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The role of the media as a parallel tool of justice for crimes against a civilian population

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Abstract

The objective of the study was to determine the forms of media involvement in justice for crimes against the civilian population. The research was conducted using the methods of systems approach, descriptive analysis, forecasting, systematic sampling and comparative method. The mass media as an institution of

civil society have ample opportunities for active participation in justice, in particular, in the detection and documentation of crimes, social support to victims, coordination of efforts of governmental and non-governmental entities. The media is an active subject in justice for crimes against the civilian population. However, their functions are not of a legal nature; they are aimed at establishing the completeness and objectivity of the facts. It is concluded that the prospects for the development of media activities envisage the model, which focuses on the detection and documentation of crimes, in particular through the latest technologies; provision of social support and opportunities for victims to express their position while facilitating the coordination of efforts between governmental and nongovernmental entities interested in justice for crimes against civilians.

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Keywords: human rights; international crimes; justice system; mass media; social networks.

El papel de los medios de comunicación como herramienta paralela de justicia para los delitos contra la población civil

Resumen

El objetivo del estudio fue determinar las formas de involucramiento de los medios de comunicación en la justicia por los crímenes contra la población civil. La investigación se realizó con el uso de los métodos de enfoque de sistemas, análisis descriptivo, pronóstico, muestreo sistemático v método comparativo. Los medios de comunicación social como institución de la sociedad civil tienen amplias oportunidades de participación activa en la justicia, en particular, en la detección y documentación de delitos, apovo social a las víctimas, coordinación de esfuerzos de entidades gubernamentales y no gubernamentales. Los medios de comunicación son un sujeto activo en la justicia por los delitos contra la población civil. Sin embargo, sus funciones no tienen naturaleza jurídica, están encaminadas a establecer la exhaustividad y objetividad de los hechos. Se concluye que las perspectivas de desarrollo de las actividades de los medios de comunicación prevén el modelo, que se centra en la detección y documentación de delitos, en particular a través de las últimas tecnologías; provisión de apoyo social y oportunidades para que las víctimas expresen su posición al tiempo que se propicia la coordinación de esfuerzos entre entidades gubernamentales y no gubernamentales interesadas en la justicia por delitos contra civiles.

Palabras clave: derechos humanos; crímenes internacionales; sistema de justicia; medios de comunicación; redes sociales

Introduction

One of the most important challenges for the world community is violation of the principles and mechanisms of global and regional security systems. National and international armed conflicts entail large-scale violations of human rights through the mass commission of crimes against the civilian population. The objectives of national and international justice in this context are diverse, as it is necessary to bring the perpetrators to justice, promote restitution and compensation for the victims of crimes.

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Fulfilment of these objectives directly depends on the quality of pre-trial procedures, first of all, the identification, collection, storage of the evidence for the purpose of its further use in court proceedings. Back in 1996, the Report on Impunity for Human Rights Violations prepared for the UN emphasized the "right to the truth." It provides that information about a crime is not only a personal right of the victim or his/her relatives, but also a collective right aimed at preventing recurrence of criminal violations of human rights (Rolston, 2020).

However, the involvement of civil society institutions in interaction with all elements of the criminal justice system is extremely urgent because of the duration and scale of armed conflicts, the number of crimes committed, and partly the limitation on the work of national law enforcement agencies in documenting them. This became possible primarily due to the position of researchers and human rights defenders, which was supported by influential mass media in the global movement for human rights and the rule of law (Lohne, 2020).

Mass media (both traditional and modern) occupy the main place among such institutions. They have a wide range of organizational, financial, and technical capabilities to be present at the scenes of crimes against the civilian population, communicate with victims and parties to conflicts.

Initiatives of traditional mass media to call to account those guilty of crimes against the civilian population can be of different scales – from special courts to the organization of public efforts to collect testimonies and other evidence. However, these practices draw attention to individual crimes (Orjuela, 2020). As regards social networks, these platforms are obviously valuable in collection, storage and presentation of the testimonies of victims and witnesses of crimes (Goldschmidt-Gjerløw and Remkes, 2019).

