

Committee: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee

Issue: The Issue of Press Censorship

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Position: Chair

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

My name is Eva Kalogirou and I am the Chair of the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee of the first ACG MUN. I am currently a senior in my school and I have been going to MUN Conferences for three years. I have to say that in that position I will try to make every delegate's experience as delightful and interesting as possible, something that I believe should be every chair's goal. I hope that you find the topics as interesting and as engaging as I do.

If for any reasons, any questions occur don't hesitate to contact me at eva.calogirou@gmail.com.

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Press censorship is an issue that is characterized by the suppression, concealment and criticism of newspapers, newsletters, articles or other published media containing information deemed inappropriate, obscene or harmful as regarded by government officials, media outlets or even authorities. This matter is extremely alarming due to the fact that more and more people are trying to claim their rights to expressing themselves freely. Violent acts, confiscation of content or even complete bans and retrieval of a press license are just a few of the methods used to censor and muzzle the press of its ideas.

This topic's goal is to discuss possible solutions in order to free the press or discuss if it is better to have it be restricted by authorities in order to ensure political balance and peace.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Censorship

"Censorship generally is the deletion of speech or any communicative material which may be considered objectionable, harmful, sensitive, or inconvenient to the government or media organizations as determined by a body authorized to censor."¹

Press

- a. "The communications media considered as a whole, especially the agencies that collect, publish, transmit, or broadcast news and other information to the public."
- b. "News or other information disseminated to the public in printed, broadcast, or electronic form."²

Freedom of Speech

"The right of people to express their opinions publicly without governmental interference, subject to the laws against libel, incitement to violence or rebellion, etc."³

¹"Censorship (Entertainment Law) Law and Legal Definition." *US Legal*, US Legal, Inc, definitions.uslegal.com/c/Censorship-Entertainment-Law/.

²"Press." *The Free Dictionary*, Farlex, www.thefreedictionary.com/press.

³"Freedom of Speech." *Dictionary.com*, Dictionary.com.

Self Censorship

“Self-censorship occurs when journalists themselves prevent the publication of information. Journalists practice self-censorship because they are fearful of what could happen if they publish certain information — they are fearful of injury to themselves or their families, fearful of a lawsuit or other economic consequence.”⁴

Journalistic Objectivity (Press Neutrality)

“Journalistic objectivity requires that a journalist not be on either side of an argument. The journalist must report only the facts and not a personal attitude toward the facts.”⁵

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Origins of Press Censorship

In the middle of the 15th century, there were a lot of great inventions one of which being the printing press. With that invention, naturally came the establishment of newspapers and newsletters. That led to an abundance of information spreading through Europe and although that might seem like a good thing, many authorities were worried that it would be dangerous to society and the public morals (especially in times of crises and war).

However, the original purpose of censorship was religious. That is very logical since the first printed works were religious or for ceremonial purposes. The aim of this supervision was so that everything was dogmatically consistent. However, educational and moral concerns were also added as an aim later on. Printing an unapproved text resulted in severe penalties like expulsion. Initially all censorship was done solely by the church. Later it was adopted by non-religious institutions as well. And then, it developed to mostly secular authorities exercising the act of censoring.

That didn't mean however that the church stopped exercising its censorship duties. In 1559 Pope Paul IV published the first *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* which basically was a list of prohibited books by the Catholic Church. Afterwards, the list of books expanded and it contained works ranging from scientific works to literary which the church believed to be contradictory to the dogmatic opinions of it.

⁴“Journalism Self-Censorship.” *The Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change*.

⁵Bovée, Warren G. *Discovering journalism*. Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1999.

