

# Public relations without ethics will face the same fate as propaganda. Research reflections (Case study of PR associations in Poland)



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**ABSTRACT:** The article is based on two basic theses. The first one involves a conviction that professional public relations does not exist without the observance of a code of conduct. No other issue is more important in PR than ethics — business ethics and ethics of people running the business. Without them the concept of PR will face the same fate as propaganda. The second thesis concerns a critical approach towards frequent, at least in Poland, manifestations of ignorance towards public relations philosophical genesis and ethos. That is why the author's aim is to convince the reader that public relations is able to develop itself, provided that it is not subjected to marketing, despite the fact that it owes marketing a lot.

**KEYWORDS:** public relations, ethics, integrated marketing communication, public opinion, propaganda



## **INTRODUCTION**

Marketing, or to be precise, the presence of public relations in integrated marketing communications, has so far facilitated PR development in Poland, but in the longer run it will endanger the independence of this art of communication between institutions and society. This risk can be prevented by one very conscious measure on the part of people involved in public relations: observance of public relations ethical principles and taking an open position towards all ethical matters that are a subject of public debate.

This article shall not determine what is morally good or bad, but it is a set of reflections about the meaning of ethical behaviour in public relations activities. It is also a current picture of people in Poland who have spent many years working as public relations consultants and have a lot to say about it. Based on those opinions, we can create a picture of problems faced by representatives of this profession.

The article is based on the results of studies carried out at the beginning of 2009 among representatives of the Association of Public Relations Companies (APRC) in Poland<sup>1</sup> and in a selected group of experienced public relations consultants whose opinions were then verified by a circle of national PR experts and journalists. The studies were compiled using a technique of internet questionnaires and focus groups.

The basic participants of questionnaire surveys involved agencies that have operated on the Polish market from the beginning of the socio-political transformation in 1989, as well as ones established at the beginning of this century. (The role of public relations in the development of democracy in transformation of the new Poland was discussed by R. Ławniczak (2001) who referred to this stage of PR development in Poland as “transition public relations.”) All of the surveyed agencies had experiences in serving several thousand customers, including many foreign ones or belonging to international corporations. They employed in total more than 560 employees.

On the other hand, the analyzed focus group comprised persons who managed PR agencies, publishers of PR-related magazines and representatives of a corporation which used PR services. They all had a vast experience in PR and practiced journalism earlier on. They held key positions in their companies, so their opinions disclosed during interviews can be considered as ones expressed from a practitioners’ perspective, as well as perspective of decision-makers who have business knowledge and at the same time are familiar with the milieu of public relations specialists in Poland.

The basic objective of the study was to recognize and systematize the knowledge and judgements related to understanding of the concept of public relations in the context of assessment of conformity of PR activities with the system of socially recognized values and norms, as well as social responsibility of PR activities.

It should be added that the analyzed opinions of representatives of the Association of Public Relations Companies and a group of persons involved in this profession for many years do not reflect a full flavour and richness of the ethical public relations image in Poland. Nevertheless, when combined with comments of famous local PR experts they become an authentic testimony of opinions and professional self-assessment, important for the whole community, but they cannot be considered as fully representative for all those who provide public relations services.

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<sup>1</sup> The Association of Public Relations Companies was established in 2001 as a representation of the industry of professional PR services in Poland and it currently associates more than 30 agencies. It is a member of the International Communication Consultants Organization. It also concluded a cooperation agreement with the International Public Relations Association. Its objective is to protect the rights and interests of its associated members, to educate and disseminate knowledge about PR. The Association is particularly interested in developing a professional dialogue between PR industry and the media. APRC carries out studies on the relations between these two milieus, organizes meetings of PR consultants with top journalists and presents PR case studies to the media.

