

The Parliament's public relations in terms of political journalism

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Abstract. *While sitting at a place designated for guests in a representative hall of the Lithuanian parliament, the Italian President was smiling at the Speaker of Seimas who was sitting right in front of him and quietly waited until the three minutes dedicated to photojournalists and television cameramen under the protocol were over. When the journalists left, his wide smile vanished, and the President confided to the Speaker of the Seimas that he 'also' did not like and even hated journalists but had no other choice than get used to them and be nice because they also 'were an authority'. He agreed for his words to be translated into Lithuanian and pointed out: "A very powerful authority, unfortunately".*

This situation from the end of the 20th century is in no way an exception in terms of the relationship between the media and government even if used in this article as a case example, because the author will present some more of such examples illustrating the issues of public relations (PR) of the parliament in respect of the media. It is just that this scene is quite typical. Even the description of the media as an authority that was voiced that morning was old news since it was publicly announced as in the early as 16th century in the House of Commons of the United Kingdom when observers sitting in the press gallery were called the "fourth estate". These words of the president, who had a long experience of parliamentary work,

reflect the issue of relationship between the government and the media: politicians are constantly striving to make an influence by means of the media while the media, if it is not under the governmental control, naturally distrust politicians, their messages and alleged friendliness to journalists. The journalism, nevertheless, has been recognised as the most effective means of information since the 19th century after the periodic media systems have developed, since it has been able to reach crowds, audiences, public and is still the most effective way to satisfy the need for information about the events and personae of interest to society and therefore is of a permanent interest to political and judicial authorities. That's why the factor of the media is so important – probably the most important in systemic PR applications. That's why in our times the structures of authority responsible for PR try not only to understand the methods of journalism but also to 'integrate' into the process of journalism to become the main source and even to absorb the nature of the journalism, i.e. to become a medium between a politician and the audience. Let us suppose that social networks allow PR specialists to reach at least part of their audience directly, without using a journalist. Maybe a PR specialist needs to become a journalist then, to reincarnate?

The author of this article has a goal to discuss the interaction between the media and public relations when seen through the prism of interests of a state institution. We will use the case of the Lithuanian parliament.

Key words: journalism, the media, parliament, public relations.

Please read this: “Journalism loves to hate PR”, as Julia Hobsbawm, an expert in public communication, an author of publications, an advisor and a lecturer, has once written. “It has become the norm in the media to knock us, whether for spinning, controlling access, approving copy, or protecting clients at the expense of the truth. Yet journalism has never needed public relations more, and PR has never done a better job for the media [...]”¹ In a sense, a journalist has the right to ‘knock’ to get that necessary information from a state institution such as press releases

¹ Hobsbawm, Julia. Why journalism needs PR. In: The Guardian, 2003-11-17.

about their agenda, planned events or even reports on past events. But to describe the entire parlance or actions of a PR specialist as the behaviour 'at the expense of truth' would still be too harsh. One cannot create an effective message without having right information and data. Moreover, some sources describe this interaction between journalists and PR as an inevitable necessity of 'coexistence' which is on the other end of the spectrum of these opposing activities. Therefore, the symbiosis between these activities is actually useful to public relations of an institution and handy to journalists but only in cases when both parties aim to inform society (audience) about a certain issue and have common goals in terms of subjects and issues.

In case of executive or judicial power cooperation with the media it could be described as instrumental and necessary, but it is still hardly believable that such an open communication was permanent.

It's different in the parliament since the parliament, even when formally 'supervising' the executive power, can provide the media with knowledge and sources (such as its investigation commission or any committee) in search of which the parliament *also* is. In other words, there is an important factor making the media to anticipate a more open cooperation with PR specialists of parliamentary institutions in comparison to spokespersons of other governmental institutions. But the truth is that in Lithuania, when executive power or law enforcement institutions receive an enquiry from the parliament (parliamentary investigation commission), they always feel the need to provide the media with their own interpretation of such actions, i.e. politicians are interfering into the activities of the professional staff. Then the journalists start criticising the initiative of legislators to investigate any presumed violations or even offences of state institutions or their officers. Doris A. Graber started the chapter of her book about the media power and government control by telling an interesting case when in 1987 the Congress committees were investigating the circumstances of a secret mission carried out abroad, but some congressmen who

felt disappointed in the way this information was presented in the media suggested “that television experts should have been hired by the legislators to advise them how to use the medium to best advantage”². Certainly, to convince the audience, each politician must know how the media work and how one should communicate with the media, even if they don’t like or even hate journalists.

In political theories, separation of powers is understood as one of the principles of a transparent democratic government. The “fourth estate” is attractive in its ability to reach all three most important powers and to change the public opinion about them. It’s not realistic to gain full power in democracy, but the striving of three powers to gain its support and favour compares to the striving to enhance the capacities of political power, to gain an advantage against the opponents and to maintain an attractive image in the public sphere. The theory of political communication suggests that journalism has an important impact on politics (not only in terms of the media as a source of information but also in terms of competition among political ideas) since it transforms the political agenda (the one of a political institution or a politician) into a schedule of issues tackled by the media, which allows the public to judge the political decisions and personalities. For these reasons, wise politicians smile in front of the journalists not just for three minutes but for decades, and usually avoid expressing their genuine opinions about the ‘fourth estate’ since they don’t trust the interests and methods of the media in acquiring information about the ideas or decisions of the government.