From religious to non-religious censorship

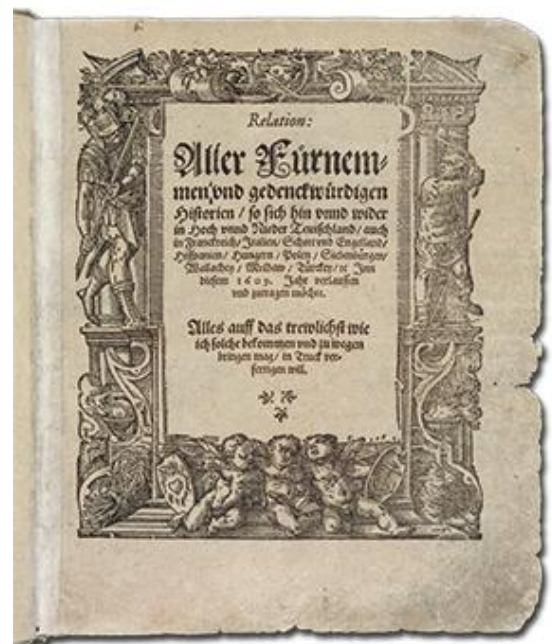
Driven by the Reformation that led to a rise of pamphlets, polemical texts and raised tensions along the Holy Roman Empire population, the main goal of the authorities was to suppress the aforementioned publications. So, every text after that had to be approved by an officially delegated person prior to its printing. Preventing the publishing of an unapproved text was relatively easy, however the “post-publication” censorship of works was extremely difficult because they had to retrieve all of the printed copies of the text in question. Also the means of which the authorities chose to restrict and prevent printing and publishing was done in many ways, not just by censoring; judicial and policing authorities had the ability to restrict something from being published as well. Also, after 1530 all the printed works had the obligation to add the name of the publisher and place of the publication. The censorship was also extended to pictures, wood carvings and mold casts, not only text. Printing places were a victim of random inspections as well, while contravention of such provisions could lead to punishments, such as imprisonment or exclusion from the printing profession.

And so, in Britain came the Licensing Act of 1662 which prohibited the publication of any work without having acquired a license beforehand. That was in effect until the Great Plague of 1664-1665. Also in Germany, during the years of 1618 to 1648 (during the “Thirty Year War”) the press was outlawed with means such as censorship, lack of paper for printing purposes and trade restrictions. At this point it would be important to mention that it was in every ruler’s right to exercise this kind of control, since it was in their duty to protect their people and make a decision without the public’s interfere was justified.

Also, keep in mind that censorship was not only used in a negative way. It protected the publishers against the reprinting of their hard work and it also offered economic privileges. But since that kind of privilege wasn’t permanent and could be withdrawn at any moment, it without a doubt promoted good behavior.

Press censorship with the establishment of a periodical press

The Relation of Strasbourg was the first regularly printed newsletter and soon after that more newspapers in other countries followed. It was not hard to implement the already existing



#1: *The Relation of Strasbourg*

measures of censorship to this new medium of information, which was published regularly.

But content-wise and the fact that it was published so often, placed a great deal of pressure to the censors. They not only had to be up to date with current political events but they also had to be quick thinkers since they had to make decisions on many current issues that were going on at the time. And not only that, it was hard to suppress something that was rapidly growing. For example, a text that a censor might have wished to censor might have already been printed in another place already!

Press censorship in the 17th and 18th century

This period truly represents a time of reason. It was one of the first times that the rights, liberty and dignity of a person became political issues in many countries.

Sweden was the pioneer in abolishing censorship and introducing a law that guaranteed freedom of the press in 1766. Denmark and Norway followed close behind in 1770. After that, the United States of America established the First Amendment in 1787, which guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Switzerland proclaimed the freedom of press in 1798.

However, not all governments had the same point of view. For example, in Italy fearing the presence of Napoleon, new restrictions came which were aiming at the restriction of foreign newspapers from being distributed in the country. That soon changed with the invasion of Napoleon who had arrived not only as a liberator but a dictator as well. He ordered a political re-formation of the country and had the strict regime that was used in Imperial France be used in Italy as well, meaning that press control was also changed. The new article, that Napoleon enforced, which mentioned press censorship stated that “the press was free, but subject to legal provisions for the suppression of abuses of that freedom”⁶

Press censorship in the 19th and 20th century

During the end of the 19th century, the battle against press censorship seemed to have been won. Even though the limits of that freedom were constantly debated mostly for political and moral reasons, it was still legal –formally speaking.

But who could have predicted that such a radical reversion in press freedom would be witnessed as a consequence of the oppressive movements that followed the first World War. After the declaration of war in 1914, Germany suspended the press and issued a list of 26 items that contained things that journalists were forbidden to report on, such as information regarding the country, the economy,

⁶“Censorship and Freedom of the Press — EGO.” *EGO | Europäische Geschichte Online*.

transportation or military matters. Similar measures were adopted by the Entente Powers. In France, the press was suppressed as well; one day after Germany declared war. In Britain however, similar actions did not take place. Even during the First World War they didn't have censorship laws. However, self-censorship still existed.

After the war's outbreak, the British government instantly took control of the telegraph network, cable connections and even radio stations. This helped in gaining control of the information flow. Parliament passed laws that did not allow for false information to be spread. Despite the fact that some publishing houses were prosecuted this didn't last for long. And so, the British press was able to maintain its freedom.