## MEANINGS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

PR is perceived in all countries differently by economists, politicians, journalists, social activists, charities and social movement activists. Generally, in Poland there are several meanings of the term “public relations,” which also reflects the richness of the forms in which it is used and abused in various circumstances and contexts. They usually involve marketing, as well as political and media or scientific and didactic contexts. Depending on the context we can discern five various variants or options of how the term “public relations” is currently understood in Poland:

1. *Normative variant*: PR denotes a deliberate management of public image in pursuit of organizational interests, which involves all communication activities (both internal and external) of institutions, aimed at generating positive relations with the public;<sup>2</sup>

2. *Academic variant*: PR is also a name of a field of knowledge about professional communication skills, style and art of developing image and brand of institutions, social organizations, building reputation in the institutions and reinforcing relations with the public;

3. *Journalistic variant*: PR is a name of a promotional and propaganda method and style of disseminating communications and information, as well as organizing events to feed the interest of the media and general public;

4. *Political variant*: PR is a synonym of negative assessment of competitor/opposition's communication activities;

5. *Market and business variant*: PR is a conventional term denoting all forms of activity carried out by PR agencies and PR departments, as well as private persons who take orders for all integrated marketing communication services (involving active participation in product selling).

This basket of comprehensive marketing services takes the form of a *megabusiness PR* — a peculiar mutation of marketing public relations. This clear promotional creation, in business practice explained by market demand, has little to do with the normative concept and philosophical bases of public relations, as it clearly goes beyond the borders of public interpersonal communication.

The normative variant is the most comprehensive in its presentation of the objective and activities taken by professionally prepared persons referred to as public relations consultants. The academic variant is used by universities where the scope of public communication by institutions and organizations is subjected to research analysis. Journalistic and political variants of PR interpretation have a caricatural nature. They are an expression of communication activities of concrete persons and political institutions, rather than the name of professional development and par-

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<sup>2</sup> The term “deliberate management of public image” also occurs in British PR textbooks. See Cotlle (2003, p. 3).

ticipation of a PR consultant in a social dialogue. In this variant-based understanding each person involved in propaganda or advertising is perceived as a PR specialist.

The fifth meaning, i.e. “megabusiness PR,” is in fact a declarative name of marketing communication in a broad sense, which utilizes all possible PR tools and techniques. This market and business variant, which is also popular outside Poland, corresponds to the commercial perspective of PR agencies and all businesses which above all see PR as a promotional tool, serving only this business. From the perspective of marketing communication there are no differences in function between PR, advertisement and other tools, as they are all supposed to be complementary and coherent in order to meet the marketing accumulation and synergy effect. As a result of these faded borders the responsibility for the results becomes blurred and there is a real risk of ignorance of the professional ethics principles.

Undoubtedly, the first two PR variants are the most coherent, universal and comprehensive. They also reflect the current understanding of the term “public relations” as popularized by all renowned national and international organizations. They are closest to the meaning of normative PR and also describe a characteristic object of scientific research and assessment of communication activities of an institution (carried out *via* communication audit). At the same time they highlight a very important public relations feature which differentiates it from traditional marketing activities — a non-commercial function of internal PR.

Global professional organizations define public relations as management based on communication of approaches and strategic relations between the organization and its internal and external shareholders, for mutual benefits and greater social governance. It resembles an Aristotelian approach: being able to persuade the stakeholders to imagine a better future of the institution and to support this vision, to motivate them so efficiently that they help execute it by participating in its development, improvement and completion. Identifying public relations mainly with the role of managing organization’s communication with stakeholders was also the most often referred to PR role in 43 European countries analyzed in 2000 (next to operating roles — i.e. implementation and evaluation of communication processes, reflection related roles — i.e. analysis of stakeholders’ behaviours in order to adjust the organization to fulfil a socially responsible function, and educational role — self-education to raise communication competences (Verčič, 2001).

It needs pointing out that our research participants from APRC declare that taking account of moral principles in everyday PR practice is necessary to ensure the desired, positive final effect and allows to avoid involvement in morally doubtful activities. They also do not approve of disguising the reality behind the decoration of attractive events, diverting public attention from negative facts, data or information concerning the business. Meanwhile, the controlled group of practitioners (focus group) had relatively little knowledge about the theory and philosophy of public relations and the related ethos of the profession, but it seems that the majority are of the opinion that what is the most important about public relations is public

relations itself — good contacts and relations with journalists. The supporters of this least complicated understanding of PR focus on simple forms of promotional and anti-crisis communication. They seek plaudits from the environment and favourable opinion of their customers — even if short-lived, as long as it is loud and provides the desired effects. *The most important thing is to make sure that there is no bad press and that no one speaks ill of myself and the customer* — this is how one could formulate the basic objective in this activity that is more reminiscent of propaganda craft than PR.

