



Uniwersytet  
Wrocławski

Instytut Politologii

Zakład Komunikowania  
Społecznego i Dziennikarstwa

ul. Koszarowa 3 bud. 2/3  
51-149 Wrocław  
tel. +48 71 375 50 69  
e-mail: zksid@uni.wroc.pl  
www.zksid.politologia.uni.wroc.pl

Prof. Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska, Ph.D.  
University of Wrocław, Poland  
Faculty of Social Science  
Department of Communication and Journalism  
E-mail: boguslawa.dobek-ostrowska@uwr.edu.pl

**Review of the doctoral dissertation of  
Marina Gennadievna Matveeva-Melnik, MA:**

**“HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS IN RUSSIAN JOURNALISM:  
DYNAMICS IN SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT”**

Dissertation for a scientific degree of candidate of Philology, Volume 2  
Scientific adviser – doctor of Philology N. L. Volkovskiy

**1. Choice of the Ph.D. dissertation topic**

Marina Gennadievna Matveeva-Melnik choice of the topic, as “human rights journalism” in Russia in the context of sociopolitical dynamics, for her doctoral thesis is pertinent, needed and important from a cognitive and practical point of view. In times of great importance of the mass media in mediating social experience with the way the media cover certain issues has become the subject of intense academic research. The media not only inform, but also comment and interpret a social reality. They are essential for shaping public opinion and for building a political agenda. For this reason I find that the topic is pertinent and needed. It could be an important contribution to the scholarly question defined in the title of the reviewed dissertation. But I know well that to do a research dedicated to “human right” in the Authoritarian Media System<sup>1</sup> is very difficult and risky.

---

<sup>1</sup> See more: D. Dobek-Ostrowska (2015). Twenty five years after communism: Four models of media systems and politics in Central an Eastern Europe. In: B. Dobek-Ostrowska, M. Głowacki (eds.) *Democracy and Media in Central and Eastern Europe 25 Years On*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lan Edition.

As M.G. Matveeva-Melnik indicates, the main aim of her study is “to give the substantive evaluation of the human rights agenda in Russian journalism with reference to the socio-political context”. The Author presents six main tasks, as to define the concept, which is the subject-matter of human rights journalism; to validate the human rights function as the tradition of Russian journalism; to analyze the challenges of evolution, structure and operation of human rights publishing; to mark the topics of modern journalism within human rights movement; to analyze human rights topics of modern press, taking into consideration the effect of socio-political conditions; and to research the genre range of human rights journalism.

How it works in the dissertation of Marina Matveeva-Melnik ?

## **2. Methodology**

The methodology used in each study fulfills the requirements for a doctoral thesis. The methods used by a Ph. D. student is a fundamental aspect of each dissertation, because it confirms (or not) a level of scientific development of candidate for an independent research. In an introduction, each author should point out elements that are necessary for an academic dissertation: the aim of a study and its hypotheses.

The Author writes that “the main hypothesis of the research is that the human rights discourse being reflected by the Russian journalism is developing in compliance with sociopolitical processes taking place in society” (p.3). She plans to verify it thanks to empirical techniques. She does not write about them directly but I guess that she thinks about quantitative and qualitative methods.

In a case of qualitative research, I see that the Author knows how they use and she did it correctly. There are four interviews with: (1) the moderator of the program “The Man Has a Right”, the judicial reviewer of Radio Liberty - Mariyana Torocheshnikova, (2) the Ombudsman for Human Rights in the Leningrad region - S. S. Shabanov, (3) the press-secretaries of the International Ecological Organization “Greenpeace Russia” in the Northwest - E. Usov and V. Ryabko, and (4) the director of the representative office of Amnesty International in the Russian Federation - S. A. Nikitin. The qualitative research was enriched by three questionnaires with journalists from the newspaper “St. Petersburg Vedomosti” (N. Orlova, Alexey Mironov and V. Kuzmitzkiy). The record of those interviews and the full text of questionnaires are added to the Appendix. Generally, as I

mentioned, the qualitative methods are correctly used and documented, but I have one doubt linked with a selection of one participant of interview - the Ombudsman for Human Rights in the Leningrad region. The Author writes clearly that the period of research is from 2011 to 2017, the name of 'Leningrad' was used in the other period (1924-1991).