Switching the point of view to the Soviet Socialist Republics, in October 1917, an era of strict censorship under the rulers of USSR began and lasted till the end of the 1980s. This new order meant that politics, economics and even culture, education and religion were soon to change dramatically. In 1922 a central censorship office was established, called Glavit. Its main role was to cleanse the Soviet society of all expressions that were deemed as destructive to the political power and corrupting the minds of the citizens. It had the power to shut down newspapers deemed as "hostile" and censor performing arts as well as print media. Nonetheless, in 1920 writers were granted "creative freedom" as long as they didn't publish anything about political opposition. Along came the Stalin regime, during which the censorship system could even be described as "sinister". Said regime banned publications and even prohibited the importing of foreign books. The destruction of libraries was also a part of the longest and most large-scale censorship in the 20th century lasting till 1989.

World War II, the Nazi Regime.

As the flames burned through 20.000 volumes of books deemed as offensive in Germany of 1933, Goebbels optimistically said "From these ashes will rise the phoenix of the new spirit". Various book pyres, lit by the young members of the Nazi movement, were supposed to purge the minds of people and the society of every book written by a Jewish author, a communist or a humanist.



Hitler the "all powerful" leader

#2: The Nazi Book Burnings

of the Third Reich implemented extreme propagandistic laws and censorship regimes that promoted the Nazis in all the countries that were occupied by the Germans in World War II. National newspapers, publishing houses and even radio stations were either seized or shut down completely. In countries like Norway, listening to foreign radio or producing, publishing, even reading “illegal” newspapers was punishable by death. However, that didn’t stop Norway from publishing illegal newspapers. More than 400 newsletters were printed by activist groups from all over the country. Denmark published 541 illegal newsletters and papers. Members from groups that published such things were either executed or died in concentration camps as a result of their activities. Despite that, there were always new volunteers willing to take the heroic part of those activists “keeping the chain of communication unbroken till the end of the war”.

Military dictatorships in the 20th century

During the 20th century, many countries were victimized by military dictators. Italy with Mussolini, Germany with Hitler, Russia with Stalin are some of the most notable examples. So while totalitarian regimes were being enforced on the people, the media also had to make a choice. Either submit to the new government and become a “mouthpiece”, or simply let the publishing house be taken over by the new rulers. In the course of World War II, the press had to be muzzled by all the countries that were involved. Other mentionable examples of press censorship caused by military dictators would have to be Spain (1936-1975), Greece (1967-1974), Chile (1973-1990) and Nigeria (1966-1999).

Press censorship in recent years

Looking only in 1998, human rights violation groups reported that one hundred eighteen journalists were imprisoned and 24 journalists were murdered, while a number of newspapers, publishers and public broadcasters were either banned, forced to shut down or violently attacked (for example, bombed).

Between the years of 2002 to 2012, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (C.P.J), 506 journalists were killed worldwide. Even in dangerous war zones, such as Iraq and Syria, the cause of death is more likely to be murder than it is being killed while covering combat. In 2001, with the 9/11 attacks, the term “Journalistic Objectivity” started to corrode, since journalists started to be seen as the “enemies” or targets or as very valuable tools for propaganda by many adversaries.



#3: Photo by KAI

Today, many methods of press censorship are done secretly. A modern method that has surfaced is the use of phantom byers and shell companies. Tamoá Calzadilla, the investigation's editor that recently quit Venezuela's most popular newspaper, said: "This is not your classic censorship, where they put a soldier in the door of the newspaper and assault the journalists. Instead, they buy the newspaper, they sue the reporters and drag them into court, they eavesdrop on your communications and then broadcast

them on state television. This is censorship for the 21st century."

Besides Venezuela, other countries have been affected by this new wave of censorship. For example Pakistan removed the license of "Geo TV" the most popular television channel in the country, right after claim of Slander that was made by the intelligence services, when one of the most famous journalists of the station was shot. The TV station had been off the air for 15 days.

In Turkey, following a recent amendment to the Internet Law, the Telecommunications Directorate now has the authority to force shut down any website or content in order to "protect national security and public order, as well as to prevent a crime". Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been blamed for the jailing of journalists and for using tax investigations in order to justify his actions. In 2009, tax authorities had fined a well known media group for 2.5 billion. Nowadays, journalists there face extreme violence, harassment and intimidation techniques from government and non government actors constantly.

In Russia, according to its country report by Freedom House, "The nationalistic tone of the dominant Russian media continued to drown out independent and critical journalism in 2015, stressing patriotic themes associated with Russia's 2014 military incursions into Ukraine and the launch of air strikes in Syria in September 2015. Russian leaders and pro-government media outlets also sought to mobilize public support and suppress any dissent in the face of an economic downturn linked to falling oil prices and Ukraine-related sanctions. Deterrents to independent reporting and commentary included draconian laws and extralegal intimidation."⁷

⁷"Russia." Freedom House, Freedom House.