Based on the observation of the whole professional PR milieu one can draw a conclusion that this tendency has numerous practicing followers. Many of them do not seem to be bothered by strategic goals in communication and long-term effects. They limit themselves to superficial activities — promotional ritual is more profitable than the factual contents of communications and fulfilling the mission of public relations. This shallow character of activities does not have to result from a lack of theoretical knowledge and ignorance of the principles of professional ethos, but it is a real reflection of the current demand on the market of services. Many customers in Poland so far have not expected anything more of PR specialists — we are at an early stage of development of a large capitalistic market. The more demanding businesses which have already passed this stage order their public relations services with agencies enjoying big professional esteem.

To sum up — public relations milieu in Poland is very diversified in terms of knowledge and practices. The presented testimonies reflect versatile faces of the profession, understanding of ethos and professionalism. All respondents representing the Association of Public Relations Companies seem to be more professional in the understanding of their social role, meaning of ethics and closeness to the normative PR philosophy present in the documents of all international professional organizations. The focus group, however, had a tendency to favour image protective PR concept, i.e. temporary actions, typically promotional activities that most of all take care of the image in the media. In this case it would be more accurate to replace the term “public relations” with “media relations,” because in fact traditional media remain here the most important recipient of PR communications.

The research also brings us to formulate some more detailed conclusions. They can be systematized in the following set of remarks:

- It seems popular in the Polish PR milieu to identify the term public relations mostly with a marketing promotional tool and development of business image. PR specialists work for those who pay them. Social interests are not at the forefront. Marketing literature seems to be the basic source of PR knowledge and inspiration.
- Progressing commercialization of PR activities translates to a broader scope of services offered to customers, which combine PR not only with advertising and other promotional tools applied in promotion-mix, but also with all other tools of the integrated marketing communication (IMC). We see the birth of a myth of PR omnipotence and justification to use a new concept referred to here as an omnibus

PR. As a result of identifying PR with IMC, in the omnibus PR custom principles codified in the binding ethical PR principles (which are not developed thinking about a much richer market reality) are being liberated to offer comprehensive marketing services whose effectiveness can be calculated in the form of a concrete material profit. Thus, there is a noticeable interest in tools measuring the effectiveness of public relations.

- PR is perceived as a form of communication of commercial (business) organizations, rather than all organizations (social, cultural, public utility, non-governmental, etc.) or institutions.

- There is no deeper reflection about history, roles, tasks and principles of this profession, which results in a lack of professional awareness, there is no visible need to consider self-identification or even the need to define the scope of public relations. As a result this easy, reflectionless simplification of tasks facilitates the fulfilment of non-PR roles and participation in marketing sales of businesses.

- Underestimating the need to define their actions by PR specialists may also mean ignorance or disregard for the need to specify the borders of this activity, which as a consequence means consent to relativism of behavioural principles and facilitates the extension of one's trade offer with marketing services.

- Relativism of principles may prove that there is a so-called declarative morality, unsupported by actions in the professional PR milieu.

- Part of the milieu have no understanding of their own responsibility for the contents of the disseminated information. It is the form and its short-term effects that are the most important — superficial etiquette counts more than ethics. One does not understand that information should result in long-term understanding, upholding of a dialogue, rather than its termination or interruption in the near future.

- At the same time, respondents were of the opinion that it is not only worth talking about business ethics, but also following the ethical principles. From the point of view of people professionally related to public relations, ethical conduct has a special importance due to the effectiveness of actions taken and increasing the chances of carrying out PR business in general.

- There is an expectation to create a system of formal regulations related to acceptable professional behaviours in the form of a set of penalties for failure to observe the ethical norms. However, this desire may reflect the preference of external norms over own system of values.

- Commenting on the conclusions presented above (more detailed results in a book by J. Olędzki (2009)), one may notice that soon it will be necessary to specially work out “the ethics of integrated marketing communication,” as IMC is becoming a frequent task carried out by public relations agencies and there are no reasons to hide this from the public opinion.