This corresponds with the adoption of new rules by the Council of the European Union on 25 May 2022 that will allow Eurojust to store and analyse evidence relating to international crimes against civilian population. This is especially important in combat situations, when the environment does not allow safe storage of evidence, including photos, videos, audio recordings (EU Neighbours, 2022).

At the same time, the analysis of the role of mass media in justice for crimes against the civilian population faces a number of conceptual problems.

The researchers discuss the understanding of crimes against civilian population. The current traditional approach covers war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide (United Nations, 2003). At the same time, while the legal qualification of the vast majority of such acts required a connection with an international armed conflict before, now they are an autonomous concept based on human rights. This allows criminalizing large-scale crimes both in wartime and in peacetime (Akhavan, 2008). Along with this approach, a broad one is proposed. Its supporters believe that crimes against the civilian population can also be understood as general criminal offences because of the particular severity and condemnation by the international community (Eskauriatza, 2021).

The question of involving the media in justice for crimes against the civilian population, in particular, the possibility of creating a "parallel" system of such justice, is studied from different angles. In general, such a context is connected with the fact that, in the modern understanding, criminal processes act as a form of communication and interaction between the state, victims of crimes and wider sections of the population. This is especially characteristic of international criminal justice, which generally does not appeal to harsh sanctions, is not aimed at the rehabilitation of convicts.

This is a humanitarian form of justice, where the victim occupies a central place. However, in relation to internal conflicts, traditional forms of justice are sometimes not effective in detecting and proving crimes against the civilian population. Crimes against civilians often go unpunished during non-international (internal) armed conflict. This is due to the fact that the state authorities are unable to ensure compliance with the law, although each commander must punish his subordinates in case of such crimes.

The issue of involving the media in justice for crimes against the civilian population, in particular, the possibility of creating a "parallel" system of justice, is studied from different perspectives. In general, this context is connected with the modern understanding that criminal processes act as a form of communication and interaction between the state, victims of crimes and wider population groups (Eskauriatza, 2021). This is especially characteristic of international criminal justice, which generally does not appeal to harsh sanctions, is not aimed at the rehabilitation of convicts.

This is a humanitarian form of justice, which focuses on the victim (Lohne, 2020). However, traditional forms of justice are sometimes not effective in detecting and proving crimes against the civilian population in relation to internal conflicts (Gilmartin, 2021). Crimes against civilian population often go unpunished during non-international (internal) armed conflict. The reason is the inability of public authorities to ensure compliance with the law, although commanders must punish their subordinates in case, they commit such crimes (Jöbstl, 2020).

That is why initiatives in the field of transitional justice are being advanced. The media intend to create a context in which conflicts and related crimes are discussed (Orjuela, 2020). In general, "media justice" as a parallel approach can be considered as an indicator that the legal system does not meet the needs and expectations of victims (Rae, 2020). However, the framework in which the mass media can play a role in justice for crimes against the civilian population has not been clearly determined. The reason is the ambivalence of the social perception of their activities. On the one hand, mass media sometimes manipulate public consciousness and are even used to provoke violence (Carlsvärd, 2019). It is noted that researchers and specialists in the field of justice must play an active role in making ideas of criminal justice in order to neutralize or counterbalance the influence of the media (Kania and Walsh, 2010).

On the other hand, the national or local media, whether free or tightly controlled, can be an important source of information about a large number of crimes. The experience of recent conflicts has shown that data presented in the mass media turned out to be important evidence in court (CENSS, 2019). Criminal procedure standards are much more serious than those used by journalists. Therefore, media materials must be collected, stored and analysed in accordance with these standards. Non-digital evidence should also be actively used (D'Alessandra and Sutherland, 2021).

All the foregoing urges the issues of determining the role of mass media in justice for crimes against the civilian population in the modern period. The main problem is to determine the real possibilities of mass media involvement in justice regarding crimes against the civilian population, as well as to identify the main prospects for the development of mass media involvement in justice.

1. Aim

In view of the above, the aim of this study is to compare the existing practices of involving mass media in justice for crimes against the civilian population and identify the main risks for achieving the goals of justice. This aim provided for identifying the main prospects for the development of the most effective model of media involvement in this area.

