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JE PENSE ENVIRON CHARLIE

HOW WILL BE THE FREE SPEECH UNTOUCHABLE?

“We sleep safe in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm.” -- George Orwell

Krisztián Kovács*

This paper aims at collecting the opinion of several public figures in connection with the Charlie Hebdo carnage, then putting it into a context and finally sharing personal thoughts about it. It is a very sensitive issue what to focus on with the CH case. It is terrifying and sad at the same time that people are still dying because of violence in the 21st century. In my point of view, it is even more devastating that the reason why a human being is forced to kill another is basically the opinion of the murdered. This is unacceptable.

On 7 January 2015, a terrible massacre happened in Paris, France. Satirical paper Charlie Hebdo's twelve journalists were brutally murdered by Islamic terrorists, because of a Mohammad cartoon they made viral. They – the committers of the mass murder – apostrophised themselves as the members of the al-Qaeda in Yemen. (HVG.hu, 2015)

For a political analyst, it is important to take a look at the spoken words by the political actors in the times of crisis. What I want to focus on at this point are the first speeches that came viral right after the carnage, said by the most influential and prominent politicians.

This paper focuses only to the very first speeches after Charlie Hebdo attack. That is what I apostrophise as crisis communication; however crisis communication fades much wider scale of political actions. This work is only interested in the speeches that were told right after the murder of the magazine's journalists. It would be a much bigger work to analyse the whole post-Charlie Hebdo communication as one.

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The first rule of political analysis is that they always have to doubt what they hear from the ones who communicate towards ordinary people. It is hard to search for any in the case of Charlie Hebdo; the West stood and spoke up as one against what happened in Paris. Standing by Charlie Hebdo is obvious to those who were born to a country that allows the basic rights.

I think the biggest problem of politicians' crisis communication is the clichés in ninety per cent. And how clichés are, so are the crisis speeches. True and academic.

David Cameron

British Prime Minister David Cameron had his say on 7 January right after the events. However, the United Kingdom and France shared a violent history, it could be expected what Cameron was moved by – solidarity with France. Cameron said the followings:

“We stand absolutely united with the French people against terrorism and against this threat to our values – free speech, the rule of law, democracy. It's absolutely essential we defend those values today and every day.”

“There is no one single answer to these appalling terrorist attacks. We have to all be vigilant. We have to try to address all the problems of radicalisation that have happened in our country,”

“But as we do all these things, we must be very clear about one thing, which is we should never give up the values that we believe in and defend as part of our democracy and civilisation and believing in a free press, in freedom of expression, in the right of people to write and say what they believe.”

“These are the things we are defending. We should be very clear on this day that these values that we have are not sources of weakness for us, they are sources of strength.” (cited by Riley-Smith, 2015)

The United Kingdom was mentioned alongside Russia, China and United States as the great powers in the mid-90s. I believe this reduced only to the United States in the past decade, especially after 9/11. However, one thing remained common in the West: those countries always fight against Islamic fundamentalism.

It is inappropriate to speculate about the long-term benefits after a terrible carnage, but I think France is able to create an advantage of Charlie Hebdo.

The reason why America earned a higher status symbol is their reaction of the 11 September 2001 attacks by a more interventionist foreign policy. In 2001, Bush sent armies straight to

Afghanistan and two years later to Iraq. The two attacks cannot be compared by the infrastructural damage, or human loss, but one thing is the same in 9/11 and the Charlie Hebdo carnage: both required a quick reaction against those who think murder is a possible way to cut back authority and free speech.

France has the chance to live with their painful advantage. Fighting for peace is a political green light for them at the moment.

Angela Merkel

David Cameron and Angela Merkel were given an extraordinary joint security briefing by Britain's intelligence chiefs in the wake of the terror attack in Paris. Merkel had the following statements:

“We stand with the French people at this time for freedom of speech and democracy and against terror and our thoughts and sympathies are with the families, friends and colleagues of the victims.”

“What has happened in Paris today is indeed a barbarous attack against all of the values we share.”

“All of us that live in Europe strongly condemn these attacks and our thoughts go out to the French people and particularly to those who have lost loved one in this horrendous attack.”

“This is an attack against the values we all hold dear, values by which we stand, values of freedom of the press, freedom in general and the dignity of man.”

“And again our thoughts are with the French people with all of those who have lost loved one in this horrific attack and everything we can do to help the French we will certainly do.” (cited by Chorley and McTague, 2015)

The constitution of the European Union is that kind of advantage, which Europe needs in the time of crisis. The countries stand in a constellation, which is probably the strongest, tightest and most effective collaboration in the world. That is the reason why it is that easy to cooperate and help a nation, if it is needed. Merkel's high position in the EU guarantees France to get every kind of support it needs.

Furthermore, the cooperation in the modern political system is wider than ever. The horrific situation in Ukraine in 2014 and the 2015 French massacre required the collaboration of President Barack Obama and Prime Minister David Cameron. Recently, they wrote an article

for the Times about shared Security and Prosperity (gov.uk, 2015), that generated very thoughtful opinions about international political relations. The importance of expecting external assistance in the times of crisis will become the most important factor of foreign policy moves for the next two, three or four years, after such violent events in Europe.

François Hollande

Finally, whose opinion and speeches would take into consideration the most by the French people than President François Hollande's? He announced day of national mourning by the following words:

“Tomorrow will be the day of national mourning, according to the decree I issued. At noon all state institutions will observe a minute of silence and I call on the whole nation to observe it too. Flags will be lowered to half-mast for three days,”

“I would like to express gratitude to [the victims'] families and everyone who was killed or injured as a result of this despicable terrorist attack. Today, they are our heroes.” (cited by sputniknews.com, 2015)

Considering the facts, the speech of Merkel and Cameron was absolutely ideological. Their spoken thoughts were about the protection of free speech. The crisis speech of Cameron and Merkel compared to Hollande's is more academic. In which Hollande's speech is different, it is practicality.

According to the linked article above, it let us know that Francois Hollande was the only one who manifested sympathy for those who lost someone in the attack, whilst Angela Merkel and Minister David Cameron was thinking about the alternative future of the situation.

In general, both the UK and Germany has a history that always pointed towards future and taking advantage of something – even from losses. France communicated its loss in the attitude of sadness and an obvious negativity which earned respect in France but it is also a disadvantage as well. For those people who tend to be less sensitive regarding social issues it can be considered as a weakness and a speech of being stuck and devastated.

French people could understand Hollande's crisis speech as manifesting sympathy, whilst other people in the world as the lack of fast thinking.

All in all, professional crisis communication happened after the Charlie Hebdo attack, on the level of national communication. France got what its citizens needed: mourning. The

international public needed what they required: fast reaction and reflecting on Islamic fundamentalism, which is a threatening factor to the West.

Public communication started quickly after the carnage. The slogan “Je Suis Charlie” blew up the internet, so did the “hashtag movement” of Muslim people who stand up against the Eastern terrorism. “Not in my name” was the line of claiming that even the followers of Islamic are denying the ideas of punishing by guns and fixing status and/or religion mocking issues with the tools of terrorism.

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