One may also conclude that it is necessary to make a clear distinction between PR communications (where journalists and other communicators should be col-

laborators in professional relations) and pure marketing communications (where business partners are media house employees, i.e. representatives of professions other than journalists and other communicators). There are justified doubts when a person calling himself a PR specialist starts cooperating with a media house to buy/sell advertising materials, participates in sales promotion and uses all other marketing communication tools. This is marketing activity and should not be referred to as public relations. Mixing or combining these roles leads to degeneration of PR and also generates crisis, as it complicates the observance of clear ethical principles of the profession and as a result erodes the reputation of all public relations consultants and shapes a negative PR image.

### **THE SYNDROME OF "MORAL NON-VIRTUE"**

Several studies have already been published in Poland about professional ethics in public relations industry, which is a testimony that not only the PR milieu is sensitized to this issue, but also many academics who observe the behaviours of the representatives of this profession, confronting them with other social trust professions, such as for example professional ethics of journalists. Opinion polls are being carried out among various segments of this professional group, and the Association of Public Relations Companies in Poland decided to launch a special "Pure information" campaign, aimed at limiting the phenomenon of buying journalistic materials. (More about this issue in the study edited by J. Olędzki (2005).)

Based on the comparative analysis of this research and own research carried out in 2006, B. Mróz and K. Urbanek (2007, p. 226) from the Warsaw School of Economics identified a visible discord between code principles and real behaviours of entities functioning in the Polish PR industry. According to them "the confrontation of empirical research with the regulation of ethical codes is depressing. Considering the already achieved level of development, it seems that it is time to reinforce the weak foundations of professional ethics and introduce and enforce standards of professional reliability in the branch, which should serve further, healthy expansion of PR businesses in Poland."

An attempt at actions that always follow the rules is inadvertently linked with "situations" where these rules are of little use. And it is very difficult, if not impossible, to avoid taking account of special (usually mitigating) circumstances. In the course of professional practice, one can frequently come across events, the circumstances of which can justify some seemingly unethical behaviours. These softer forms of behaviour that raise certain doubts were described by Ann Gregory (2003, p. 87): "The majority of practitioners are able to accept the fact that there are some basic ethical principles, the observance of which is their duty. For example, telling the truth, being honest and delivering on the promises, enforces the awareness of possible consequences of the failure to follow these principles. So, while it is al-

ways right to tell the truth, it is not always right to tell *the whole* story, for example provide the names of people involved in crisis.”

It seems that the most frequent approach is close to situational ethics, according to which it would be impossible to always, at every hour, follow the common principles of ethics and morality. The problem is that one cannot abuse this option by free interpretations, but one has to refer to individual moral principles, experience and broader perspective, to make sure that the decision is as correct as possible, even if not everyone agrees with it.

Gifts for journalists are considered unethical. However, in many environments both giving and receiving gifts is the done thing, while others see it as violation of moral rights. It is therefore difficult to quote moral truths when the same situations are well received in some milieus and are an everyday occurrence, not considered to be a crime. In the opinion of our respondents in a versatile and rich business, such as public relations, there are always circumstances that justify the failure to follow universal moral values and norms, which means that in practice the principle of lesser evil is applied — sort of a syndrome of “moral non-virtue,” to use the already quoted term coined by a famous Polish philosopher Barbara Skarga (1994). The fact that many representatives of this profession adjust to the principle of “moral non-virtue” is a refined method of coping in ambiguous situations. It is a compromise between ethical doubts and at the same time satisfaction of one’s own and customer’s material aspirations, in the name of the known proverb “beads about the neck and the devil in the heart.”

“Moral non-virtue” is related to the ethical syndrome of current Polish PR — relatively very unified with all commercial marketing communication tools, focused on business promotion rather than social information, permanently torn by the dilemma of choice between the feeling of responsibility towards customers, social interest, one’s own profession and own benefits. It is coming to terms with the Gordian knot type situation where it is better not to cut it for the sake of peace. It is also a good justification for “moral non-virtue.”

Scientists point out to the progressing rise in various social pathologies related to sudden social, economic and political changes. Mass media also have their share in it — by providing information they extend the borders of human tolerance to behaviours of even criminal nature. As a result, we not only find out what wrongdoings can be committed by people against other people, but we become less sensitive to human misery, we become indifferent, justifying it with the enormosity of evil which we are not able to help or prevent. However, we do not feel happy about it and keep searching for positive solutions. One of them involves reference to human values and ethical behaviour.

