

Role of the Press in the Fight against Corruption and Negativity in Vietnam Today

Assoc. Prof, Dr. Minh Son PHAM

Abstract: *In the fight against corruption and negativity, the press plays a special role. It contributes to detecting and fighting against cases, organizations and individuals who show signs of corruption and negativity. Also, it propagates and encourages the participation of the whole political system in the drastic struggle, mobilizing the strength of all people to participate in preventing and fighting against corruption and negativity. Analyzing and clarifying that role is of great significance, helping the Party, State, Fatherland Front, socio-political organizations and people have the right guidelines and measures in awareness and action. It will also strongly promote the system of press agencies, helping to improve the effectiveness of the fight against corruption and negativity in our country today.*

Keywords: *role, press, fight, anti-corruption, negativity, Vietnam.*

The role of the press in the fight against corruption and negativity has been affirmed in the Party's resolutions, documents and many legal documents. The 2018 Law on Prevention and Combat of Corruption stipulates the responsibilities of press agencies and journalists in preventing and combating corruption in Article 75. Article 4 of the 2016 Press Law clearly states the functions, tasks, and powers of the press, which has the mission of "Discovering and setting examples of good people, good deeds, new factors, and advanced examples; fight against illegal acts and negative phenomena in society"⁽¹⁾. The great role of the press in the fight against corruption and negativity can be clearly recognized through a number of aspects as follows:

Firstly, *the press makes an important contribution to popularizing the Party and State's guidelines, policies and points of view, helping to form and develop awareness of preventing and combating corruption and negativity among the people and the entire society.*

The press has always been considered a part of the revolutionary cause, a particularly important ideological and cultural work, and a sharp

ideological weapon of the Party. With the function of communication and encouragement, the press conveys messages (directives, resolutions, views or opinions on a certain issue) of the government to the entire society, thereby orienting thought and the will of the ruling elite over the people. Accordingly, from the perspective of fighting corruption and negativity - an extremely difficult, complex, and sensitive task that requires a very high consensus of the entire political system and strong support from the people, the role of the press is more prominent than ever. Regulation No. 65-QD/TW, dated February 3, 2017 of the Party Central Committee's Secretariat "*On direction and orientation for providing information on anti-corruption communication*" has affirmed the important role in propagating and raising awareness and consciousness of the mass about this work. Thus, it can be seen that, after having guidelines, policies and opinions of the Party and State on preventing and combating corruption and negativity, the press participates and affirms its great role right from the first step and stage in the policy implementation cycle. If the role of the press in this aspect is not promoted well, it will not be possible to create a high consensus among people of all walks of life, and will not be able to create proper social awareness at the grassroots, thereby will indirectly reduce the effectiveness and efficiency of the fight against corruption and negativity in the government apparatus.

In fact, the press has many different forms, methods, and channels to propagate, mobilize, and raise people's awareness and knowledge of preventing corruption and negativity, including (1) Official publications that propagate the content of the Party's and State's viewpoints and guidelines on preventing and combating corruption and negativity; (2) Mass media reports on corruption and negativity cases; (3) Theoretical and practical books and newspapers on preventing and combating corruption and negativity; (4) Films and stage productions of anti-corruption and anti-negativity content; (5) Content of discussion between individuals, experts, and managers on preventing and combating corruption and negativity; (6) Categories with content of education and/or training on awareness, skills, methods, processes... of preventing and combating corruption and negativity; (7) News articles and reports reflecting the process of law-

making and application of laws on preventing and combating corruption and negativity of agencies, etc.

According to the results of the August 2020 public opinion survey by *the Institute of Public Opinion*, the activities in preventing and combating corruption and negativity of our Party and State have achieved outstanding and encouraging results highly appreciated by public opinion while the “information, propaganda, and education work to raise awareness about preventing and combating corruption and negativity for officials and party members” ranked third among the 19 tasks mentioned. From 2016 to 2019, press and publishing agencies have released more than 677,999 books and documents on preventing and combating corruption and negativity; published 2,419,518 books and legal communication documents on preventing and combating corruption and negativity. There have been 16,600 news pieces and articles from more than 40 print and electronic newspapers about the prevention and fight against corruption and negativity⁽²⁾. In particular, the Central Committee of the Vietnam Fatherland Front in collaboration with the Vietnam Journalists Association organized the national press award “Journalism in the fight against corruption, negativity and waste” attracting the participation of a large number of press agencies. The 2017 national press award “Journalism in the fight against corruption and waste” received 1,126 journalistic entries in various forms: print, electronic, radio and television. In 2018 - 2019, there were 1,046 works, and in 2020 – 2021, 1,181 works from over 100 central and local press agencies. Those data once again affirm the extremely important role of the press in propagating and raising awareness and sense of responsibility of all strata of people and the entire society in the fight against corruption and negativity.