2. Methodology and methods

This study was carried out in stages according to the logic of presentation of the material in order to achieve the aim and fulfil the objectives of the research. The research involved the following stages: selection of literature; analysis of the material presented in the selected literature and evaluation of the results of these studies; identification of the current state and conceptual problems of media justice for crimes against the civilian population; determining the aim of the article; drawing of conclusions and providing practical recommendations for the development of mass media activities in the field of justice for this category of crimes; outlining the prospects for further research in this area.

This study involved international legal standards on the features of crimes that can be classified as crimes against the civilian population, as well as a generalization of the practice of media involvement in justice for this category of crimes in the context of the paradigm of media influence on criminality. This allowed determining the main prospects for the development of the most effective model of mass media involvement in justice for crimes against the civilian population.

The following methods were used in this research in order to achieve the aim and fulfil the objectives: systems approach was used to study the mass media involvement in crime control as a complete system of interaction between the state, society and criminality at the current stage; descriptive analysis was used to identify and consider the main features of different types of mass media and their role in the prevention of crimes against the civilian population depending on the type of conflicts; generalization and forecasting were used to determine the prospects for the development of the most effective model of mass media involvement in this activity; systematic sampling and the comparative method were used to select and compare the main features of widespread practices of mass media involvement in justice for crimes against the civilian population.

3. Results

The analysis of the role of mass media in justice for crimes against the civilian population provides for determining the conceptual framework of the analysis. This is why it is important to determine: a) the scope of understanding crimes against the civilian population; b) understanding mass media as a civil society institution.

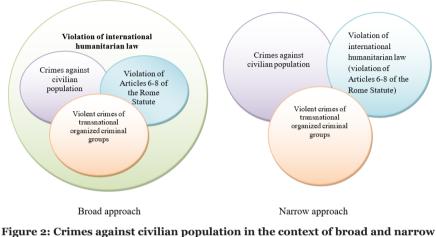
It should be noted that there are no crimes against the civilian population in international criminal law. For example, Articles 6-8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court apply to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. These actions have certain common features of the elements of crime, including: a) criminal liability is cause by a deliberate and conscious action, which is committed "inhumanly", "cruelly"; b) such an executor's assessment of his/her actions is not mandatory; c) the term "executor" is neutral regarding the guilt/innocence of a person, it only means a person who fully or partially performs actions; d) actions must mean one or more crimes, that is actions that contradict the Rome Statute or other international legal norms. Accordingly, from this point of view, crimes against the civilian population can include genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, where the victims are civilians. They are serious violations of international humanitarian law and do not require mandatory criminalization in national criminal law, which would hinder the modernization of international crimes (International Criminal Court, 2013).

This excludes the category of "illegal combatants" from the list of victims of crimes against the civilian population, which includes, in particular, members of armed groups who lose the protected status of civilians by taking an active part in hostilities (Hathaway *et al.*, 2019). This is why not all crimes under the Rome Statute are crimes against civilian population. However, the crimes against civilian population are the core of international crimes (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Correlation between crimes provided by the Rome Statute and crimes against the civilian population.

The prospects for the development of international humanitarian law as the background of international justice are an important aspect of understanding crimes against the civilian population. However, crimes against civilian population are recognized by both approaches despite the existence of broad and narrow approaches to this issue. Their inherent feature is the violation of human rights (see Figure 2). Yuriy Bidzilya, Lidiya Snitsarchuk, Yevhen Solomin, Hanna Hetsko y Liubov Rusynko-Bombyk The role of the media as a parallel tool of justice for crimes against a civilian population



approaches to the development of international humanitarian law. Source: (Eskauriatza, 2021; Carlsvärd, 2019).

At the same time, further research is required on the types of media that can play a role in justice for crimes against civilian population. In general, mass media are diversified media technologies intended to reach a wide audience through mass communication. Mass media comprise both technical and institutional methods of communication, production and distribution of news and information. The audience is offered a wide range of content and media platforms for verification of the information. Mass media is one of the most important drivers in modern culture. They reflect all the ongoing processes in society. However, another trend is also important, because they influence society on a wide range of issues from everyday life to socio-political issues. At the same time, mass media have common tasks in justice for crimes against the civilian population regardless of whether these are traditional (newspaper, television) or new (Internet platform, social network) media (see Figure 3).

