

## **POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS OF THE AFRICAN REGIONAL MEDIA SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT**

***Annotation.** The article examines the political aspects of the formation of international specialized governmental and non-governmental organizations in the field of mass media in the African region. It is shown that the role of interstate regional institutions as drivers of integration and forming of the Pan-African media system is not significant, and in today's context, private initiatives have a greater potential to identify the actual trends in the development of African media and their cooperation.*

***Keywords:** international information relations, international organizations, mass media, the African region.*

***Анотація.** У статті розглядається політичні аспекти становлення міжнародних спеціалізованих урядових та неурядових організацій у сфері мас-медіа в Африканському регіоні. Показано, що роль міждержавних регіональних інституцій як драйверів інтеграції та формування пан-африканської медіа-системи не є визначною, і в сучасних умовах приватні ініціативи мають більший потенціал у виявленні актуальних напрямів розвитку африканських медій та їхньої співпраці.*

***Ключові слова:** міжнародні інформаційні відносини, міжнародні організації, засоби масової комунікації, африканський регіон.*

***Аннотация.** В статье рассматриваются политические аспекты становления международных специализированных правительственных и*

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*неправительственных организаций в сфере масс-медиа в Африканском регионе. Показано, что роль межгосударственных региональных институтов как драйверов интеграции и формирования пан-африканской медиа-системы не является значимой, и в современных условиях частные инициативы имеют больший потенциал в выявлении актуальных направлений развития африканских медиа и их сотрудничества.*

***Ключевые слова:** международные информационные отношения, международные организации, средства массовой коммуникации, африканский регион.*

**Problem statement and last publications related to that problem.** The shaping of African regional media system began later than other regions of the world, due to the peculiarities of the political and economic development of the region. Among the factors that determined the nature of and challenges to African media system, the following should be singled out. First, the fact that until 1950s the predominant share of the continent was colonies, and development of the media sector obeyed the interests and needs of colonial administrations. Secondly, in addition to the cultural-religious division of the continent (mainly Islam and Christianity of various branches), the colonial divide shaped certain linguistic and cultural areas (British, French, Portuguese, etc.), the contours of which are visible to this day. Thirdly, the peculiarities of the socio-economic development of Africa as the poorest region of the world determined its significant technological retardation, which could not but affect the development of the media sector. Fourth, the lack of state-building experience and underdevelopment of civil society led to the formation in several African countries of odious dictatorial regimes, often supported by the West during the Cold War as a mean of counteraction to the spread of Soviet Union influence in Africa. These regimes, obviously, were not interested either in the development of cooperation between countries of the region or in the development of their own countries. Despite these and other factors, intergovernmental, and subsequently, non-state initiatives

emerged on the African continent, aimed at promoting regional and international cooperation in various spheres, including the field of ICT and mass communications.

The political, economic, sociocultural, etc. problems of the development of the African regional media system, and its place in the global media system were studied by foreign researchers such as A. ChéNeau-Loquay, K. Cavanagh, L. Eko, Sh. Li, P. K. McCormick, J. M. Ruijter, H. Topuz, and others. The author did not find any domestic research on this problem, but some of its elements can be found in the works of V. Bebig, Ye. Makarenko, Ye. Tikhomirova, O. Zernetska, and others. But the role of regional intergovernmental and nongovernmental institutions both pan-African and Arab in the development of African media system needs additional reflection. Therefore, **the purpose of this article** is to identify the features, especially political ones, of the emergence, establishment and development of African regional media inter- and non-governmental organizations.

**Study results.** The African Union, which emerged in 2002 as the heir to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), is the key institution that provides processes for integration and cooperation in the African region. According to OAU Charter adopted on May 25, 1963 in Addis Ababa, the organization's purposes were to promote the unity and solidarity of the African States; to coordinate and intensify their cooperation and efforts to achieve a better life for the peoples of Africa; to defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity and independence; to eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa; and to promote international cooperation, having due regard to the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Among the fields of cooperation were communication, cultural, scientific and technical spheres [1]. It was under the auspices of the OAU that several international regional media institutions were created that played a certain role in the formation and development of the African media system.