A real problem appears in a context of the quantitative research. M. Matveeva-Melnik writes:

“The methods of research are determined by its goal, tasks and specifics of the materials. The author of this work used the logical method of obtaining knowledge; analysis and synthesis of information; reasoning by analogy; the Aristotelian method of study while delivering the material. Analyzing the items of human rights agenda of the sources in research, she used the method of quantitative content analysis and the processing of obtained data statistic methods (mass observations, data summary and pooling, the integrating factors analysis), As a part of the study, the digital keyword search at the official websites of chosen media editions was put to use. The author also practiced bibliometric lexical analysis – a method of key words and phrases estimation, which is often used by the authors of scientific publications.”(p. 18)

The Author counted in percent articles, notes and interviews published in four newspapers: “Rossijskaya gazeta”, “Kommersant”, “Izvestiya”, “Vedomosti” and newspapers in general. But a reader does not know how the empirical materials were selected and what many publications were analyzed since in the period from January 2011 till January 2017. The Author underlines that this choice was dictated by a “credibility and proved relevance among the readers, circulation geography, frequency of publication, average issue readership, coverage and profile of the audience” of sources. The titles like “Vedomosti”, “Kommersant”, “Izvestia”, “Rossiyskaya Gazeta”, it means four newspapers have been analyzed. But in the third chapter she writes above all about the human rights topic presented by one newspaper “St. Peterburg Vedomosti”. Additionally, the tables show a shorter time: 1) The protection of social rights and freedoms: analysis of key phrases for the period 30 November 2015 – 5 May 2016; 2) Publications on the topic of protection of housing rights in the newspaper “Vedomosti” in December 2012 – June 2014; 3) Publications on the topic of protection of labour disputes in the newspaper “Kommersant” in January-September 2015; 4) Publications on the topic “Orphanhood in Russia” in the “Rossijskaya gazeta” in December 2012 – December 2014; 5) Publications in the newspaper “Kommersant” on benefits for large families 2011-2015; 6) Publications in the newspaper “Izvestiya” about pension reforms in 2011-2015; 7) The debate on the reform of compulsory health insurance in the newspaper “Izvestiya” 2011-2014; 8) Materials on problems of free medicine in the newspaper “Vedomosti” (June 2012 – November 2015); 9) “Rossijskaya

gazeta” about the impact of reforms in schools and universities on access to education 2011-2015; 10) The number of publications per year that mention key phrases, 2011-2015; 11) Genre features of materials in the newspaper “Kommersant” (key phrase «right to freedom of speech») 2011-2015; 12) Genre features of materials in the newspaper “Izvestiya” (key phrase ”right to freedom of the media”) 2013-2015; 13) Genre features of materials in the newspaper “Vedomosti” (key phrase “protest actions”) 2014 -2015; 14) Genre features of materials in the newspaper “Kommersant” (key phrase “appeal to public authorities”) 2013-2015; 15) Genre features of materials in the newspaper “Rossijskaya gazeta” (key phrase “court protection”) only 2015 and 2015; 16) Protection of political rights and freedoms: analysis of key phrases for the period January 2012 – October 2016; 17) The number of publications per year that mention key phrases 2011-2015. We do not find any information about a time of analysis in a case of Diagram 1 (Appendix 24, p. 294).

No doubt that the Author did a heavy job but the quantitative methods were not used well in each case. The Author does not add to the dissertation a coding book and she does not explain how she received all analyzed data presented in seventeen tables and one diagram.

### **3. The content of the dissertation**

The Author writes that the main object of the study is “Russian human rights journalism” and the main subject is “the context of human rights journalism in sociopolitical dynamics”. She likes to present it in three chapters. The content of the dissertation undoubtedly corresponds to the topic defined in the title, but there is not a balance among three chapters: the first – 26 pages, the second one – 69 pages, and the third one - 108 pages.

The first chapter “Human rights journalism as subject- thematic specialization” is a kind of theoretical background. It is dedicated, on the one side, to the protection of human rights as a sphere of activity of Russian journalists, and on the second one, to the human rights function as a creative tradition in Russia. No doubt that “civil rights and freedoms” are very important journalistic standards but in the Authoritarian Media System Model, they are not respected. So, in a case of Russia, it is a very problematic topic.