The media and journalism, i.e. how the news are created, act as a never tiring critic since the search for information makes them not only critically look at the decisions that are under consideration and the behaviour of politicians, but also to make this criticism available to society in accordance with the standards set by certain media.

² Graber, A. Dorris. *Mass Media and American Politics*. Third ed., 1989. P. 1.

The 'universal curiosity' which is characteristic of audiences³ and journalistic activities are the closely interrelated concepts when they are each other's foundation. To satisfy social curiosity is the first concern of a publisher, especially in the areas of life that have a critical influence on society changes but are not directly available to citizen groups, for example, politics, entertainment business, professional sports, criminal life.

In case of the Lithuanian parliament, PR specialists were challenged with the uneasy task of grasping the role of politicians in the schedule of the media issues within the last 10 to 12 years. It is enough to remember that from the beginning of the century some members of the Lithuanian Seimas were trying to reconcile their political and entertainment activities to gain more popularity. It was especially obvious in the *Auksiniai Svogūnai* (The Golden Onions) TV show broadcasted by the LNK channel on the national scale⁴ on April 1 every year where the funniest and often dumbest political actions were not only ridiculed but also awarded, even if in a funny way. Strange as it may seem, famous Lithuanian politicians gladly took part in this show not only as an audience but also as its active participants ready to sing or to entertain public in any other way, even if they had no aptitude for that. They even were able to find time for rehearsals before the show, instead of meeting with their electorate or working on legislation drafts.

The **second situation** is from the beginning of this century. A public services employee comes to the office of the Speaker of the Lithuanian parliament for an appointment that was agreed in advance and is told that "we are sorry but we can't receive you now". After a short pause she hears an explanation as if it was the most natural thing, "The speaker is getting ready for "The Onions", he's in a rehearsal now". At that time, everyone in Lithuania knew that the *Prima Aprilis* TV show was the best

³ Keliuotis, Juozas. *Psichologiniai spaudos pagrindai (1930) / Žurnalistikos paskaitos*. VDU, 2000. P. 59.

⁴ The entertainment show Golden Onions by the LNK TV channel, the most watched TV show in Lithuania since 2001 (e.g., 33% in 2002).

entertainment of April 1, targeted at ridiculing politicians. The answer of the officer of political confidence shouldn't make us smile, tough. It demonstrates how the circle of actions closes, which consists of time, place and relations with *target* audiences: one who reveals a 'public secret' about the whereabouts of a politician should be convinced that the show rehearsal is absolutely justifiable because 'everyone is watching "The Onions"'. Now, try to imagine: if 'everyone is watching basketball', then the speaker of the parliament is allowed to exercise. Or if 'everyone is watching Eurovision'⁵, he might as well just go and watch it, etc. An assistant who helps a politician to create the personal image builds the career by coordinating his agenda. In this case, based on the official agenda, the civil service employee had to be received for her appointment while the unofficial but actual agenda paved the road to the stage of "The Onions".

Such an "integration" of some parliament members into the media (TV) programme schedule made them better known to the public but disagreed with their own publicly declared concern about the higher society's trust in the Seimas (in comparison with other state and public institutions). On the other hand, such fame contributed to a different than expected effect: in 2008, representatives of the entertainment business created a new political party and were elected to the parliament. For one term.

The PR specialists of the Seimas office who serves the Lithuanian parliament might think that the cooperation with the media is important in the efforts to inform society about legislations to be adopted and various parliamentary events such as debates, hearings, meetings, and conferences. But for some parliament members, seeking popularity in the forms of entertainment imposed by the media is more important. I would name it as an issue of post-soviet thinking: legislators are entertaining the public (or having fun with the public)

⁵ The Eurovision Song Contest is a television song contest organised by the European Broadcasting Union since 1956.

and satisfying commercial interests of the media while at the same time they completely forget about their direct responsibilities. This article does not question who is related to the evaluation of the freedom of press⁶ since the situation in terms of the freedom of press was evaluated as 'satisfactory', but this rating should become even lower due to at least one factor which will be presented later in the fourth scene.

The PR specialist of the parliament is also trying to ensure good relations with the political media. One of the main objectives presented by the administration of the parliament to PR specialists in 1997, which was the guiding principle in entrenching the Lithuanian parliament as an open institution, was to ensure journalists' good working conditions in the parliament and to provide them with information about the future and present parliamentary events. These objectives seem to be rather clear, but the goals are much more complicated for a few reasons:

- when coming to the Parliament, a journalist may have various tasks imposed by an editor (editorial office) which are not related to legislative agenda;
- the media are naturally critical of the political power;
- the process of parliamentary events, legislation especially, calls for a deep understanding of issues, while the media (just as users) need some easy-to-understand information products and have a tendency to simplify the issues so that their controversies or conflicts are obvious.

This is a communication 'noise' in itself, which should be anticipated by both PR specialists and a MP, especially if the latter wants to stay in the office for longer than just one term. The said factors make us look for an answer to the question: "What should the relationship between the parliament, the structures of a parliamentary institution who are directly responsible for PR tasks and the media be?" The issues discussed in the previous section suggest that the problem of relationship between the

⁶ 2013 World press freedom index: Lithuania's situation ranked 33rd as 'satisfactory'.

parliament and journalism arises out of the difference in how the legislator and the media understand their interest in informing the population about political decisions and shaping the public opinion about such decisions, even if both parties naturally seek for a mutual influence. The main condition in ensuring a normal cooperation between the media and the PR staff is the independence of the PR staff from the influence of politicians and political structures such as fractions, committees, parliamentary administration.