Secondly, the press creates a broad forum for experts, academics and people from all walks of life to present their opinions, express their views, thoughts and aspirations, directly influencing planners and implementers of laws on prevention and combat of corruption and negativity.

Reality has proven and recorded that there are many ways for the press to participate in preventing and combating corruption and negativity. Apart from directly declaring war on the “corruption enemy” by detecting and investigating to bring corruption and negativity cases to light, the indirect

method (the press participates in petitions and suggestions for the functional agencies to amend and supplement the inadequacies and loopholes in legal policies on preventing and combating corruption and negativity) is a way to sharpen legal tools for more effective anti-corruption measures. This indirect approach of media involvement represents the important role of the press in preventing and combating corruption and negativity. The essence of the problem is that the press has been promoting its role of monitoring and social criticism, thereby directly affecting those who plan and enforce laws to prevent and combat corruption and negativity.

The press creates a broad and extremely democratic and open forum for experts and academics in all fields to contribute their opinions. In particular, before each occasion of submitting a draft law or ordinance related to the prevention and combat of corruption and negativity, the role of the press in gathering public opinion becomes even more important and necessary. Many newspapers such as Nhan Dan (People's Daily), People's Army, and Law of Vietnam have opened separate pages and columns for experts and scientists to contribute opinions and discuss the work of preventing and combating corruption and waste, combating signs of deterioration, "self-evolution", and "self-transformation". For example, Nhan Dan has a column *"Resolution of the 4th Plenum of the Party Central Committee, 12th tenure on Party building"*; The People's Public Security Newspaper has a column *"Implementing the resolution of the 4th Plenum of the Party Central Committee, 12th tenure on fighting "self-evolution", "self-transformation"*; The "Great Unity Newspaper" has a column *"Monitoring and Critique"*; The People's Police Television has established a section called *"Immediate Actions to Take"*. Radio and Television stations in various provinces such as Thanh Hoa, Gia Lai, Vinh Long, and Can Tho, etc., have a section named *"Prevention of and combat against corruption and waste"*. In particular, the column *"The Party in today's life"* of Vietnam Television has received special attention from the people. In addition, many magazines have also regularly published quality articles, raising many valid opinions related to the prevention and fight against corruption and negativity. For example, the Legal Journal - the organ of the Vietnam Lawyers Association, in 2018 and 2019 alone published more than 50 articles analyzing comments, notes, and

dialogues to inform and reflect opinions of National Assembly delegates, lawyers, experts... about the inadequacies of the legal policy system related to the prevention and fight against corruption and negativity, thereby proposing solutions for amending and supplementing many related laws such as: Land Law, Law on Prevention and Combat of Corruption, Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, Law on Inspection, Law on Bidding, Law on Public Investment, Law on Planning, Enterprise Law, Law on Organization of People's Councils & People's Committees...⁽³⁾.

From the most general perspective, the press regularly, honestly and promptly reflects the thoughts, aspirations and will of the people in response to events and issues as well as matters related to the nation's destiny. It is an organizer and a means for people to participate in building policies and deciding on important national development strategies. It reflects the people's attitudes towards and demand for the quality of operations of power agencies and the responsibility of performing public duties. In terms of preventing and combating corruption and negativity, the press is not only a forum for scientists and experts to contribute, it is also considered an important means for people to perform their supervisory function, social observation and criticism. Also, it is a place where people from all walks of life present their opinions and views, thereby allowing agencies that build and enforce laws on preventing and combating corruption and negativity to adjust and operate increasingly effectively. The people are the subjects towards which all guidelines and policies of the Party and State are directed. At the same time, the Party and State are always deeply aware of the great role of the masses in the revolution. When fully exercising their rights of supervision, the people will become the "eyes and ears" of the Party and State, just as President Ho Chi Minh once said: *"The people with millions of eyes and ears have many intelligent opinions... If you want to do any job well, you must take people's opinions seriously"*⁽⁴⁾. General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong also pointed out: *"The great strength and driving force of the fight against corruption and negativity is the people's agreement, support, response, and active participation (...) Without relying on the people, the fight against corruption and negativity will hardly be successful. Rely on the people, listen to the people, listen to public opinion to select and absorb the right thing..."*⁽⁵⁾.

And one of the very important channels for people to play their role in monitoring and expressing their opinions, views, thoughts and aspirations is the press system.