It might seem odd to discuss about censorship, especially in an era when democratic elections are prevalent around the world, private freedoms have been expanded and anyone with a Facebook, Twitter account or access to the internet in general can be a journalist. However, facts prove that oppression of the press has hit record levels and press freedom is dropping alarmingly, more than it has in the past 12 years. It is also a fact that only 13% of our population enjoy a completely free press (that means that the safety of journalists is guaranteed and there is minimal intrusion by the state and that the press is not worried about economic or legal pressures), 41% of our population live in a partly-free press environment and 46% live with a press that is labeled as “Not Free”.

Topics that have been proven to cause controversy

There are numerous topics that pose risks when covered by the press. The journalists can be imprisoned, receive threats or even be victims of violence. These topics are:

1. Organized Crime

Specifically in areas with a weak rule of law, covering organized crime can be a big risk. For example, in a case in Mexico, the body of a journalist who was known for uncovering organized crime and the authorities’ failure to address it was found gruesomely dismembered in January 2015.

2. Corruption

Corruption in businesses or government places leaves journalists open to harassment and violent attacks globally. For example, a famous radio host in Brazil, who was known for commenting on corrupt officials, was shot dead during a radio show in August 2015.

3. Religion

Sensitive religious topics can lead to the targeting of extremist groups or authorities. For example, a blogger charged for defaming Islam had been charged with 1,000 lashes in January 2015. Also in January, Charlie Hebdo, a magazine office based in France was attacked by extremists because of its continuous depiction of the Prophet Mohammed in satirical cartoons.

4. Disputed Sovereignty

Whole parts of the world can become off-limits for journalists when questions of autonomy and self-determination are asked. For example, it has been noted that Russian authorities are very quick to punish any coverage of Crimea.

5. Violating the dignity of authorities (Lèse-Majesté)

Laws that are against the insulting of the state or top authorities are plentiful and exist in several countries. Some leaders are even unhesitant to use them against critical voices. In Egypt for example, they have extended records of charges against bloggers, journalists and even social media users.



#4: Map that shows which countries have free press, partly free press and not free press

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Cuba

Cuba's print, publishing and broadcasting media are all being fully controlled by the one-party Communist state. Reporters without Borders, have previously uncovered that Cuba even has jailed journalists (most of them unjustly). Also, in Cuba, only state media are allowed which are: national radio, national television, two daily newspapers and their local versions. Reports by foreign journalists are also controlled by the authorities, with most of them being expelled for being "overly negative".

China

For more than a decade, China has been among the top three jailers of journalists in the world, a distinction that it is unlikely to lose any time soon. A popular tactic that China uses in order to muzzle foreign press is by not allowing any access to the country at all. By not allowing visas for foreign correspondents, they are showing that that China is at least on top of controlling the flow of information.⁸

⁸ "China : Great Firewall and systematic imprisonment | Reporters without borders." *RSF*, Reporters without borders, rsf.org/en/china.

Iran

In 2009, Iran became the world's top jailer of journalists and ever since, has ranked among the world's worst jailers of the press. Internet censorship is also very prominent in Iran, millions of websites, including social networking sites and news websites, are blocked.

Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan, the state controls and own all broadcasters. This is also the main source of information there. Also, international broadcasters are blocked and sometimes even have their satellite signals be barred.

Ethiopia

In 2014, due to many threats of imprisonment and an escalation in journalist exiles, many journalists were forced to flee the country. Ethiopia has passed an anti-terrorism law, which means that authorities may criminalize any reporting that is deemed to be promoting or "providing moral support to banned groups" and this has been used against many jailed journalists there. There are also lawsuits being filed against editors, which force publishers to stop the production of printing. This has left Ethiopia with a small amount of independent publication companies.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia had passed a law in 2011, that made press suppression even more intense. This law allows the punishment of any materials thought to go against Sharia law, to contravene state interests, to cause harm to the public or be a matter of national security.

DPRK (Democratic Republic of Korea)

In North Korea, access to independent information sources is extremely limited. Most of the existing sources come from the same source, the official Korean News Agency and their focus is only political leadership achievements and statements. Also, internet is extremely limited to the elite, however, some schools do have access to a specialized extremely controlled intranet called "Kwangmyong".

Finland

Finland is marked as the top country in the World Press Freedom index, and has been for the past five years. 200 newspapers (31 of which are published daily) and a variety of broadcasts and online information outlets allow this country to distribute information freely and without control.