The first regional media association in the African continent — the Union

of National Radio and Television Organizations of Africa (URTNA) — was established on September 29, 1962, during African Broadcasters meeting in Lagos, Nigeria. The purpose of its creation was to promote inter-African cooperation for the development of services and activities in the field of broadcasting in Africa. URTNA had a status of autonomous specialized agency under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity.

The emergence of URTNA is closely linked to the socio-political processes that took place on the African continent in the late 1950s. Decolonization and the formation of new states clearly demanded that African peoples find their identity, adequate values and, more broadly, their place on the world stage. And, according to the authors of the monograph “Making Broadcasting Useful: The African Experience”, the birth of URTNA is one of the many manifestations of self-esteem and self-affirmation processes that characterized that period. To the founders of URTNA, there were two fundamental areas of concern. The first was the need for regional co-operation aimed at the development of cross-cultural awareness and appreciation through broadcast programmes among the peoples of Africa, who are scattered over a vast continent where unfavourable conditions of history and geography, inadequate transport and communication links, and illiteracy have retarded desirable cultural and socio-economic interactions. The second, equally important, concern had to do with the development of broadcasting activities and services so that they became meaningful to the cultural and socio-economic aspirations of the newly independent African states. Out of such broadcast development needs and considerations emerged URTNA [2, p.17].

The objectives of URTNA were the following: to promote and coordinate studies on all matters relating to radio and television; to sustain in every domain the interest of radio and television organizations; to develop cooperation among its members and establish relations with other organizations or groups of organizations; to ensure that all its members adhere to international and inter-African conventions and agreements on radio and television; to coordinate the coverage of major national and international sporting and cultural events; to

represent its member organizations at world planning conferences on frequency utilization organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) [3]. As of January 31, 1999, URTNA's membership was composed of the broadcasting organizations of 48 countries.

An important activity of the Union was organizing of information exchange. Thus, in 1991, the Centre for Television News Exchange (Afro-Vision) was set up. News items were prepared by African TV news journalists for URTNA African member organizations as well as for the member organizations of sister broadcasting unions throughout the world.

During the 43rd and final session of the URTNA General Assembly on October 30, 2006 in Abuja, Nigeria, the African National Radio and Television Union was transformed into the African Union of Broadcasting (AUB). According to its statute, the mission of the Union is to provide and sustain the quality of life and development through excellent broadcast delivery with the widest range of programmes and services to Africa, Africans in the Diaspora and the rest of the world; the vision is to be the first-class broadcasting Union contributing to the enrichment of the quality of life and projecting the true African perspective. Any broadcasting organization from any African country that is a member of the African Union, which provide national public broadcasting service with the authorization of the national authorities may be active members of the Union [4, p.1].

Among the main objectives of the African Union of Broadcasting it is proclaimed to represent and protect the interests of its members; to draw up and take all necessary measures aimed at the development and promotion of broadcasting in Africa; to promote and facilitate regular programme and news exchange, co-productions, organizing screening sessions as well as participation and representation in cultural events; to coordinate the activities of members organizations in the coverage of major events; to ensure that all its members honour the provisions of international and African agreements in matters relating to broadcasting, etc [4, p.2–3].

According to Union's official website, its members are broadcast organizations from 45 continental countries, such as Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo (Democratic Republic of), Congo (Republic of), Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe (see [5]). Accordingly, to date, the AUB does not represent such states as the Comoros Union, Djibouti, Libya, Mauritania, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Somalia, and Southern Sudan.

As of September 1, 2016, the African Union of Broadcasting did not have a consultative status with ECOSOC (see [6]) but is on the list of UNESCO's partner NGOs and is a member of the International Telecommunication Union. In addition, AUB is a member of the World Broadcasting Unions (WBU).

