

## **Ecological coverage in Ukrainian press**

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Independent ecological coverage has developed in the Ukraine only since the end of the 1980's. This depends strongly on development of the environmental policy. Ukrainian environmental policy is however a still very recent political field. As a new political field, it has developed in the Ukraine only since the end of the 1980's or at the beginning of the 1990's. The organisation of this politics field had been partly determined by international influences and the Chernobyl catastrophe. Without press there would be no communication to the citizens over problem situations of environmental politics, no criticism and inspection of the exercise of power of the governing.

The real thaw in ecology development started only in the late 1980's. But it was promoted not due to the gradual changes in mentality and state structures, but because of the sharp reevaluation after the events of April, 26, 1986. The population, shocked by Chernobyl disaster and clouded with stench of enterprises' throw outs, is seeking for truth. Even the main paper of the time - „Pravda" - proposed the most horrible lies accompanied by the songs of the „Prypyat nightingales" of Odynets', its own correspondent.

In Russian, the word *glasnost* literally means openness. Its broader meaning, however, became universal when Michael Gorbachow coined the term during his period of political and social reform.

Some more years passed after the nuclear disaster, when, during the overwhelming ecologization of the population, the secret regime as to the information on ecology became softer. Democratisation of the society favours the long-awaited „birth". In April, 1988 the Prypyat Scientific and Industrial Association starts „Vestnik Chernobylya" newspaper. Subject matters of its first issues went not far from those of regular provincial paper „No one thought ,at first that we deal with ecology, but we were in the very hell and had no alternative. Our paper is one hundred per cent ecological", Mykola Lyabakh, its editor, says. Unfortunately, one can hardly agree to this now. The major Part of the paper's articles has a pro-nuclear character and reflects the interests of pro-nuclear lobby in Ukraine.

One should admit though, that the first issues of the paper covered objectively the events within the thirty-kilometres zone of alienation and outside it. The Conference of Journalistic Unions awarded the staff of the paper with the prize for courage and professionalism. Analysing the process of the press' ecologization, Mykola Lyabakh said in his interview to the „Spasenie" newspaper: „There is direct a link between ecology and politics. If the governments of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia admitted that these countries were in the state of ecological disaster, they should take care of the ecology press. And speaking about the prize, it is symbolic that our team was noticed. The task of salvation of the Earth is taking primary position now, and it's good that at least our colleagues from the Conference of Journalistic Unions understand this".

"Zeleny Svit" newspaper is the first democratic edition. The presentation issue came out in 1989. Officially it dates back to April 1990. The newspaper reflects the history of the green movement and there changes. At first the materials pertaining to political ecology prevailed in

it, while in present the priority is given to the general ecological problems, moral aspects of interaction of man and nature. The editorial board of the „Zeleny Svit" published special issues dealing with ethnography, folk medicine, nature protection, ecological crimes of the army and so on. A permanent heading devoted to the ecological upbringing of the children "The Green Class" is held in the newspaper.

Analysing editions that are covering any environmental problems is rather interesting for some reasons. First, the topic has just started to appear in the press and had got such a boom in progress that caused a creation of new papers and magazines in the postsocialist society. Second, a new journalist specialisation is forming now: a environmental reporter. There is a certain bunch of problems dealing with ecology crisis, consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, ways to develop nuclear and alternative energies and other issues, the covering of which one needs a special knowledge, journalist dossier etc.

Third, certain experience of environment protection work has already been gained by now and former Ukrainian press. This layer is attractive not only for research but also for practical usage by public ecological groups.

Modern press tries to unite organically the actuality of present problems with the revival of the respect for the nature, historically existing among the Ukrainians. Although one can find a lot of interest in the past, real development of environmental press can be found only during the last decades.

Article 34 of the Ukrainian Constitution establishes the following: "Every person has the right to freedom of thought and speech, to the free expression of his views and convictions. Every person has the right to freely gather, use, and disseminate information orally, in written form, or by other means at his choice. "

The significance of this petition lies in the Article 50: "the right to free access to information on the environmental situation, the quality of food products and consumer goods, as well as the right to disseminate such information. This information cannot be made secret to anyone."