Reporters without Borders (RSF)

“Based in Paris, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is an independent NGO with consultative status with the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF). Its foreign sections, its bureau in ten cities, including Brussels, Washington, Berlin, Tunis, Rio de Janeiro and Stockholm, and its network of correspondents in 130 countries give RSF the ability to mobilize support, challenge governments and wield influence both on the ground and in the ministries and precincts where media and Internet standards and legislation are drafted.”⁹

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
1609	The first periodically printed newspaper, <i>The Relation of Strasbourg</i> is established.
1662	The Licensing Act is passed in Britain.
1766	Sweden passed the first law to protect the press’ freedom.
1787	The First Amendment is introduced in the United States.
1866	Censorship laws are re-imposed in the Soviet States.
April 1917	Censorship is abolished in the Soviet States
October 1917	Censorship is imposed again, stricter this time under the rulers of the USSR.
1936-1975	Spain goes through a military dictatorship which in its turn means extreme press censorship
1941-1944	The Nazi regime, which is infamous for burning books takes place, along with its extremely strict censorship regime
1950-1994	The Apartheid regime takes place in South Africa, the results of which are torture, killing and severe censorship.
1967-1974	Greece undergoes a strict military dictatorship and severe press censorship

⁹“Presentation.” *RSF*, Reporters without borders, 31 Jan. 2017, rsf.org/en/presentation.

1973-1990	Chile suffers from military dictatorship and press censorship
1966-1999	Nigeria also is plagued by a military dictatorship and strict press censorship
2014	Pakistan suspends the license of the most famous channel in the country
2014	In Russia, multiple publishing outlets were blocked or forced to change their editorial line overnight, because of government pressure
2015	Terrorist attack against satirical French magazine “Charlie Hebdo” takes place, after a depiction of the Prophet Muhammad, sparks debate on press censorship.
2015	In Erdogan’s control, Turkey suffers from severe press censorship.
2016	A study confirms that Venezuela has at least 43 blocked sites (added to the 1500 sites a previous study showed were blocked in 2015)

RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Resolution A/HRC/27/L.7

This resolution, adopted in 2014, protects the safety of the journalists and media workers while condemning the impunity for attacks and violence against them.¹⁰

Resolution A/HRC/28/L.24

This resolution, adopted in 2008, combats the defamation of all religions and urges government to prohibit it. However, the only religion specified in this resolution is Islam.¹¹

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19.

Proclaimed in December 14th 1948, Article 19 states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions

¹⁰ “Resolution A/HRC/33/L.6.” *United Nations*, United Nations, 26 Sept. 2016, www.article19.org/data/files/SoJ_res_Draft.pdf.

¹¹ “Resolution A/HRC/28/L.4.” *United Nations*, United Nations, 19 Mar. 2015, www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/other/HRC_Res_28_L.4_Orally_Revised.pdf.

without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”¹²

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

There are various organizations that have been established in order to combat press censorship, “Article 19” being one of them. Some of the most important solutions that “Article 19” has offered are:

“We (Article 19) design and promote laws and policies that protect free expression, holding abusers and governments to account, and advocate for legal reforms”[...]“We assist the media in its professional development with a range of training and capacity-building resources on freedom of the press, journalist’s rights, defamation, public interest broadcasting, media pluralism and reporting diversity”[...]“We also actively demand transparency and accountability by testing governments’ transparency practices and access to information provisions and by campaigning for the disclosure of information of public interest”¹³

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Depending on your country’s policy, you might find that different solutions work best. For example, if it is a delegation with a “free press” policy, protection of the journalist’s life and rights along with stopping impunity would be a possible solution. However, if your policy is the complete opposite of that, you would have to come up with “middle ground” solutions. Setting up a framework which states what is and not allowed, having the press under regulation and imposing fair punishments would be possible solutions. If your policy is about having a partially free press, again you will have to come up with solutions that set up frameworks that regulate the press and decide what is and what is not appropriate for publishing, while maintaining the idea of balance. Letting people express themselves while setting some boundaries with fair punishments and the raising of awareness about the importance of expressing oneself, would be another possible solution with a delegation that has a partly-free censorship policy. Lastly, the creation of a UN body that protects and regulates member states to see if the aforementioned solutions are being complied with, along with other actions that you seem are important, will be useful.

¹² “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” *United Nations*, United Nations.

¹³ “Mission · Who we are · Article 19.” *Article 19*.

Keep in mind that this is the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee. Therefore, any solutions that you come up with have to comply with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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