One may be disturbed by the impression of spreading ignorance of axiological norms and consumerism which is intrinsically related to the syndrome of “moral non-virtue.” Consumerism, in particular, is more and more visible. We are unanimously converting from a social working class or capitalistic citizens to consumer



mass. Our interests shift from public to private matters. Digital media provide us with convincing arguments to this effect, they reinforce and increase our interest in global topics. Thanks to them, we can see how we are becoming more and more dependent on what is happening in geographically distant places, which may soon be of critical importance to us. This anxiety is favourable to the spread of consumerism, and we try to come to terms with it, as this consumerism process also provides positive effects — we notice how different we are, we develop our identity, see cultural and ethnical differences in order to respect and nourish them. Above all, we want to maintain the richness of diversity and learn tolerance, provided that this otherness does not bring the risk of calamity. People sick with hatred will live far from us and we will be dispatching soldiers, just to make sure we protect this consumerism of ours.

Philip Young, a British PR ethicist, suggests that each communication activity should be assessed against his “ethics of diffraction” model — a qualitative assessment of contents according to criteria that allow to find a clear answer on the ethical value of the message. Young (2007) is of the opinion that in a dynamic exchange of information each discourse participant constantly evaluates — not always consciously — the received and sent communications. He calls this evaluation process ethics of diffraction. According to the diffraction model, each message is categorized in five ways. We assess whether the message is:

- True and beneficial for the organization;
- True but not beneficial;
- Neutral (having no perceptible impact on perception — “the event will take place on Tuesday”);
- False and aimed at deceiving the recipient;
- False, but not aimed at deception.

This categorization is an ethical exercise which is frequent in life and activities of many people who then take decisions depending on the conclusions they draw from diffraction. We can see the diffraction of light on the prism — in the case of ethical diffraction human conscience seems to play the role of the prism. The question about the truth is probably the basic issue: is this supposed to be the truth of my customer and employer or the truth of the recipient? If PR is to be credible, it cannot participate in developing a false image of the customer. What does it mean? Again, the truth is the key for assessment. Can PR be neutral in its opinions — it is difficult to expect that, as there are no objective opinions, only our individual opinions. We do not only contest facts. It would therefore be ethical, if we openly said that these are our opinions and this would be honest towards the customer.

In the light of these considerations one could ask a more general question of an ontological nature. Are people from outside the professional PR milieu ethical when they write about ethical duties in PR? If we agree with the opinion that PR works in favour of an institution, do we dismiss in advance the thought that occa-

sionally there are truths of this institution and our truths — its observers, possibly stakeholders' or clients'? From which side, from whose perspective do we then assess the ethical behaviour? If we take perspective of the consumer of media contents, should we doubt the true nature of the information, opinions and facts? Coming back to PR, if we assume that a PR specialist acts on behalf of an organization, do we at the same time perceive him as a person who works in its favour or in our favour as customers? We agree with the statement that he develops a positive image of an institution — does this also include the interest of customers? We can answer positively in the case of public institutions, we will have doubts when analyzing the activities of political organizations and parliamentary factions, but it will not be as obvious in the case of banks, production and service businesses.

The above-mentioned syndrome of “moral non-virtue” is close to the diagnosis of environmental hypocrisy and reminds of the life and activities of Edward Bernays who collected both good and bad experiences. Bernays was an American precursor of PR and spin, and many consider him worth following (he was famous and very affluent), even if it is not always a conscious desire. Public declarations of representatives of the profession concerning the important role of ethical standards do not always go hand in hand with practice and contradict their private opinions.

PR similarly to politics or journalism and other open professions can involve people without any moral spine, who have no reservations towards damaging everything that is not with them or that, according to them, can be an obstacle to meeting their goals. They consider form more important than contents of action. They reject the “first act than talk about it” principle and involve only in propaganda activities which they want to use to substitute real actions and this is what they call public relations. In this situation, should the whole PR industry remain idle and unresponsive? A natural question comes to mind about the role of the Council of PR Ethics and professional associations which could all join in the discussion on defining the problem: what do we participate in — marketing and promotional activities or public communication, taking account of the customer and social interests?

