

In Uzbekistan, The Press Is The Main Symbol Of A Democratic Society

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Abstract: This article analyzes the role and significance of the press in Uzbekistan's democratic society. Particular attention is paid to the role of mass media in implementing public oversight within the framework of the Law "On Public Oversight" adopted in 2018. The press is viewed as an important tool for fostering freedom of speech, openness, and civil society.

Keywords: Public oversight, mass media, freedom of speech, information policy, constitutional rights, censorship and self-censorship, openness of information, civil society, media literacy.

INTRODUCTION:

The Law "On Public Control", which entered into force on April 13, 2018, singles out the Mass Media (media) among the four subjects of public control. The widespread implementation of democratic principles that ensure freedom of speech and the press, transparency, and openness of reforms is one of the priority tasks in the development and qualitative renewal of society. It is precisely the strong civil society formed through the media that creates the basis for the weakening of the role of state bodies in solving socio-economic problems in society and the gradual transfer of these functions to public organizations. As is known, the media are an important component of political communication, exerting an information and ideological influence on the socio-political activities of society. This creates new opportunities for strengthening public control over state institutions. Therefore, the higher the spiritual and political intellectual potential of the media, the stronger the activity, enthusiasm, creativity, and alertness in society. Taking into account such a spiritual and social environment, it is a very important task to coordinate and direct the mood of society, while further strengthening public control.

Strengthening public control through media institutions allows citizens to exercise their constitutional right to unite and organize, and

expresses the social interests and concerns of various groups and strata of the population. In addition, it serves as a means of increasing the socio-political activity of citizens, raising their legal and political culture.

The press is an important intermediary between the state and society in any democratic society. Freedom of speech, openness to information, public control over the activities of state bodies, and the right of citizens to receive information are important signs of democracy. In this regard, the press shapes public opinion in society and ensures dialogue between society and the state.

In recent years, reforms have been implemented in Uzbekistan regarding freedom of speech and the press. However, there are also factors that hinder the full freedom of the press. This article analyzes the development of the press in Uzbekistan, its legal framework, existing problems and future prospects.

The press functions as the fourth power in a democratic society. It performs the functions of covering the reality in society, disclosing the activities of state bodies, forming public opinion and providing citizens with information.

Freedom of speech, the right to disseminate and receive information are a necessary condition for civil society and a democratic state. As Jurgen Habermas

noted, the media create a “public space”, that is, an environment in which citizens form their opinions and evaluate state policy(1).

According to Article 81 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, everyone has the right to freedom of speech and the right to receive information. The Constitution stipulates that freedom of the press is guaranteed by the state(2).

In addition, the following laws constitute the legal framework in the press:

- The Law “On Mass Media” (2007) – defines the activities and legal status of the press(3);
- The Law “On the Protection of Journalistic Activities” (1997) guarantees the right of journalists to keep their sources confidential and to operate freely(4).

In 2018, the Agency for Information and Mass Communications (AICMC) was established. Its tasks include coordinating the activities of the media, ensuring the openness of state bodies, and cooperating with journalists(5).

In 2022-2023, reforms were carried out to “Liberalize Legislation in the Information Sector”. In particular, draft laws were prepared to create a legal framework for the activities of online media, bloggers, and citizen journalism.

In recent years, the activity of independent news sites (Kun.uz, Daryo.uz, Gazeta.uz, Zamon.uz, and others) has been increasing in Uzbekistan. The growth in the number of Internet users and the popularity of social networks have expanded the sphere of influence of the press.

At the same time, social problems are quickly covered through bloggers and online journalism, and government agencies are forced to respond.

At the same time, there are the following problems:

1. Pressure on journalists - in some cases, journalists are persecuted for critical statements;
2. Censorship and self-censorship - some publications, fearing pressure on themselves, refrain from covering important socio-political topics;
3. Problematic concepts in draft laws - vague concepts such as "information that disrupts social order" and "content that violates the law" open the way to censorship.

International assessments and rankings are also important. In 2024, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked Uzbekistan 148th in the World Press Freedom Index (6). This result indicates a decline in recent years.

Freedom House also rates Uzbekistan as a “state with limited freedom of information.” According to them, there is government pressure on the activities of online media, blocking of websites, and restrictions on critical materials.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that reforms in the press sector in Uzbekistan have been an important step towards ensuring freedom of expression. The improvement of the legal framework, the development of online publications, and materials that strengthen public control have increased the influence of the press.

However, for a successful democratic society, the following measures must be taken:

1. Guaranteeing the safety of journalists and protecting them from various pressures;
2. Facilitating access to information, ensuring a policy of openness in practice;
3. Bringing the legislation in the field of information into line with international standards;
4. Preventing self-censorship on important socio-political topics;
5. Strengthening journalism education and media literacy.

The press is not only a disseminator of information, but also an institution that ensures the democratic development of society. Its freedom is inextricably linked to the openness of the state system and the activity of society.

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