

STATEMENTS BY THE PRESS SECRETARY OF THE PRESIDENT

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The journalists' remark "... stated the Press Secretary" has long become some kind of an "idiomatic" phrase, a permanent attribute in the stories of journalists about the statements made by the President's spokesman. It is quite acceptable, as the Press Secretary's *statement* is one of the pivots of the spokesman's job, primary product of his activity in respect of political informing, to put it figuratively – his "language." If we divide the contents of press conferences, briefings, interviews, etc. into constituent parts, the statement will happen to be in line with similar purely informational spots. Statements may be in form of texts and sentences, which carry the maximum of semantic load. Though limited in their size, the statements of the President's Press Secretary are *at the given moment conclusive descriptions of elements of policy* of the current authorities on this or that issue.

All of this makes the creation of statement texts a difficult process, which requires special knowledge and skills. In some sense, this reminds creation of aphorisms, where a missed or used not to the point component of speech may distort the meaning or will reduce to zero the effectiveness of the said. A mistake made in the statement and causing

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incorrect interpretation of the authorities' policy may become a serious problem of general political scope, and the quality of the statement in general is the quality indicator of the whole political team: it is clear that the Press Secretary is the co-author of the statement at the best.

If we try to describe underlying meanings contained in the majority of statements, then the following classification can be brought about: denoting president's awareness ("*...the Head of the State is reported about the happening*", "*...informed, situation is under control*"); absolutely imperative action ("*...relevant recommendations are given*", "*...signed the decree; assigned/dismissed/received/held*"); denoting readiness/non-readiness for action ("*...ready to establish diplomatic relations without any preconditions*", "*...will not discuss again...*"); emotional condition/expression of views, inviting/not inviting to actions both the subject and the object ("*...concerned with the happening and have this attitude to that issue/hope to get clarifications*", "*the President is sure/thinks that...*"); call/order for action ("*...we expect/demand explanation in connection with this incident*", "*the President demanded soonest clarification of all the facts of the matter*"); statement of fact/clarification ("*...corresponds/ does not correspond to the facts*", "*...indeed...*") and finally, assessment ("*...we consider inappropriate*", "*... consider it an attempt to interfere with the internal affairs of our country*").

Practical Example 1

In France, transportation industry workers continued their strike, demanding President Nicolas Sarkozy to abandon the plans for labor privilege cutback aiming to increase competition in the labor market. Transport workers in Paris promised that the strike, which started a day

before, would continue irrespective of the fact that Sarkozy called on the strikers to settle the conflict through negotiations, Associate Press reports. “The president of the Republic has always considered that there is more to be gained for all parties in negotiation than in conflict,” stated David Martinon, Press Secretary to the President Sarkozy’s administration. “The strikes must end as quickly as possible in the interest of passengers” – the Press Secretary reported Sarkozy’s call.

‘Subject creativity’ of the authority towards the situation’ component is genre-forming for the statement, which may be expressed by a finished or continuous (continuing at the given moment – *present continuous*) action denoting at least making interim decisions or readiness for that in the near future (“... *decision is made to examine the situation at the upcoming meeting of the Security Council*”, “...*we are now examining the situation and following the developments to elaborate the relevant attitude*”) or by assessment. If this component is missing, then we would be dealing not with a statement, but with providing pure information, where the current situation preserves initial elements and does not undergo any changes after it has been voiced.² Thus, let us imagine that in some country, with which diplomatic relations have been established, military takeover happened. If the Press Secretary reports that our embassy in that country was not exposed to any danger, diplomats continue their work in normal mode and in the result of disturbances, the citizens of our country did not suffer in that state, then

¹Meaning:

- a) subjectivity, here – authority of the speaker,
- b) presumed identification of this authority by the addressees of the statement and
- c) creation of a new element in the current situation.

²Cases of statement/clarification are not exclusions here, as *restoration* of the true picture of this or that event becomes an action here.

this is only information. And if we add a sentence with one of the phrases below (“...*We do not recognize the new government*”, “...*president ordered MES to help in overcoming humanitarian disaster*”, “...*ready to carry out mediation mission to avoid large scale civil war*”, “...*we consider it an internal affair of the given country*”, etc.) after which the situation “grows” with a new element in the form of a subjective attitude to the events in that country, then it will become a classical statement. Incidentally, journalists feel this difference immediately and give relevant remarks to quotes. Thus, to the phrase “...*our diplomats continue their work in the normal routine*”, probably the remark “*the Press Secretary reported*” will be added, whereas to the quote “...*we consider it an internal affair of the given country*” the remark “...*the Press Secretary stated*” will be added.¹

Practical Example 2

Israel does not recognize the new Palestinian government. Miri Eisen, Press Secretary to the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert reported. “The political program of this government introduced today, envisages creation of a Palestinian state through resistance, which clearly means terror”, she said. “We shall not work with this government, as it does not recognize our existence, past agreements, and more importantly, does not in any way renounce terror”, Eisen said.

