

## Paper Windmills: on Self-Censorship

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These days, I have been trying to get a series of texts on self-censorship for *Media Online*. I seem to have been looking for impossible – moral fractures on three or four pages. I thought I would receive a concentrate, or maybe even a raw piece of self-cognition that would amaze me, shock me, disturb me. But nothing of this happened – most of journalists would simply not write about self-censorship.

My experience of attentive reader of newspapers teaches me that journalists gladly write about the specific circumstances surrounding the development of journalism in such a turbulent region as this one and all the problems with censorship – as though the world had seen the first of its censors in the Balkans of the nineties only. Or they rushed down upon the collective, editorial team's self-censorship without mercy, although that very editorial board is sacrificing like a mother, without hidden – or, to that matter, any other – agenda, to save journalists from individual responsibility for the cut-out paragraphs and accumulated euphemisms. So, text after text, line after line, many of the journalists reveal self-censorship in deed, in all its glory.

However, the problem is not the lack of honesty on the part of journalists or their failure to admit to their own miniature deceptions, even delusions. Because, some of them do confess in private, without much hesitation and with a touch of village maiden-like blushing. The problem is exactly in that insensibility for the drama, in the full oblivion to the problem itself. Even those who step out and confess do not see self-censorship as anything else but the reflex of censorship. And in the story of this reflex, a journalist becomes only a nerve in a knee, a completely passive one, only reacting to external stimuli without a single trace of will. Thus, a journalist lowers himself down to a pure object, to a paper windmill whirled around by the “objective circumstances”. And there is no executioner anywhere in this story of executing words and sentences.

“There is no choice”, is all that one can hear from some of them – at the best. As if all the decisions were made, all the options already exhausted, and as if there were not even a trace of concern for the future of one’s own words. Does it mean that journalists see each of their words as a world for itself, without history, whereas self-censorship – just like censorship – is some sort of an earthquake or deluge, a natural catastrophe beyond control that

comes and goes, and journalists themselves are re-born, innocent and pure as newborns in each new text they write? ‘My dear reader, please forget about all my weaknesses, all my messy metaphors or far-fetched analogies, I am new now, open and fierce, and that which was – was a summer shower, a hardly noticeable noise on telephone lines. ‘ – Is this the message that journalists convey to their readers?

And the whole story of self-censorship and the non-destined series of articles flashed with excitements only once: an extraordinary and audacious journalist of older generation phoned the office and said that he believes the issue of self-censorship to be a matter of his very personality, and not of himself as a member of a certain guild, and thus he does not wish to dig through his intimate drama that he lives every day, again and again. Is it the lack of audacity that we are looking at? On the contrary, an abundance of it, because the battle for each single word is not to be fought with me or with you but with one’s own self, without allies.

However, the battle does not have to be fought without witnesses – take this for an invitation to re-assure me and to write about self-censorship openly and bravely.