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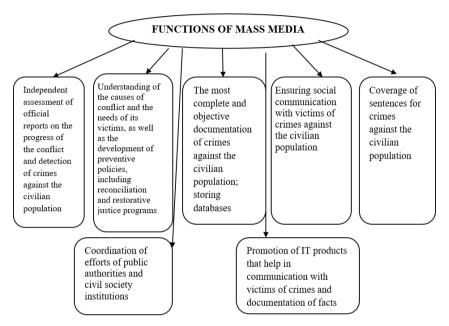


Figure 3: Functions of the mass media in justice for crimes against the civilian population. Source: (D'Alessandra and Sutherland, 2021; Gilmartin, 2021; Greer, 2017; Goldschmidt-Gjerløw and Remkes, 2019).

So, the mass media try to humanize international and national justice as much as possible and objectively cover the needs of victims of crimes in view of the nature of crimes against the civilian population as a violation of human rights.

At the current stage, there is a significant potential for the development of mass media efforts in the field of justice for crimes against the civilian population, which include the implementation of the latest technologies (Freeman, 2021; D'Alessandra and Sutherland, 2021), identification of vulnerable population groups — potential victims of crimes (Parrin *et al.*, 2022), collaboration with other subjects in the field of justice (Crimea SOS, 2022; NISS, 2022; Bachmann *et al.*, 2019) (see Figure 4). Yuriy Bidzilya, Lidiya Snitsarchuk, Yevhen Solomin, Hanna Hetsko y Liubov Rusynko-Bombyk
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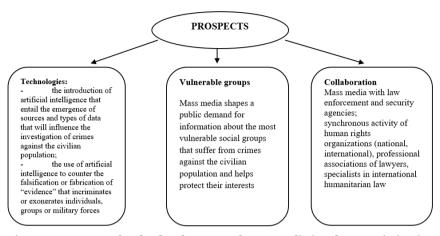


Figure 4: Prospects for the development of mass media involvement in justice for crimes against the civilian population.

In view of the foregoing, it is considered appropriate to identify the prospects of developing a model of mass media involvement in justice for crimes against the civilian population, taking into account the growth of international and domestic armed conflicts. It should be based on a broad approach to the role of mass media, which may include such blocks as: detection and documentation of crimes, in particular through the latest technologies; providing social support and opportunities for victims to express their position; coordination of efforts between government and non-government entities interested in justice for crimes against civilians.

4. Discussion

The conceptual vision of the role of mass media as a parallel tool of "justice" for crimes against the civilian population is part of the general discourse on the place of mass media in crime control and the specifics of their influence on the most socially dangerous types of behaviour. In general, the position that the mass media shape the understanding of crime and countermeasures is confirmed (Baranauskas and Drakulich, 2018).

However, such coverage does not really reflect the real state of the criminal situation. This is characteristic of all types of mass media, although traditional media distort the criminal response in general by paying a disproportionate attention to it, and social networks cover crime relatively rarely, unless it is about violent acts (Prieto Curiel *et al.*, 2020).

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In general, it is emphasized that mass media translate cultural and communication contexts that promote fear of crime on the one hand, while justifying the illegal actions of the state in fighting crime, in particular terrorizing the civilian population, on the other hand (Altheide, 2006). It is emphasized that modern governments depend on public opinion, which, in turn, depends on the mass media.

This gives the mass media extremely powerful leverage, because the very fact of discussing its application at the government level will depend on their position, not only the specific measure (Carlsvärd, 2019). The thesis that the mass media play a central role in shaping cultural ideas about crime and measures to combat it can be considered a general conclusion (Wattis, 2021). Therefore, the study of the role of mass media should be at the centre of criminological studies dealing with the problems of crime control and social order (Greer, 2017), policies in the field of justice (Baranauskas and Drakulich, 2018).

In this context, the understanding of the role of the mass media in justice for crimes against civilians remains controversial. The reason is a significant difference between the mass media in countries that have become direct victims of crimes against the civilian population to be investigated in the course of international judicial proceedings, and the mass media in other countries (Simons, 2009).