In terms of providing parliament members with information, the media are not just a source. They also try to influence their minds, including political consciousness. Earlier, in the 20th century, i.e. before the spread of the electronic media, parliamentary reporters could agree among themselves on how they were going to present the key facts if only for making their bosses to believe in the authenticity of the represented facts. For example, once, when the new parliamentary coalition was negotiating ministerial posts in a room of the parliament, journalists who represented two major dailies decided not to wait for the end of the negotiation and agreed to 'give' two minister posts to the minor party, and that's how they presented the news to their editors. This was published in the morning by the dailies, and the politicians who failed to reach the agreement over the night had no choice but to believe that this was actually their 'agreement'. The diversity of the electronic media prevents journalists from such manipulations with information because the news, when published, can be actually corrected, they are made publicly available by politicians themselves, one way or another, they are commented on in social networks, and this way of expression becomes one of the ways of political competition.

The technology now provides journalists with the improved ways of communication with the parliament: journalists can watch not only the Seimas sittings over the Internet, but also press conferences and ask questions over the phone; they can browse the Seimas database of legislation, find the latest draft laws and draw



The leader of the Lithuanian parliament Vytautas Landsbergis among journalists (13/11/1997, photograph courtesy of Gintaras Mačiulis)

up publications, send enquiries to politicians or the Seimas office staff by email. The accredited journalists receive preliminary event information and reports from locations of events (full information or, optionally, based on their interests, e.g., from a parliamentary sitting or based on their request specified in the accreditation form). The above ways of communication are provided for in the respective legislation, first of all in the accreditation procedure established by the Board of the Seimas⁷ which was drawn up and improved by referring to the Law on Provision of Information to the Public and the Law on the Right to Information of State and Municipal Institutions and Establishments of the Republic of Lithuania.

⁷ The description of the procedure for the accreditation of representatives of institutions responsible for drafting and/or disseminating public information in the Office of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. Resolution No. SV-S-198 of the Board of the Seimas of 03/04/2009.

In part due to the above factors, the number of accredited persons, i.e. representatives of various types of the media, in the parliament has been decreasing. In 2001, the press service of the Office of the Seimas accredited 326 journalists and 58 representatives of other media and PR (organisations)⁸ while in 2013, 273 persons in total were accredited in the Communications Department of the Office of the Seimas. In other words, after evaluating their need for information and ways to receive it (Internet, email, telephone), the media workers decide if they actually are interested in physically taking part in parliamentary events and observing them.

Accreditation has its advantages since it ensures access not only to briefings drafted by parliamentary PR specialists but also to various parliamentary events, meetings with politicians and advisers; moreover, the accreditation license issued by the Seimas service opens the doors of the institutions of executive power. Thus, in reality, a democratic parliament ensures access to the most necessary information, but the behaviour of individual political structures and politicians and the parliamentary institution as a whole with regards to questions of the media and their individual institutions may vary: it might be favourable, contradictory, unfavourable, i.e. determined by a wish to hide (to not disclose) an important information.

The cooperation of the structural departments of the parliament, especially of the PR department of the Seimas, is important in three aspects.

First, the consistent provision of clearly formulated messages is the most efficient way to disseminate information of national and international significance.

Second, the interest of journalists in getting an important information helps in disclosing the political subjects that are relevant to society (or certain audiences) but are not well known, or are kept such, by certain interest groups (including politicians).

⁸ Accredited in the Seimas. In: Seimo kronika. Metų apžvalga, V., 2001. Seimo spaudos tarnyba, 2002. P. 171–182.

Third, the dissemination of information in the public sphere can be controlled even when choosing a preferred subject (issue) since journalists show interest in a highlighted item (event) of the parliamentary agenda. It might be achieved that all the most important and competing media channels report the same news on their front pages (or on 'prime time' television) in a similar way. Such reporting, no matter how badly criticized by the journalism theory, is called 'pack journalism' by PR specialists and is welcomed in the PR sphere.

Therefore, we first need to decide what we actually can call a parliamentary reporter: the one who is not only charged by the editor with the task to cover a certain subject but who also is interested in constantly monitoring the parliamentary agenda and covering subjects of one's own choice. Even if I have pointed out quite high numbers of the accredited media representatives, I would like to emphasise that only a few of them could be called creators of parliamentary journalism: these are news writers (reporters) and analysts who constantly observe political events in the Seimas and publish various writings (messages, news reports, commentaries) in dailies, news portals, radio and television broadcastings. Such journalists might be interested in completing the task they were charged with by the editor or in *discovering an issue* in a legislative institution and coining a publication as relevant 'hard' news.

Usually news agencies choose parliament reporters from those political reporters ready for their work who already know the structure and characteristics of the work of a political institution, have necessary relations, are able to find the sources that meet their needs for obtaining information about the future decisions of various political powers or their representatives (officers) as early as possible. The PR staff should provide parliament reporters with a help that could be understood as services to information users (audience) and as the activities useful to Lithuanian politics. The cooperation of PR specialists with the media in the provision of necessary, coordinated information services in line with strategic planning actually is one of their direct functions, especially when we talk about a structural division of an institution, not about

officers of political confidence, e.g. rapporteurs of political groups or officials of the parliament administration. Communication specialists must be able to set the priority tasks that might be important not only to a news agency and its audience but to the dissemination of democracy and parliamentarism in general. If earlier PR specialists could be 'directors' of news priorities, today they must take a broader context into account, which is created by various participants of an event, such as politicians, institutions, viewers, who communicate in social networks.