In the chapter second entitled “Journalism of human rights movement in the system of mass media”, the Author takes five problems. She is interested in: the human rights movement in Russia as a factor of formation of institutions for protecting human rights; the emergence and development of journalism of the human rights movement; the human rights network media, their structural and functional aspects; the main thematic areas of

journalism of the human rights movement; and the cooperation between human rights organizations and media. In the last part of this chapter, the Author writes that there are:

“(…) three main ideological trends in this environment: «americanists», «cosmopolitans», «patriots», which significantly influences the subject and content of publications in covering the human rights protection in the media of the human rights movement.” (p.107)

After that, she adds that there is an interaction on the formation of the consciousness of the population in the field of protecting their rights between human rights organizations and the Russian media. She mentions about “human rights defenders”, “influence the public opinion of the Russian society through the media, and about “human rights «potential»”. In the end she underlines that “the emergence of new forms – civil journalism, journalism complicity is able to enhance the interaction of law-protecting organizations and the media” (p. 107). It is really very important to know how it works in the media and the political systems in Russia.

The chapter third - “Subject and genres of human rights publications concerning the modern Russian press” - is the biggest. It takes about 50 percent of all Ph.D. dissertation's text. M. Matveeva-Melnik concentrates her attention on three main threads as the thematic areas of human rights problems in qualitative Russian editions, the human rights topic of the newspaper “St. Petersburg Vedomosti”, and the genre system of human rights journalism. I guess how difficult is to do research dedicated to the newspaper where Vladimir Putin was the first Chairmen of its Advisory Board (1995-1997). The Author sums up:

“Our study of human rights issue in the newspaper «St. Petersburg Vedomosti» for the period covered (May-June 2014 and December 2015) allows us to conclude that research has been devoted more to the human rights-related social issue. The publications contain both short communications and a detailed analysis of cases of protection of the social rights of people. Many of them have recommendatory nature which means that they contain practical advice to readers on the protection of their rights – to which authorities to apply, how to correctly write applications, what laws regulate the rights of citizens, and etc. In order to writing analytical articles some journalists not only take comments from experts, but also independently check the state of affairs, for example, the quality of specific goods and services. Also, letters sent by readers in which ordinary people talk about the experience of implementation and protection of their rights are of a great importance in the human rights subject.”(p. 191)

In the last sentence of the Chapter 3, M. Matveeva-Melnik concludes that the analytical materials dedicated to the genre system of human rights journalism predominate in the federal and regional press, there are a lot of materials about reporting a human rights violation, and “the artistic and journalistic genres in post-Soviet human rights journalism have disappeared from the press”.

I like a construction and structure of Conclusion. It is a clear and well organized part of dissertation and can be a model for other authors. At the beginning M. Matveeva-Melnik answers for six tasks and the next, she presents eight main conclusions.

#### 4. Final remarks

It is a damage that the Author does not know some important monographs and articles dedicated to Russia such as a chapter of Elena Vartanova "The Russian Media Model in the Context of Post-Soviet Dynamics" published in the collective book of Hallin and Mancini (*Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World*, Cambridge 2012). It is a significant analysis. One part of this text is dedicated to the formal media laws and informal norms. Svetlana Pasti (2015), also M. Cherysh, L. Svitich (2012) and Nordersteng (2013) presented interesting research dedicated Russia and the conclusions could develop deeply a study of M. G. Matveeva – Melnik.

What should be particularly stressed and appreciated that this work is the empirical research and it implemented various methods.

#### 5. Conclusions

In general, I do not feel a competent reviewer to appreciate of this Ph.D. thesis. I can appreciate the used methodology and my opinion is positive. But I do not know the content of analyzed newspapers and I cannot evaluate "the new aspects of a problem of human rights in Russian journalism". But, in a final conclusion, I think that this thesis fulfills the principles required by the Russian Ph.D. system and I recommend the dissertation of M. G. Matveeva – Melnik, MA to proceed to the next stage of the PhD program.



Prof. dr hab. Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska, Ph.D.

Wrocław, August 29, 2018