and the journalist and also undermines their ability to perform their social mission, including protecting public interests.

With this in mind, MSON member organizations call on journalists, editors, media owners and everyone else who bears responsibility for editorial content and its dissemination to be guided by fundamental professional standards in their work and ensure the following in practice:

- the importance, accuracy and relevance of news and its coverage, providing citizens with truthful, complete and clear reporting about current events in a context that makes sense;
- fairness, professional integrity and a journalist's right to hold an opinion;
- the separation of journalistic material from any other material that is capable of conveying propagandistic pressure or messages of a manipulative nature;
- the rejection of any censorship restrictions and the protection of citizens' rights to receive objective information.

MSON member organizations believe that media editors must refrain from disseminating any direct or indirect discriminatory or xenophobic assertions and must prevent the release of publications that slander, insult, humiliate or disparage citizens based on race, language, religion, ethnicity or gender and deepen social, political or other forms of inequality.

MSON member organizations believe that the media:

- must avoid distributing rumors and disseminating messages that are based on unverified information and aim to provoke controversy and initiate manipulative content. Comments should in no way be incorporated into the news section of information materials. Media outlets which think certain information cannot be objectively verified but still deserves to be disseminated must provide its audience with the appropriate notification;
- have no right to manipulate images or sound so that the choice of words or other means of expression, changes in intonation, a shift in emphasis or editing result in the deliberate distortion of the meaning or value of the message;
- must be certain that each component of the news only and exclusively contains facts that are true. The news report must cite independent sources that confirm the information;
- must avoid "tailoring" information and facts to distort reality. When determining the degree of importance of certain components of a news report, the media must strive to present the news impartially and objectively while making a distinction between what is important and secondary or less significant by its nature;
- must immediately inform the audience about each situation involving the release of a report that contains misleading information and apologize in cases when an editorial mistake caused such a situation.

MSON member organizations emphasize the following basic attributes of propaganda:

- the "objective" relationship of the subject of the propaganda to a specific person, social group or company as a whole;
- the purposeful reduction of multi-dimensional to two-dimensional image or multi-color to black and white; narrowing the field for one's personal moral choice and responsibility for the choice;

- the existence of a clear objective to be met as the anticipated result of the media's influence on an "object" - with a definitive change (or maintaining) of the "worldview" in the latter's mind; ideally - with these imposed ideas being put into deed and action;
- the targeted selection of facts according to tight "script," the active reference to misinformation, the manipulation of facts, statistical data and opinions, including expert opinions, or shifting emphasis in places where blatant misinformation is impossible;
- actions based on the logic that "the end justifies the means"; the use of means and methods that are almost always incompatible with such values as honesty, truthfulness, etc.;
- the identification, creation or compositing of an "enemy image"; the introduction to the mass consciousness and sustaining of divisions into "us" and "them";
- the formation of convictions about the moral justification of any action against an "enemy", including an "internal enemy", potential enemy or a person who is insufficiently loyal to the dominant institutions, interests and ideas in society;
- the daily repetitive sequence of themes, references and images tossed into the public discourse; generally appealing to subjectively interpreted traditional values as the only stable values and therefore the dominant values in an unstable world;
- appealing primarily to emotions and feelings and not to reason, playing upon fears and prejudices, and actively using stories about crimes and atrocities;
- "journalism-disguised" work and the desire to play the role of a primary news source;
- fabricating attributes of reliability, including sources of information;
- establishing loyalty among those coming under manipulative influence to the system of institutions, interests and ideas that serves the subject of the propaganda.

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