The third situation. When the Secretary General of the NATO announced about planning a visit to Vilnius, the Russian public television ORT⁹ asked the Office of the Lithuanian parliament for the possibility to broadcast the briefing of this official, which was planned to take part in the Seimas after his meeting with the Speaker of the Seimas directly during their main news broadcast *Vremya* (Time) on 17/06/1998. It would have been much simpler to recommend that television just to report the answers to the questions, but the staff of the Office of the Seimas recognised that it was a good opportunity for Lithuania to directly report their aspirations on becoming a member of the North Atlantic Alliance. Thus, the meeting of Javier Solana and Vytautas Landsbergis, the Speaker of the Seimas, which took part in the evening as per agenda, had to be 'framed' very precisely so that it was completed on time and that the guest appeared in front of the microphone stand at 8 pm, down to the second accuracy. At that time, the said news broadcast was watched by millions, and the fact that Russian television regarded these news as the leading news ("the NATO Secretary General visiting Vilnius") was an important sign showing that Russian politicians are genuinely interested in the striving of the Baltic states to become fully established members of the Western world were all major decisions were made. Therefore, the right of the first question was granted to the Russian journalists Liudmila Lvova, and the answer of Solana concerning the situation in the Central Europe to the Russian and the

⁹ OPT (Rus.)

whole world was broadcasted directly from the Lithuanian parliament. The Press Service of the Seimas was criticised even before the event was over “why a Russian and not a Lithuanian reporter was granted the right of the first question”, in other words, some politicians had quite a narrow understanding of the ‘image’ concept. Therefore, we simply have to make a reference to the last question of one of the Lithuanian journalists to the Secretary General of NATO about Lithuania having a nuclear weapon. This question was just an ‘explosive’ of the immaturity of that journalist, and it clearly showed on the face of Solana but, after all, the last question is not the first and not the most important one.

PR specialists of the parliament, acting as agents between their institution and journalists, also face an issue of internal communication. This is one of the most prominent issues of political communication caused by the different understanding of the functions of the PR staff of any state institution. After all, even in each individual case when a journalist asks for information, the opinion of politicians, officials and the media on the efficacy of these functions or the purpose of certain duties or units might differ. Differently from a business establishment, the state authority *must* provide information which is of interest not only to authorities but also to the media. Parliament reporters, who have access to various sources, can usually interpret this as a service provided in extremely important cases: when a news agency has no access to a certain video information and might ask for a recording from the Office of the Seimas; when they don’t understand the draft state budget (or funds of a narrower sample) or expenses and ask for answers to certain questions (for a more accurate information); when they are aware of a certain event, thing or issue and would like to get some proof (to see a document, a location, or a person). And the parliament shouldn’t have an issue with providing access to information about the planned or completed works or decisions made that were financed from the state budget, unless they are related to the state security, legal actions or investigations or military secrets and unless they are in conflict with the documents regulating the parliamentary procedures. Unfortunately, a



This information in the daily was based only on the report of the parliament since journalists did not have an opportunity to listen to the dialogue between Queen Elisabeth II and the Deputy Speaker of the Seimas:

“In the exhibition consisting of four parts, Her Majesty was interested in the circumstances of creation of the First Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania when it was adopted in Vilnius Seimas in 1529 where it was drafted at the initiative of the rulers of Lithuania. In the room of the modern parliamentarism (“The First Republic”), the Queen noticed a picture of Colonel Ward, an authorised representative of the Royal Government and an official guest of the Constitutive Seimas of 1920, and listened to Mr. Česlovas Juršėnas explaining the role of the Constitutive Seimas and especially about the participation of women in the parliamentary politics of Lithuania (from 1920 to 1926). The Queen was also interested in the tragic fate of the leaders of the Lithuanian Seimas in 1940 when some of them were arrested and others were deported by the occupation regime (Aleksandras Stulginskis, Vytautas Petrulis, Leonas Bistras, etc.). In the exhibition, all information was presented in illustrations; therefore, it was easy to note the essential facts of the development of our parliamentary state. Mr. Česlovas Juršėnas noted it was obvious that it wasn't an accident that Seimas was included into the visit programme of Her Majesty. The history of our parliament also started in the Middle Ages, in the form of estate meetings”.

The Queen was interested in three things in the exhibition. *Lrytas.lt*, 17/10/2006. (Photograph courtesy of Tomas Juodaitis).

public servant – communication professional – may be negatively perceived by other staff of the same institution as a person ‘serving journalists’. This attitude can, and must be, changed, first of all, only by the leader of the parliament office, and not by directions or lecturing but by implementing the principle that the PR activity plan is an important matter for the entire institution (when speaking about our Seimas or the parliament of any other democratic country).