On 25 June 1998, on the occasion of the fourth "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference in Aarhus Denmark, Ukraine signed the new UN/ECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in decision making and access to Justice in Environmental Matters. This Act is an important input into the general European process since they define priorities of environmental activity and international co-operation. This document was discussed by the authorities and public several times.

Modern press pays not much attention to the ecological problems. According to the results of content-analysis 80% of all materials government press about environment are connected to Chernobyl NPP. Loser in the Ukraine is the free press. Pro-nuclear lobby investment in the mass-media sector to buy the public opinion. If a newspaper doesn't belong to you opinion immediately, then create your own. Who however couldn't afford a newspaper, gets some journalists, who do the complete report for an article-fee. PR-managers organise for journalists different competitions with generous prices, press journeys etc.

The rest of materials take over the whole spectrum of themes. Some particular topics (f.e. environmental consumption, garbage separation, etc.) are being covered very rarely. Mostly informational style is present. The materials devoted to the special calendar dates (World-wide environmental protection day, Earth day, etc.) as well as different reportage's about

environmental actions are the most popular ones. Among analytical articles exists a clear domination of the general character materials without any deep analysis of the cause of a concrete environmental problem. The main disadvantage of the journalistic materials is superficial approach in covering the topic. Expert materials look at environmental problems deeper, thought often they are difficult for understanding by an average reader.

Thanks to the support from foreign foundations NGOs got the possibility to publish their environmental materials regularly. Unfortunately, these possibilities were not always supported by the necessary level of professionalism of the publisher. Most of the publications had not a very big edition (under 100 exemplars), they were copied with a help of rizoğraf or a copy machine, and the publications were not published any more after financial support was over.

One interesting particularity of environmental problems in Ukraine coverage is the social accent of the theme. Daily newspapers treat environmental material hot as a scientific or a technical ones as it is for example in Germany, but they put it in the parts „Human“, „Society“ and other. Usually correspondents of the social problems department („Robitnitcha gaseta“, „Serkalo nedeli“ and others) are the ones who is responsible for environmental theme coverage.

Besides the printed editions, the electronic bulletins become more and more importance in the environmental organisations of Ukraine for communication. Many users get from them more useful data as compared with the press. The essential advantage of the information networks is the effectiveness of information dissemination. In effect, it can reach Ukraine from other continent in a few hours. In a number of cases, in order to support ecological actions, help the activists in other critical situations, this is the only e-communication means possible. Moreover, the computer memory enables us to store great massifs of information and to effectively use them if necessary. This factor essentially increases the possibilities when forming a journalist dossier.

For example the nongovernmental organisation "Ecopress" started its activities in the beginning of 1997. The basic aim of the organisation is the protection of the environment by using enlightenment work, which would be carried out to the world equally with the help of the electronic variant of the information bulletin. It contains allotted pages for the enlightenment of problems of medical ecology, the protection of the environment, ecological and nuclear risk, questions about labour security and equally ecological news from information agencies (the revue by Ecopress Ukraine and European periodicals).

The users of Internet can receive the issues of the information bulletin with different publications, announcements and contents in Ukrainian and English languages of the present and the future issues free of charge. The information bulletin "Medical Ecology" pays attention to the environment protection problems, ecological and nuclear risk, labour security questions, as well as ecological news from information agencies.

The nongovernmental organisation "Ecopress" has been publishing the information bulletin "Medical Ecology" since June, 1997. There are such columns in the bulletin as: Health Prevention, Medical Ecology, If You Want, To Be Healthy, Ecology Education, Pollution Risk, Information.

But, in spite of all the enumerated advantages, there is one complication restricting the access to the above networks: the majority of the environmental activists and journalists have no

computers and modems necessary for maintaining communication. But even irrespective of a limited number of users, the e-mail information and communications means already a serious compete with the printed publications.

For overcoming such a competition and organising an interaction among different means of mass communication, a permanent monitoring is required for audience, which acts as the user to acquire the nature protection and ecological information. Those who distribute it should take into account the specific features and requirements of each users' group.