As a reflection of the specific needs of the region, which was and remains the most retarded in terms of the development of communications networks, was establishing on December 7, 1977 in Addis Ababa at the 12th session of the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government of new specialized agency in the field of telecommunications — Pan-African Telecommunication Union (PATU). At the 4th Extraordinary Session of the PATU Plenipotentiary Conference on December 7, 1999, the Union was transformed into the African Telecommunications Union (ATU). The mission of the renewed alliance is to promote the rapid development of the ICTs in Africa, with the main objectives to promote the development and adoption of appropriate African telecommunications/ICTs policy and regulatory frameworks; to promote programmes for the development of the African Information Society; to promote human resources development in the field of info-communications and the establishment of info-communications industries; to harmonize the actions of Member States and Associate Members in the telecommunications/ICTs sector;

to foster co-operation and partnership between and among Member States and Associate Members, etc (see [7]).

According to Union's official website, 45 African states are ATU members, namely Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo (Democratic Republic of), Congo (Republic of), Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe [7].

The Union is a member of the International Telecommunication Union; the agreement on cooperation with UNESCO was signed in 1984.

Particularly important role in the region is played by the development of media organizations, in particular, news agencies as key players in the media space. The specific political dimension of media development in post-colonial Africa was that "the role of African mass media, as envisaged by its national leaders, is as vital instruments for nation-building, as a political function whereby national integration and development as well as liberating white-controlled areas of Africa can result" [8, p.195].

In general, in Africa, as in the region consisting mainly of the colonies, information agencies created by the colonial administration began to appear rather early. The first African agency was created in 1910 in the South African Union, by Reuter. This office, known by the name of Reuter South African Press Agency, later changed its name to the South African Press Association. In 1946 and 1949 the British colonial administration established the Sudanese Press Agency (Sudan) and the Adjisam's News Agency (Ghana) respectively [9, p.48]. This territorial distribution was probably due to the need for news coverage in major areas controlled by the Great Britain — that is southern, western and northeast Africa.

The next wave of news agencies setting up in Africa is linked to the

emergence of new independent states. The first national agencies of the independent African states were Middle East News Agency (1956, Egypt), Ghana News Agency (1957), Maghreb Arab Press (Morocco), Senegal Press Agency (1959), Cameroon Press Agency, Guinea Press Agency, Gabon Information Agency, Congo Press Agency (1960), etc. (see [9, p.48–49]).

However, despite the creation of African news agencies, African media still depended on news agencies from the countries of the Global North to provide news. The McBride report, commissioned by UNESCO in 1980, identified the one-way flow of information and media content, mostly from developed countries to less developed countries. Media organizations in Africa, like in most developing countries, suffer from a shortage of domestic correspondents, rely excessively on international agencies for foreign news and depend mainly on government sources for national news. At times, because of the lack of resources, African media transmit news coverage on their own countries from the wired international news agencies. Another specific feature of media communications in post-colonial Africa was the preservation of ties that existed in the colonial period — for example, while British newspapers devote more space to articles on India, Kenya and Zimbabwe, the French press might be more interested in Algeria, Morocco and Central Africa [10, p.58].

The first attempt to create a pan-African news agency arose as an intergovernmental initiative within the Organization of African Unity. Indeed, during the inaugural assembly (1963, Addis Ababa), when the OAU was launched, there was a call for the creation of an African news agency [11, p.354]. However, this idea was implemented only on July 20, 1979, when the conference of information ministers of OAU states in Addis Ababa adopted convention which established the Pan-African News Agency (PANA) with headquarters in Dakar (Senegal). As it was noted during the conference, “African events, their background and their progress have not always been presented to the outside world with objectivity and exactitude” [12].

The agency started its operation on May 25, 1983. It was stated that PANA



will distribute the news materials provided by its member news services without editing. Acknowledging that distributing reports issued by official press services, which often serve as propaganda organs, could limit the agency's credibility, to ensure trust in the agency's materials in case of conflicting reports from two-member agencies, the agency would distribute both reports. It was assumed that PANA will produce news in three major languages of Africa — English, French, and Portuguese (see [12]).

It was proclaimed that “the Pan-African news agency, in its endeavour to meet the... aspirations of the people of Africa, will do its utmost to put information at the service of peace within African states, between African states and in the continent at large. PANA will be a centre for reviving, promoting and projecting pan-Africanism ... Didactic, analytic and explanatory, PANA news will challenge its readers to reflect and seek understanding of the problems of African development. As a strategic telecommunications network, PANA will enable African countries to communicate with each other without recourse to non-African channels. Thus, through PANA's work, the voice of Africa will be heard proclaiming and defending the collective interest of the nations and people of Africa” (cit. ex [11, p. 354–355]).