One may of course challenge these remarks and ask a question about the need for discussion on PR ethics and the need for written codes of PR ethics. Everyday practices of many representatives of this developing profession eliminate some behaviours as a result of these principles. So to those who are nagged about betraying these principles, such a set of rules of conduct could be a very useful tool to avoid conflicts. However, opponents of codes enumerate several limitations which question the sense of developing a PR code:

1. We will never write down enough principles that would present correct behaviours in all ambiguous situations;
2. It is an encouragement to seek legal gaps, because the more principles and rights there are, the more time and energy is invested in looking for mistakes and ambiguities in all sorts of codes;

3. Interpretation of principles is a problem as well, because as we all know everyone can understand them one's own way;

4. The last threat involves a conflict of principles; what do you do in a situation when you are bound by the principle of truthfulness, but also by the principle of doing no wrong to another person? What do you do in a situation when the expressed truth (e.g. about the customer) can hurt many innocent people?

In the light of the above considerations there is no doubt that codes of ethics are necessary in every profession. Not only because public relations will not have a future without ethics, but also because whether we want it or not PR plays an important role in generating information consumed by the media and directly participates in social communication, and thus it joined the group of professions of public trust.

Patricia Parsons (2008, p. 48) identifies three stages of gaining professional respect as a basis of ethical behaviour of PR specialists:

- The first stage is to want and develop our own moral maturity and learn to understand it, respecting other people;
- The second stage is to harmonize one's habits and behaviour with this earlier developed system of values;
- At the third stage you realize this system of values in your own professional environment *vis-à-vis* customers and society, becoming an example of professional competence.

In other words: first be moral yourself, next behave morally towards others and then be competent in what you are doing — only then you will deserve a public opinion of being ethical and worthy of professional respect.

There is a conviction that a public relations practitioner should be “a jack of all trades.” It is a consequence of the fact that people practicing this profession in various institutions, businesses and economic sectors have to manifest many skills and cope in various circumstances. Many textbooks (Black, 1993; Davies, 2004; Seitel, 2003) point out the close relationship with other types of marketing communication (advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion and direct sales), journalism, diplomacy and politics or even law.

Considerations about PR profession practiced anywhere in the world may also lead to a breakdown into good and bad employees, those who carry out this profession with passion and those who have nothing to do with it, but call themselves PR specialists. There is no obligation to join any professional PR organization, there is no duty to take entry exams, undergo training courses or in-service courses, as it is considered to be a limitation of civil rights and freedoms. It would probably be problematic to formulate a list of criteria that would have to be met in order to be accepted to this profession. So as long as it is a profession that is open to any willing person lured by the temptation of generous money, one cannot expect the fulfilment of social expectations that all PR specialists should observe ethical principles and become professionals. Ethical behaviour is recognized as a private sphere of life of people who make sovereign choices and use own value systems

and own life experiences to take decisions. It is also the best understood knowledge that does not have to be in conformity with PR theory and science discussed at universities.

## CONCLUSIONS

In a civilized world developed public relations activities are founded on the belief in the capacity of men to communicate with others in the name of common good. A PR specialist is therefore expected not only to conduct dialogue, but also to have practical knowledge about ways and tools that make it effective. Continuous development of those tools, deeper knowledge about human behaviour, as well as technological advances in the area of communication means results in the fact that public relations business becomes richer and covers a broader scope of communications. Evolutionary democratization of communication has an impact on the development of PR techniques and tools, while rising social requirements impose better professional PR standards and more focus on the presented values and ethics.

An immanent feature of current public relations therefore involves a constant evolution of methods and means of communication, and thus permanent development. After the four well-known stages of PR development outlined by J. Grunig and T. Hunt (1984) we already face another one (Dozier, J. Grunig, L. Grunig, 1995), referred to as “excellent PR” or “win-win” (carrying out dialogue to create partnership communication leading to innovative solutions both in the public and in the business sphere), and surely this is not the last stage of PR development. We should assume that 100 years ago the idea of PR was not presented as a mature and perfect creation, but rather as a concept that requires polishing, optimizing and nourishing. And so, starting with the stage of a press agent, publicity and propaganda information, we have reached the model of equal chances for each communicator. Further perfection of communication principles seems to head towards reinforcing ethical values in this partnership communication. PR is an element of democracy, it cannot exist in monoculture and dictatorship. There are no possibilities of development in the climate of mafia-like intimidation, corruption, when access to information is limited, perspectives of regarding or assessing concrete institutions (businesses), people, groups or parties are deformed. Without PR understood in this way public communication will have no sufficient tools of critical thinking and assessment — which we expect of all mass media. As written in a different context by Jürgen Habermas: “democratic constitution remains just a facade so long as the material and cultural conditions for an inclusive, equitable and autonomous use of the rights of participation are not fulfilled.”<sup>3</sup>