The author made a study of potential users of the ornithological information, and the motivation capable of arousing the interest of concrete addresses to do with the protection of the birds, as well as the requirements of different categories of users of a very narrow-directed information. Even in the sphere of clearly limited data there is a diversity of interests. The bigger size of material is the more diversity increases. At present, that is why in order to successfully develop the environmental press, the moment of finding, selection and approving the concrete publications in the own ecological niche is a very important one.

Scientific editions can be an example of such a practice. They have small numbers of copies printed, but they retain a permanent readers' audience, that is one of the criteria of an edition's stability. Such an approach promotes the surviving of the environmental press in the future.

But on examining its past, the following steps can be singled out in the history of the environmental press in Ukraine:

- 1) the preparatory one, which is connected with: the appearance of the first students' nature protection detachments, change of the social consciousness after the Chernobyl disaster, forming the nature protection public, appearance and holding permanent topical sections in the press;
- 2) the appearance ecological editions in small quantities by using a low-quality printing base, but rapidly reacting the requirement to acquire an indecent and effective information, which could not be ensured by the press of that period;
- 3) mass appearance of the state and public ecological organisations, whose publications were intended for a wide circles of readers;
- 4) the appearance of editions, oriented on a certain reader's audience, meeting its purposeful requirements and having fundamentally new methods of dissemination by using modern technical means.

At present we can speak of an increasing importance of the environmental press, in particular, and ecological journalism, as a whole. The main factor that results in the situation transition of ecology from a pure scientific to the social sphere. The shaping of the ecological consciousness and culture of men's interaction with nature, overcoming the information vacuum are problems of the new journalism.

An explorer of Ukrainian journalism, professor A.Z.Moskalenko considers that „the information hunger is dangerous for the young state no less than the physical one, and in the system of social control the mass media information plays an exclusive important role."

The environmental press can influence and already does influence the taking of discussions by the state, commercial and social structures, but this is done not always enough effectively, that, by the way, does not exclude the availability of reserves for the future, as far as the practice of such measures is concerned.

Alongside with the environmental press development, it is required to change the nature protection and ecological problems interpretation as a whole. These problems must be interpreted by the information mass media day-to-day, not sporadically. For achieving this, a consolidation of specialists-ecologists actively participating in the environmental movement - and journalists is needed.

When preparing their scientific publications and having come across the specific nature of materials for the press, the authors of scientific materials encounter certain difficulties. But pure journalistic materials do not always good enough to be disseminated. If in the first case one deals with the formalised approach and plentiful terminology, in the second case diverse mistakes caused by an inadequate knowledge of ecological problems should be accounted.

That is why a necessity to ecologically educate press, radio and TV personal springs up. According to the stress made in the Agenda for the XXI century, adopted at the UNO Conference in Rio, UNESCO, UNEP and the universities should be permanently amending the curriculum for the would-be journalists with the topics on nature protection and development.

The course of basic knowledge on environment is for the students of journalism a must. A special facultaty course on environmental journalism was included in the programme of the last-year students in the Institute of Journalism of the Kiev National Taras-Shevchenko-University.

Environmental journalism is shaping now as a new, separate branch of our profession. Its regulations and principles should be worded in accordance with the international experience. The environmental journalists co-operation is to promote a better and more complete informing the public on the problems of the environment and especially those of them of great international importance.

Meanwhile, it is necessary to emphasise the journalists responsibility for the truth and constructive treatment of the environmental problems.

The education of various strata of the public and support rendered to the voluntary activities of different non-governmental organisations should become the main goals of environmental journalism in participation of journalists in discussions on large projects of importance for the environment and in searches of better solutions for them are to be regarded, as well.

The main barriers for the successful coverage of environmental problems in Ukrainian press are:

- priority for economic and political information;
- commercialisation of the press;
- pro-nuclear and industry lobby;
- limited and not sufficient level of environmental knowledge of journalists;
- a weak contact among nongovermental, governmental environmental organisations and the press, badly organised Public Relations;
- lower interest of the population to the environment as a whole in general.

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