However, despite the establishment of the Pan-African news agency, most African countries continued to depend on Western, transnational news agencies, even for news about Africa. African media institutions, including URTNA and PANA, suffered from severe shortages in finance, equipment, and personnel. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, the World Bank, the German government, and the United States Agency for International Development have provided significant assistance [13, p.284]. Another problem was that the main source of information provided by PANA was material from the domestic news agencies of OAU member states. Since most of these are state-controlled, the “news” they were offering was never likely to attract many western users [14].

Numerous problems and inefficiencies in the operation of the Pan-African

news agency inevitably raised the demand for revision of the basics of its activities. PANA Recovery Plan under the aegis of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was adopted by OUA Heads of State and Government on July 1, 1992. As a result, in October 1997 PANA was transformed into a private news agency PanaPress.

In the 1990s and 2000s, democratization and commercialization processes liberalized the media market on the one hand, and the emergence of the Internet, on the other, greatly reduced the dependence of African media on access to the necessary infrastructure (telephony, TV satellites, etc.). As a result, new opportunities were opened for African national media, and private pan-African news agencies were set up.

In 2000, the media company AllAfrica Global Media emerged, one of its key direction of activities is the aggregation, production and dissemination of news about Africa (as stated on the AllAfrica site, “AllAfrica is a voice of, by and about Africa”). AllAfrica collects news from more than 140 media across the continent and distributes them to the African and global audiences. The company positions itself as the only independent, pan-African news source (see [15]).

The urgency of ensuring the “voice” of Africa in the global media space is confirmed by the creation in 2015 of another private media institution — the African News Agency (ANA). Being created instead of the abolished South Africa News Agency SAPA, however, it was intended to go beyond the country borders and engage in the activities across African continent. ANA positions itself as Africa’s leading news platform, as a reliable source for African news (see [16]).

Regarding the press, at present there is no Pan-African association that brings together publishers of periodicals. This can be accounted for by low standards of living and literacy in most African countries, which determines the degree of development of the newspapers and magazines, as well as by cultural differences.

### **Conclusions.**

- 1) The extreme disparity between the countries of the African region

dramatically slowed the processes of integration and cooperation. Unlike the European, Latin American or Arab regions, Africa has neither a cultural nor political nor economic integration core that makes tries to implement different kinds of cooperative projects ineffective. It is confirmed by rather long terms of implementation of initiatives on the establishment of separate regional intergovernmental organizations. In addition, part of the African region, namely, the Arab countries, is much more interested in the projects of cooperation within the Arab institutions.

2) The tangible backwardness of the region in technological development inevitably puts it in dependence on external assistance and support. The functioning of intergovernmental institutions representing the region in global structures (UN Economic and Social Council, UNESCO, International Telecommunication Union, etc.) creates a mechanism whereby the needs for assistance, its nature and scope are determined, and various ways of providing it are realized.

3) The processes of globalization of communications and the emergence of cross-border communication media significantly eased the problem of the dependence of African media on external sources of information and the processes of organization of information exchange within the region. In our opinion, this makes interstate efforts to develop the African media system unnecessary and unpromising.

4) The development of private initiatives in the African media landscape as a priori more flexible and adequate to real needs will help to identify the actual trends in the development of African media and their integration into the global media landscape, to identify the needs and prospects of transnational cooperation, and, more broadly, to answer the questions of whether pan-African media system will have real outlines, functionality and value for the countries of the region, or there will be several regional and transregional systems.

5) The foregoing gives us reason to assert that the role of the inter-state African institutions in the development of the regional media system lies mainly

in ensuring interaction with global specialized agencies. Instead, their role as driver of African integration seems rather uncertain. In our opinion, the African region will gradually move away from the “integration fetishism”, and the development of the media sector will reflect the real needs of local audiences. The only deterrent factor now is technological retardment, elimination of which should be the subject of political efforts by existing pan-African organizations.

Perspectives of further research development are to study political and institutional aspects of the regional media system development in other parts of the world.

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