We propose and would like to analyze PR as another stage of public communication evolution. In my opinion, public relations exists only in those countries which

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<sup>3</sup> Retrieved on March 2010 from: [www.the-utopian.org](http://www.the-utopian.org), or [www.micromega.net](http://www.micromega.net).

have a “loud public opinion” and freedom of public debate, because public relations requires certain conditions of development to prevent it from becoming sheer propaganda and advertisement. These conditions involve:

1. freedom of speech,
2. plurality of the media and access to various means of information and opinions,
3. free market,
4. free information flow (free access to Internet).

They do not have to be met by marketing and integrated marketing communication which as a result can exist and develop in any society. It may well be that this favourable atmosphere is conducive to the expansion of the above-mentioned megabusiness PR in any state, regardless of its political and social structures; democratic, single-party or totalitarian system. Indeed, the fifth consecutive variant of the term PR (market and business PR) is able to absorb the negative features of other options, as their common denominator involves using the same promotional and propaganda techniques.

There is a need to initiate a public debate about the idea of PR social responsibility, which by its fundamental nature has a character of a public, i.e. open and transparent communication. One can therefore conclude that the principle of social responsibility is one of the rules reflecting the ethos of this profession and has a significant impact on the effectiveness of PR activities. In the daily professional practice this means decency and treatment of all communication process participants as equal partners.

There is a noticeable dilemma between the hierarchy of ethical values and carrying out PR business according to the binding market law. However, at present, in the 21st century, this dilemma may turn out to be ostensible, if we assume that there are no reasons either to confront or to standardize PR and the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). PR is only a communication activity and CSR a concrete socially responsible action taken by the institution in favour of the community. There is a common perspective of pro-social development of communication and doing good for public, and PR specialists have a duty to inform the public about CSR. Our respondents do not dismiss the opinion that planning the effects of PR activities related to corporate social responsibility is not only an expression of ethical behaviour of each PR specialist, but also an expression of professionalism. It is a positive manifestation of rational thinking which we can already see in other countries.

Literature describes research confirming that external costs are significantly reduced when businesses try to develop a human community and pose business ethics at the top of their system of values. Business contracts are signed faster, because counterparties have more trust towards businesses whose organizational culture they know and with whose values they agree. Also, positive changes inside businesses can be observed — employees become more innovative, more involved

in the matters of the company and are more willing to cooperate with each other, levelling out rivalry and unhealthy competition. Many managers admit that it is necessary to implement ethical values in economic practices, as ethical values largely mean rationality, predictability, trust between partners without which there is a threat that one will have to resort to mafia-like economic solutions.

The public perception of socially desirable non-legal norms, or at least their declaration, is met with an unambiguously positive reception. In many developed countries it becomes fashionable to pursue value-based actions, which is reflected in the growing interest in corporate social responsibility. Each business functions on the basis of written or figured out values, i.e. universal rules that determine what is good and what is bad, what counts and what not and who has what sort of rights. If managements do not want to or are not able to manage values, principles and rituals in their businesses for which they are responsible, they are running the risk that someone else will do it for them. These can be naturally selected leaders, competitors from the business itself or some uncontrolled, spontaneous mechanisms that govern the whole crew in the organization. Here we can study more carefully the case of BP behaviour during Mexican Gulf pollution disaster.

It may well be that I see too many social values in public relations, which are not present in everyday PR business reality, but for the sake of the values themselves one should talk about this, as dialogue constitutes a superior value in any public communications. The foundation of ethical functioning in PR involves respect for others. And it is worth repeating that. The commencing century has started to bet on the need and power of dialogue and conversation precisely because the developing competition and material rivalry, with all its associated negative social and spiritual consequences, proves the need to return to humanism.

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