Legislation reveals social, political, cultural, and legal issues and different attitudes towards their resolution. It is these contradictions that are intentionally pointed out to journalists by advisers, parliament members and parliament PR staff: each legislation procedure that is complete after adopting a law reflects formal actions but ‘disguise’ the questionable characteristics that may contribute to the efficacy of a legal act and decisions that were made based on that act. For example, when in 2004 the media made public¹⁰ information about reservations suggested by the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime with regards to liability for information found in personal computers related to pornography¹¹, the new amendments were immediately registered

¹⁰ *‘Seimas Committee on Foreign Affairs and Committee on Legal Affairs proposed Seimas to ratify the Convention on Cybercrime with a reservation excluding criminal liability for use of pornographic production depicting children for personal purposes without a purpose of its dissemination. It was proposed that use of child pornography for personal purposes was not to be criminalised. [...] The Chairman of The Committee on Legal Affairs Aloyzas Sakalas told BNS [news agency] that such reservation was offered in fear that innocent people could be held liable due to criminalisation of such actions. “If anyone sends a pornographic image to your computer without your knowledge and then reports you, you will end up in jail”, said the Chairman [...]’.* BNS, Delfi.lt, 16/01/2004.

¹¹ *‘In accordance with Article 42 and Paragraph 4 of Article 9 of the Convention, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania hereby declares that: (1) The Republic of Lithuania shall reserve the right not to apply paragraph 1, sub-paragraph D, of Article 9 of the Convention to the the extent it’s related to obtaining the production of pornographic content depicting children for personal use without a purpose of distributing such production; (2) The Republic of Lithuania shall reserve the right not to apply paragraph 1, sub-paragraph E, of Article 9 of the Convention; (3) The Republic of Lithuania shall reserve the right not to apply paragraph 2, sub-paragraph B, of Article 9 of the Convention [...]’.* The draft law on ratification of the Convention on Cybercrime IXP-3098, 19/12/2003.

by a member of the Seimas¹², and proposals were again discussed by the Seimas Committee on Foreign Affairs¹³. We may only presume that without journalists reporting the suggested reservations, they might have been approved and the issue would have only received reactions when it was already too late, just as it happened with the amendments of the Law on Documents and Archives that were approved by the Seimas later that year¹⁴. The latter legal act came into effect on 01/01/2005, and only then it gained an interest of various concerned groups such as researchers, cultural workers, and journalists¹⁵. It was just that journalists didn't find the amendments of the said law 'interesting' while they were still in discussion, and they decided 'not to make a big deal out of it'. In

¹² *Jonas Čekuolis, a member of Seimas Liberal and Centre Union, proposed the Seimas to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime without any reservations in the area of child pornography proposed by the Government. This proposal was registered at the Seimas Secretariat of Plenary Sessions on Tuesday. With adoption of the amendments proposed by Čekuolis, Lithuania would undertake to apply strict liability for deliberate actions related to production promoting child pornography in all cases [...]*. Čekuolis proposed to eliminate any exclusions in the area of child pornography. Balsas.lt, 19/01/2004. Based on the communication: Čekuolis proposed to eliminate any exclusions in the area of child pornography. Communication of the Seimas Liberal and Centre Union, 19/01/2004. Access: http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/w5_show?p_r=1754&p_d=30664&p_k=1.

¹³ *"[...] Decision of the Committee: 1. To approve the draft law improved by the Committee. 2. To propose the Committee on Legal Affairs to take into consideration the proposal of the Vice-Minister of Justice Gintaras Švedas and to make amendments to the version of Article 309 of the Criminal Code in accordance to the draft law improved by the Committee on Foreign Affairs".* The Seimas Committee on Foreign Affairs. The conclusion of the primary committee on the Draft law on ratification of the Convention on Cybercrime (IXP-3098 (2)eS). 21 January 2004.

¹⁴ The Law on Documents and Archives of the Republic of Lithuania No. IX-2084, 30/03/2004.

¹⁵ *'Famous cultural and society activists and historians address the President Valdas Adamkus and the Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas with a plea to take all measures to revoke as soon as possible the amendments of the Law on Archives that came into effect on the 1st of January this year and are limiting access to KGB documents, and to draw up the law on the use of archival documents that would be in line with the practices of civilized countries [...]*'. Cultural activists and historians are against the amendments of the Law on Archives. Elta, Delfi.lt, 27/01/2005.

other words, there are cases when journalists accredited for work in the parliament are on the lookout for some “bad news” instead of helping to raise awareness about an arising issue since it is the conflict that “draws attention”. On the other hand, through cooperation with parliamentary reporters, PR specialists may be able to find out about political and economic priorities and ‘public’ relations of a certain news agency; it is just enough to offer them an interesting subject, and sometimes the editor is the one telling a reporter to drop a chosen ‘issue’.

On the one hand, journalists must use the methods that make the form and content to look more attractive, and this usually annoys at least part of their audience, including politicians, even if the priority is given to the needs of users in all spheres of life (unless the user is tricked). When PR specialists know why they are preparing information about parliamentary events, they probably also know who are their readers or viewers they are appealing to. On the other hand, a PR professional (civil servant) sees a representative of the external media as an agent who works for a certain audience, thus the efficacy of such media should be taken into account. Besides, the mass audience deserves a critical look in the context of modern information and the information provision potential, because it was already noticed that its attention is first of all drawn when speaking about:

- Sex.
- Death (or violence).
- Money.
- Power.