I consider it important to show the existence of the factor of *presumption of subjectivity and responsibility of the authorities*, which

¹To fully understand the peculiarities of the statement genre, those who are interested may want to familiarize themselves with the notion of *performative*, or more precisely, the *performative verbs* and their classification (I would recommend “Performatives in grammar and vocabulary” by academician Yu.D. Apresyan, AS of USSR, Ser. Lit. and Lang., 1986, T.45, #3), as it is the performative that forms statement, the utterance of which is equal to doing an action.

must be taken into consideration when writing statement texts. Statement of the President's Press Secretary on this or that occasion by all means must be made based on the attitudes of the authority, reflecting the prerogative of the President for imperative actions as the Head of the State. The action, mentioned in the statement, must be within the frames of initially existing *permanent responsibility* of the high authorities, in no way ignoring, underestimating, but at the same time not crossing the line. For instance, the Press Secretary to the President must not "*express hope*" that the law enforcement bodies will take measures to find out the circumstances of a high-profile crime. This may be considered as unnatural dissociation, evasion from responsibility for law and order in the country, loss of the President's being a subject in the country. Here with the help of actually used (e.g. during a special meeting) imperative expressions we should introduce information about exercised right of the Head of the State to be in charge of the defense and law enforcement agencies: "...*the President gave a strict order to the heads of the law enforcement agencies to undertake all necessary measures for finding out the circumstances of the crime.*" By the way, an authority's presumption of being a subject and its responsibility clearly dictate the vocabulary to be used (*made a decision, give task/order, assigned/dismissed, received, held, visited, considers unnecessary, intends, speaks against, etc.*). Though for this reason the vocabulary for describing the President's activity is somewhat limited, at the same time, as experience shows, it is more than enough and what is more important, it is to the point in linguistic and political terms.

Practical Example 3

The President of Iran Mahmud Ahmadinejad intends to remove ministers of Economy and Internal Affairs, reports AFP referring to the Press Secretary of Iran's leader. Ahmadinejad's Press Secretary said that the President has already addressed Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi, Minister of Internal Affairs, and Davoud Danesh-Jafari, Minister of Economy and Finance Affairs of the Islamic Republic with a call for their resignation.

As it has become clear from the above-mentioned, statements can be divided into the following types: *actions, assessments and statement of a fact*. In their turn, these types have several subtypes, which are hard to summarize in a final classification, both because they are many, and because of free variability of their content components. At first sight, we can single out some of them: *informational, informational-elucidative, informational-assessing, assessing, affirmative/denying statements*, etc. As you can see, the naming classifications here are explicit and they give a full idea of the content of the subtypes, so it seems unnecessary discuss each of them separately. I would only mention that depending on the subject of the statement and circumstances touched upon in it, the statement may sometimes combine elements of several types.

Let us discuss several statements from experience related to “constructing” content.

Here is a statement made by the Press Secretary to the President of the Russian Federation in response to information about “an expressed concern” by the US president in telephone conversation with Vladimir Putin in connection with the “non-democratic” parliamentary elections in Russia in 2007. “*Press Secretary to the RF president Alexei*

Gromov said on Tuesday that in telephone conversation with Vladimir Putin the US President George Bush did not express concern in connection with State Duma (Russian Parliament) elections on December 2, reports 'Interfax' agency." According to Gromov, the topic of parliamentary elections in RF was raised by the Russian president. He informed his American colleague about the results of the elections in connection of which Bush remarked that "Putin's popularity in Russia is well-known", the Press Secretary said.

"Russian president criticized some actions and statements made by the US Department of State in connection with the parliamentary elections in RF", Gromov said. To this Bush noticed that "American foreign-policy office sought to sincerely express its feelings to the Russian people." Gromov also stressed that during the telephone conversations they discussed other serious issues too, which we do not comment on for confidentiality purposes." This is a typical statement denying statements of fact and serving to restore the true picture of the event, in this case conversation between the Presidents of the two countries. When analyzing this statement we should pay attention to the logical sequence of sentences and the structure of the semantic antithesis. Thus, in the first sentence one with the help of particle "не-" (*not*) *direct negation, denying that something took place*, which on the level of the fact states the truth (in reality no concern was expressed), whereas the following phrase "...*the topic of parliamentary elections was raised by the Russian president...*" with further indication on the criticism of the actions by the US Department of State, it fully restores the semantic and emotional content of the event (the author of the critical remarks during the conversation was not the American, but the Russian president). Emphasizing the circumstance of the confidentiality of the conversation is an

original criticism of the fact of leakage of (by the way wrong) classified information. As a result of restoring the true picture, as it can be seen from the analysis of this statement, not only a formal change of the true fact took place on the semantic level on the principle of *did/did not*, but also a change of the subject and object of criticism took place, which is more important in the given context.