At the same time, the media are blamed for having a double standard regarding which cases should be prosecuted. As a rule, the agents of the regime deny the commission of crimes against the civilian population. If violence is recognized, it is assessed as purely defensive (Jones, 2019). This causes some scepticism in the human rights community (Simons, 2009). Moreover, the mass media appeals to the lack of interest of general public in the legal aspects of judicial proceedings (Simons, 2009).

Besides, mass media usually assess a small fragment of the conflict, sometimes only one incident, a particular crime committed during a military campaign (Bachmann *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, it is proposed to carry out a careful assessment of the use of the mass media as a parallel forum of justice, as it is appropriate to reduce the role of the mass media to the establishment of an accountability mechanism that can draw attention to the shortcomings of official institutions, measures and processes (Rae, 2020).

At the same time, it is considered more appropriate to recognize the essential role of mass media in promoting justice for crimes against the civilian population, which can be divided into limited and broad approaches.

The emphasis on the main task that the mass media should perform is positive in the limited approach. For example, researchers correctly draw attention to the algorithms for the correct documentation of crimes against the civilian population as the main professional opportunity of journalists in the context of providing evidence for further judicial proceedings (Prostir. UA, 2022). This involves the work with a list of documents that can be used in the practice of international and national courts (CENSS, 2019).

It is also considered important to promote the use of programmes for documenting crimes against the civilian population, which, for example, automatically transmit information to the International Criminal Court, which investigates the events (Prostir.UA, 2022). This vision is confirmed by the modern idea of international justice as a complex information system, where data flows from civil society reported by the media are processed and provided to law enforcement and judicial authorities (D'Alessandra and Sutherland, 2021).

It is also possible to support those researchers who emphasize the role of mass media in providing comprehensive information to the society and the world community about crimes against the civilian population (NISS, 2022).

This opens up the opportunity for mobilizing efforts to recognize crimes against the civilian population and restitution to victims, the communication of potential crimes is destroyed by organizing international campaigns in the mass media (Jones, 2019). Supporting victims of crimes against the civilian population is considered an equally important task of mass media. It implies uniting them and covering their problems (Goldschmidt-Gjerløw and Remkes, 2019) reminding society about crimes against the civilian population.

However, this is possible provided that the mass media go beyond the legitimacy of the armed conflict (Bachmann *et al.*, 2019), when their main task is to restore justice (Prostir.UA, 2022).

However, a broad approach is considered more promising, as it is based on the legitimization of justice through the recognition of the results of the work of judicial bodies as legitimate and rendering of this assessment to the society (Rosen, 2021). This is especially important for resolving issues of bringing officials of foreign states to criminal responsibility, which is extremely difficult in view of international legal customs and political considerations (Epik, 2021). The mass media involvement in justice for crimes against the civilian population allows achieving common goals for justice and civil society such as establishing justice, accountability and compensation for victims of crimes (D'Alessandra and Sutherland, 2021).

The findings of this study evidence that the media's role in shaping and providing public space for activists and victims increases when criminal justice mechanisms are considered limited. In this regard, mass media has the potential to simulate parallel justice. They determine the agenda, shape public opinion, and mobilize society for action in support of preventing human rights violations and reparation of damages to victims. The media can also influence law enforcement agencies to make them respond to criminal activity (Rae, 2020).

Conclusions

This research allows drawing a number of conclusions on the importance and directions of mass media involvement in justice for crimes against the civilian population. It was found that these crimes are one of the most dangerous international crimes that violate human rights. The mass media can fulfil a number of non-legal functions aimed at establishing justice for the victims and strict punishment for the perpetrators. At the same time, they have common tasks in justice for crimes against the civilian population regardless of whether the mass media is traditional or new.

It is proposed to develop a model of mass media involvement in justice for crimes against the civilian population with due regard to the extension of international and domestic armed conflicts. It should be based on a broad approach to the mass media role, which may include the following blocks: detection and documentation of crimes, in particular through the latest technologies; providing social support and opportunities for victims to express their position; coordination of efforts between government and non-government actors interested in justice for crimes against civilian population.

This study paves the path for developing standards for working with data covered in the mass media for their further use in international legal proceedings. Another promising area is the development of criminological studies, which deal with the mass media as subjects of the prevention of crimes against the civilian population.

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