It is especially so when an average consumer – not a journalist or information analyst – perceives entire media production as a form of entertainment. Therefore, a journalist who is looking for a conflict, sensation, some exclusive event, especially with a camera, will not concentrate on every item of the agenda (including international subjects). First of all, it is impossible due to the number of events in the parliament and a capital city. Second, various media have various priorities. Third, when creating an information product, journalists will also use informal parliamentary sources.

The diversity of political sources has a huge influence on the subject variety of parliamentary journalism since the sources vary from PR specialists who provide written and oral communications to the other staff of the institution of the parliament and politicians. The sources could be interpreted twofold:

- a source as a messenger¹⁶;
- a source as an expert.

Both journalists and PR specialists use the same criteria to evaluate the efficacy of the sources. A civil servant who needs to make certain parliamentary information public can choose the form and content of a communication. He or she just needs to remain impartial when choosing the sources since activities of civil servants cannot, and must not, serve any political power and/or manipulate information. The interaction between the political source and a journalist is that of political communication: a politician may become a source for a journalist when, in seeking friendliness from the media, the discloses information about the actions or plans of colleagues and political rivals. In other words, a 'source' can choose a journalist. Such a behaviour of politicians does not obligate journalists to be uncritical as regards each and every parliament member and official; quite on the contrary, because such 'friendliness' of journalists could be easily noticed not only by editors but also by readers and viewers. Of course, with time, journalists who have been accredited longest and know parliament members best know their beliefs, characters, connections and thus can predict their behaviour or even the roles of certain politicians (experts of certain subjects) or officials (experts of certain issues) in choosing a subject for a publication. Of course, a parliament member can 'befriend' a journalist in a way that may seem shocking even to bureaucrats. For example, when an official opens the door to the room of a chairman of a certain committee, she finds a journalist sitting in the chair of that politician, talking to him in a very informal way and

¹⁶ In this case, a whistleblower could be a source of a journalist.

encouraging him “to feel free and just to discuss” the things with the official. No wonder, since in the evening of that same day the chairman of the parliamentary committee is going to take part in a television show hosted by that journalist. The issue of interaction between the source and the journalists is very well depicted by a rather brutal case when a state institution is literally attacking the media, even if it claims simply performing its duty.

This is **the fourth situation** which is especially significant in terms of democracy. On 07/11/2013, the officers of the Lithuanian Special Investigation Service (SIS) apprehended and escorted out of the building of the Parliament a journalist of the Baltic News Service (BNS) with a purpose of questioning her about the source that was of interest to SIS¹⁷ and that was related to a report about the warrant of the State Security Department (SSD) warning Lithuanian political institutions about potential attacks against politicians¹⁸. This case should be seen as exclusive for three reasons: (1) the journalist was apprehended while doing her direct work, therefore, the question arises if in democratic society a journalist could be threatened due to the features of the journalistic work (connections with sources); (2) the SIS agents arrested a media reporter right in the building of the parliament when that reporter did not violate any procedures of the parliament and

¹⁷ “The actions of the officers provoked outrage when after questionings in the SIS office a series of searches were carried out in the home of Jūratė Damulytė, editor-in-chief of the division of Lithuanian news. *After the questioning her deputy Jūratė Skėrytė was escorted by the officers to Seimas to get her computer and then back to the questioning. Computers of some other BNS journalists that were used directly for their work were also taken*. Kvedaraitė, Vilija. ‘If they think that it’s their easiest way to investigating this case, they should think twice’, said the head of BNS about the actions of SIS. Fm99.lt, 08/11/2013.

¹⁸ “The State Security Department (SSD) has warned that Russia is preparing new active information attacks. The heads of the state and part of the parliament members were warned about the possible surge of disinformation about President Dalia Grybauskaitė and other high officials of the state [...]’. SSD warns: Russia is about to hit Lithuania and President Dalia Grybauskaitė. BNS and *Lrytas.lt* info. *Lrytas.lt*, 31/10/2013 12:26, updated 31/10/2013 15:24.

hardly posed any threat to society (or surroundings); it should also be noted that officers or the VIP Protection Department who guarded the building granted the SIS representatives access to the building without even informing the leader of the Office of the Seimas about the actions of the SIS¹⁹; (3) the predatory behaviour with a media (news agency) worker just shows the attitude of the institutions that allowed such measures to be taken towards the work of journalists and the twisted perception of the role of journalism in democratic society.

Journalists have no immunity protecting them against arrests, but when working they provide information about life events; therefore, we call the decision to ‘extract’ a journalist from her workplace brutal. Immunity is granted to the parliament members who can protest the arrest of a journalist, but no member of legislative power in the Lithuanian Seimas did it, even when the reasons were clarified. Only later, the decision was made to demand an explanation from the SIS and for the Commission for Parliamentary Scrutiny of Criminal Intelligence to investigate the matter. This case only shows that the Lithuanian media are lacking part of the freedom of speech process. The media here are unprotected against prosecution for the freedom of speech since it may be, and is, vulnerable in two aspects: criminal and financial. After considering the reaction of journalists (even if it wasn’t very widespread), the politicians offered some legislation amendments: on 19 November 2013, the Seimas accepted the proposals of the President