Thirdly, the press has the ability to “directly attack” the “corruption enemy” by bringing corruption and negativity cases to public opinion and creating and orienting public opinion to fight against corruption and negativity.

According to current Vietnamese law, although journalists do not have the right to accuse or oppress anyone, journalists have the right to independently investigate and take responsibility for the information they publish. They also have many ways to detect corruption and negativity cases, such as through letters sent by readers to press agencies and reporters. Through feedback and denunciations received from the people, the press verifies to find authentic documents and evidence to forward to public opinion and competent agencies. The press detects negative manifestations and corruption and implements profession-specific investigative measures. With an impact audience of a large public, with the ability to choose events and phenomena to attract public attention, and with its role in setting the agenda, the press clearly has complete power to create public opinion and put pressure on negative phenomena such as embezzlement and corruption. All types of “corrupt people” are very afraid of being dragged into the light by the press and under pressure from public opinion. According to the survey results “*Corruption from the perspective of people, businesses and officials, civil servants and public employees*” jointly conducted by the Government Inspectorate and the World Bank in 2020, the press was one of the most active and effective institutions in detecting and investigating corruption in Vietnam. According to incomplete statistics of the Fatherland Front, in one month, the whole country had about 450 articles reflecting weaknesses and negativity.⁽⁶⁾ In reality, there have been many cases with signs of corruption and negativity discovered by the press, for example: The case of “million dollar gambler” Bui Tien Dung and serious negativity in PMU18; The case of leaders of Do Son town, Hai Phong city embezzling dozens of plots of land worth billions of VND; Super scam case of Nguyen Duc Chi and Rusalka project in Khanh Hoa; The case at Vietnam National Oil and Gas Group; Pham Cong Danh case associated with Vietnam Construction Bank; The

case of “giving bribes” and “receiving bribes” at the Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, branch 7, Ho Chi Minh City...; violation case in Thanh Tri bridge site clearance (Hanoi); Textile and garment quota running (QUOTA) case at the Ministry of Trade; Insurance fraud at Petrolimex Insurance Joint Stock Company (PJICO); the case at East-West Highway Project Management Board and Ho Chi Minh City Water Environment; the case at Bai Chay bridge construction project; the VINASHIN case, and so on.

Timely and public reporting of corruption cases and incidents to the mass media has helped raise awareness, create social consensus, and strengthen the trust and determination of officials, Party members and people in the fight against corruption and negativity of our Party and State. The press’s important contributions to monitoring and detecting negativity and corruption cases have been highly appreciated by public opinion. Newspapers have very regular news and articles on the work of preventing and combating corruption and waste, typically: Nhan Dan, Vietnam Television, Voice of Vietnam, Vietnam News Agency, Labor Newspaper, Thanh Nien (Youth), Tuoi Tre (The Young), People’s Police, Pioneers, Ho Chi Minh City Law, etc. It can be affirmed that the press’s role in directly attacking the “corruption” is a particularly important and outstanding role, helping it truly be one of the “spearheads” in the work of preventing and combating corruption and negativity, consolidating and strengthening people’s trust in the Party, the State and the path forward to socialism in our country today.

Being clearly aware of the role of the press in the fight against corruption and negativity is important to help the Party, the State, the Fatherland Front, socio-political organizations and all classes of people have appropriate policies, guidelines and support for the press in the coming time. To this end, it is necessary to synchronously implement many measures, including:

First, law enforcement agencies need to agree on a mechanism to provide transparent, responsible, reasonable information..., especially information between the Central Steering Committee on preventing and combating corruption and negativity, Vietnam Fatherland Front, Central Department

for Communication and Education, Ministry of Information and Communications and Vietnam Journalists Association. Thereby, we help press agencies and create conditions for the press to practice and participate in preventing and combating corruption and negativity in a convenient, effective and safe way.

Second, there should be a mechanism for the press to monitor the process of handling corruption and negativity cases to promptly inform the people. It is imperative to raise the awareness of subjects (especially organizations) about the rights to access information and the monitoring role of the press. Subjects must truly consider the press as an important channel that contributes to effectively preventing and combating corruption and negativity.

Third, creating a safe legal corridor for journalists to write about anti-corruption and negativity. Increasing sanctions for acts of repression, assault, intimidation, obstruction, etc., of journalistic work. Boosting the independence of the press. Preventing pressure on and “orientation” for articles for personal purposes; protecting reporters and editors in the fight against corruption and negativity.

Fourth, improving the quality of training for journalists, strengthening skills of information research and writing accurate and objective investigative articles, and promoting professional ethics for journalists. Strengthening forms of both material and spiritual rewards for journalists and press agencies with good achievements in the fight against corruption and negativity./.

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