¹⁹ “After a scandalous leak of information from the State Security Department (SSD), the Seimas made a racket about security. The officer of the Special Investigation Service (SIS) who was caring out the pre-trial investigation was admitted to the Seimas to collect the computer of the BNS journalist Jūratė Skėrytė without any permit and without the knowledge of the Seimas Chancellor Jonas Milerius. This situation provoked the outrage of the parliament members, [...] on Tuesday they demanded to find out who and how allowed the SIS officer who escorted the journalist to enter the building of the Seimas [...]”. The SIS officer was admitted into the building by security guards as instructed by the head of the VIP Protection Department. 15min.lt, 14/11/2013.

for discussion²⁰, and in December the Speaker of the Seimas presented a draft related to criminal liability for the defamation of a person in the media²¹. In reality, it does not offer any improvements to the media system but looks more like a competition among politicians in their effort to be more likeable by the media and the public. The media system needs the financially and legally based normal functioning to be ensured, starting with the regional press. The author is sure that the activities of the parliament's PR specialists should cover not only taking care of the journalists' working conditions in the parliament and their provision of information but also the provision of information about the issues of journalism in Lithuania, if not to the parliament, then at least to its board. The author is also sure that the board of the leaders of parliamentary groups and the leader of the parliament meet regularly, i.e. annually, with representatives of the media, especially regional, since this could help to better understand the issues of the media system and to improve the legislation.

The view through at a section of at least two triangles (theoretical 'message–sender–recipient' and practical 'politician 1–media–politi-

²⁰ “On Tuesday, the Seimas started discussing amendments concerning the protection of journalist sources proposed by President Dalia Grybauskaitė. [...] The head of the state suggested that draft amendments to the Law on Providing Information to the Public and the Code of Criminal Procedure were heard urgently but the Seimas didn't approve of that. Only 7 members of the parliament voted in favour of the urgent procedure, 16 were against, and 60 abstained [...]”. The Seimas started working on amendments concerning the protection of journalist sources. *Kasdien.lt*, 19/11/2013 12:50.

²¹ ‘Article 154. Defamation. 1. A person who distributed misleading information about another person stating that the latter committed a crime shall be penalised. 2. A person shall be liable for acts provided for herein only when a complaint is filed by a victim or his/her authorised representative or when the prosecution's demand-letter is received’. The draft law on the title of Chapter XXII, the amendment of Article 154 and declaring Articles 155, 232 and 290 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Lithuania null and void. The Official Gazette, 2000, No. 89-2741. 23/12/2013. Provided by Loreta Graužinienė.

cian 2', when politicians start communicating through the media, not directly) allows seeing the issue of the communication of powers that was already discussed, the role of the media when it is able to demonstrate the power of its own understanding and, finally, the style of communications intended for the media.

Members of the parliament, just as other politicians, can express their opinions in the Lithuanian online news portals (it is one of the media solutions determined by evaluating the role of social networks in political communication). Thus, the modern media interprets politicians not only as a source for journalistic work but also as a direct message sender who is able to contribute to the information product created by the media and published in a respective column, e.g., in the news portal Delfi.lt. This is what Renata Matkevičienė wrote about such expression of politicians as authors in the column "As seen by politicians": "An impression is made that [...] provides politicians with an opportunity to express their opinions, interpretations of political events or decisions made, actions taken by supplementing or denying the presentations of certain subjects in the general media agenda"²². And such a politician truly looks like a 'fellow' of the media; his or her opinion expressed in the newspaper as a work of an author may represent his or her beliefs, but it is not necessarily the beliefs of a political organisation and especially the parliament (or its part). This is an opportunity for political expression, especially in terms of competition. Therefore, such a platform provides an opportunity for expression and becomes a sphere for political audience. But the media's efforts to profit from political opinions and their propaganda are a completely different story. At the beginning of this century, for quite a time, the weekly magazine *Veidas* tried to present some politicians (MPs) as authors by providing them with the arena for expression and not referring to it as a political

²² Matkevičienė, Renata. Lietuvos internetinės žiniasklaidos konstruojamo politinio diskurso kaita [Changes in the Political Discourse Constructed by the Lithuanian Internet Media]. *In: Informacijos mokslai*. 2012, 59. P. 75. ISSN 1392-0561.

advertising, even if in reality there were paid articles (some were paid from the account of the Office of the parliament). This issue refers to the issue of values which never cease to be relevant and which always must be reflected in the media, directly or indirectly, in terms of public discourse.

Journalists representing news agencies follow a certain definition of values which is also reflected in their presentation of subjects. These values do not change on their own, without the dialogue between a legislator and the media or a legislator and the electorate; their examination in terms of various aspects (interpretation), dissemination of opinions, discussion about norms and draft legislation only create a presumption that the democratic Lithuania has something that, allegedly, “didn’t exist before”²³ or “shouldn’t exist”²⁴. Those drafting and issuing legislation also take an active part in this process of publicity depending on what electorate they represent, and their relationship to values can be soon disclosed in the media by expressing attitudes towards issues and values in general²⁵.

²³ “... A gay or not a gay, that’s one of the fundamental questions of the 21st century. It’s been one of the most important questions in the societies around the globe in the past decades always ending up with heated discussions in the Western world and drawing in people who usually detest politics (in Lithuania) or negotiations concerning nuclear weapon (USA)... Discussions about homosexual families were mostly taking place not in the Seimas but in separate groups. They are bound, nevertheless, to reach the Seimas sooner or later, especially when they have taken over the media for quite a while now”. Jachimavičius, Karolis. Aš myliu gėjus [I love gays]. Apžvalga.eu. 20/06/2012.

²⁴ “Ayatollah Javadi-Amoli has blamed homosexuals for spread of aids and says pro-gay politicians are lower than animals, wrote Guardian.co.uk. [...] Javadi-Amoli says politicians adopting pro-gay laws are lower than animals: “Even animals ... dogs and pigs don’t engage in this disgusting act [homosexuality], but yet they [western politicians] pass laws in favour of them in their parliaments“. Iranian cleric: homosexuals are lower than dogs and pigs. Delfi.lt, 19/04/2012 11:05.

²⁵ “A group of PMs proposed to institute that criticising homosexuality and efforts to persuade to change sexual orientation are not deemed discrimination or bullying. They proposed to add a provision to the Criminal Code stating that “criticising sexual behaviour or sexual practices, criticising or discussing beliefs or attitudes or efforts to persuade to change such behaviour, practices, beliefs or attitudes should not be deemed bullying, disdain, instigation

The changing forms of the journalism not only allow 'to return' to the genre of a daily *blog* but also to influence the perception of the status of a journalist and the profession. The journalism already covers not only political analysts, which isn't anything special, but, first of all, bloggers. That was decided by the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania in 2009²⁶ after considering recommendations of the media experts, documents of the Council of Europe, the need for the free, unhindered journalistic activity, even if in 2007 the Office of the Seimas refused to grant accreditation to one of the bloggers, and this decision was appealed in court. The parliaments PR should also be understood as an opportunity for the direct observation of parliamentary sittings since the disregard of the person's right and striving to comment on parliamentary events would distort the purpose of this activity and the meaning of representation.

of hate, discrimination or instigation of discrimination". This amendment was registered by conservatives Irena Degutienė, Rytas Kupčinskas, Vytautas Juozapaitis, representatives of the Labour Party Dangutė Mikutienė and Gediminas Jakavonis, social democrat Edvardas Žakaris, liberal Eugenijus Gentvilas, the representative of the Lithuanian Polish election campaign Jaroslavas Narkevičius and the representative of the political group "Drąsos kelias" Algirdas Patackas. The MPs explained their decision to promote this amendment on the proposal of social organisations so that 'expressed criticism or remark with regards to sexual orientation is not identified as discrimination, bullying, instigation of hate, harassment or libel'. "The past few years witnessed an increase in the number of petitions for criminal lawsuits based on Article 170 of the Criminal Code for any negative judgement and comment with regards to groups of people or persons belonging to such groups", explained the interpretative document to the amendment. Article 170 of the Criminal Code provides for sanctions against people who publicly harassed, stigmatised, instigated hate or discrimination towards a group of people or a person belonging to such group due to gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, language, origin, socio economic status, religion, believes or opinions. The group of PMs claim that by adding the suggested provision to the Criminal Code, constitutional right of the citizens to their beliefs and their free expression will be protected." Some of the members of the Seimas suggest that the criticism of homosexuality should not be considered discrimination. BNS and Lrytas.lt info. 11/06/2013 17:03.

²⁶ Judgement of the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania on behalf of the Republic of Lithuania of 20/04/2009. Administrative case No. A⁴⁴⁴-70/2009.

Conclusions

In terms of communication, today the entire parliament can be construed as the media since messages are distributed not only from the main stand of the parliament. Even if democratic laws do not ensure the possibility for the structures of political and judicial power to become direct publishers of the periodical media, they also do not prevent them from being information providers and even obligate them; therefore, when providing information about laws, the institution of the parliament and events in the parliament, due to the potential offered by technologies the PR specialists can choose from a variety of channels, ways and instruments to inform about the work of a legislator in terms of both the current and the historical aspects. This ensures the openness of the parliament. The parliamentary services should be limiting their activities to servicing journalists since now they can broadcast videos, audios and texts; they are able not only to provide their electorate with the possibility to virtually or directly visit the parliament but to answer hot questions or act as an agent when politicians answer them. The parliament is a citadel of democracy or, in other words, a symbol of the freedom of speech and of the right to disseminate information which cannot be restricted by anyone, including journalists.

Since both the internal and the external communication of the parliament is always bidirectional and has different sources of information (not only in evaluating the factors of opposition and position but also the subjective beliefs of MPs and the competences of parliamentary staff), no one could claim that the PR staff could be 'hated' by journalists. After all, the openness of the parliamentary activity is determined by law (or lower level legislation), in other words, by a decision of the legislator. The media should first of all care about the openness of the parliament as a principle element of the freedom of media since only then the media can see the accountability of power; journalists (using the interests of parliamentary investigation commission) can obtain more information about the executive power, and MPs can be ensured the respect of other powers and the public.

In terms of the openness of the parliament, cooperation with the media reveals an actual work and the role of the parliament and MPs. The involvement of politicians (legislators) in entertainment shows of the media, which happened in Lithuania, showed not only how viewers and part of the politicians understood the level of their (ir) responsibility, but also reduced the interest of the public in getting serious news disclosing the cases of abuse, corruption or ability of the executive power to implement the promised reforms.

On the other hand, all this does not eliminate the conflict between the media and the government arising from their striving to influence each other, and the development of technologies only contributes to the competition for an the possibility to shape the opinion of the audience (electorate) and for the creation of themes for public discourse. Political communication is becoming more and more open and in this way depolarizes three main components: politics (institute of politics), the media, and audience.

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