Here is another statement made by the Press Secretary to RA president, which *refutes statements of the fact* in response to the rumors continually discussed in the Armenian mass media that Robert Kocharyan, at one of his meetings with the representatives of the ruling coalition requested from the latter “political assistance” and protection from the opposition during the parliamentary debates. “*First of all I would mention that the President is not used to ask anybody for help and he does not need it. As to the statements of the anonymous source, they do not correspond to the fact. It is known that during that meeting a number of important issues were discussed. Only one question was voiced about the given topic. The President asked the present people: doesn't the parliamentary majority need “time to make statements” to express political positions on actual issues and is this why the parliamentarians from the majority faction fully leave the rostrum to the opposition? That is it. So, the anonymous source simply lied or his story has been colored by the newspapers.*” Here the first sentence emphasizes untruthfulness of the statement by definition, which, in principle, could be enough for refutation. By the way, this manner of refuting statements is often used in cases, when the Press Secretary does not have a detailed answer to the question, but at the level of voicing the principles of the politics, the spokesman gives a relevant reaction; this will be discussed in detail in the next part on holding press conferences.

Then, as you can see from the example, a direct refutation follows through narrating true content of the conversation, in which, with the help of indication on the importance of other themes discussed during the meeting, special emphasis is made on the minor significance of the given issue in the President's perception. Finally, as a result of refutation, a change in the *essence* of being a subject takes place: instead of the author of the request, the subject of criticism speaks.

Practical Example 4

Press Secretary to the President of Kyrgyzstan Nourlan Shakiyev, during the interview with AKIpress, refuted allegations by Felix Koulov that president Kurmanbek Bakiyev gave prior agreement to hold early presidential elections. The matter is that today some mass media quoted Felix Koulov, as if the President of KR gave prior agreement to hold early elections, as well as expressed readiness to resign from his position after 18 months. As Shakiyev stated, "provisions of holding presidential elections are clearly specified in the constitution of the country. It also clearly specifies under which conditions pre-term elections may be held. There are no grounds to hold early elections now. All the political processes in our country must be implemented in accordance with the legislation and within the frames of the Constitution", stated the Press Secretary to the President.

Below are examples of statements of assessment.

"Premature cancellation of visa-free practice of citizens' movement in our countries will dramatize relations between Moscow and Prague, and first of all significantly complicate personal contacts between the Russians and Czechs", Press Secretary to the head of the Czech Republic Ladislav Špaček told to ITAR-TASS during the inter-

view. *“The President speaks against the fact that visas are granted to the citizens of RF starting from May 29, he thinks that the visa regime with Russia should be introduced as late as possible – right on the eve of the country’s entry to EU.”*

Here, in spite of the phrase *“speaks against”* with a verb in imperfective aspect showing action, assessment is expressed which shows negative attitude of the Head of the State towards the probable process. The assessment expressed in the statement is accompanied with *arguments*, which is a necessary content component in statements of assessment. Along with this, as it is seen in the example, articulation of two contexts takes place: actual, based on the indication on untimeliness of the probable action, and permanent, which refers to its inevitability in future.

Articulating several contexts in a statement of assessment is also the guarantee of its maximum effectiveness; it is the argument base of this kind of statements that is in the center of attention of the political circles. For example, in many cases, when a certain politician or his/her actions become an object of a statement of assessment, for a more comprehensive explanation of arguments of positive/negative assessment, along with voicing general principles of politics, it is appropriate to operate with the context of personal qualities of a certain politician, his biography, etc. Here is the statement of the Press Secretary referring to the chairmanship of the ruling party in Armenia by Prime Minister at the time, Serzh Sargsyan: *“The President considers it positive that Serzh Sargsyan becomes a member of the Republican Party and presides over the Board of RPA. A politician with great authority, he, like several other statesmen after becoming a member of the party, may have positive impact on the political process in our country. Defi-*

nately, this is a positive phenomenon especially that so far we have very often dealt with factionalizing in the parties, rather than consolidation around one ideology.”

Statements of information and action indicating *urgent informing* of the President and description of *imperative actions* of the Head of the State are widely used in emergencies. As an example, we shall study materials from mass media, in which relevant statements of the Press Secretary to the President of RF are used. Below are reports of October 23, 2002 by ITAR-TASS about the first actions of President Putin (he was abroad at that time) after the hostage-taking by terrorists in Theatre Center on Dubrovka, Moscow:

“President of the RF Vladimir Putin was immediately informed about the capture of the concert hall in Moscow. Press Secretary to the President Alexei Gromov informed him about that. As reported by the press-service of the President of Russia, in connection with the events in Moscow Vladimir Putin cancelled his meeting with the Federal Chancellor of Germany Gerhard Schröder in Berlin and his working tour to Portugal. At the same time, it was assumed that on the way to Lisbon the Russian leader would negotiate with Schröder on the territory of the Tegel Airport in western Berlin. Besides, Sergey Prikhodko, Deputy Head of the Administration of RF president, yesterday told ITAR-TASS that within the frames of the daylong visit to Portugal negotiations had been planned between Vladimir Putin and Portuguese president Jorge Sampaio and Prime Minister Jose Manuel Duran. The Portuguese President expressed ‘sincere sorrow’ in connection with the happening. In connection with the terrorist act, Vladimir Putin made a decision to cancel the working visit to Mexico. Alexei Gromov, Press Secretary to the Russian president, told the RIA Novosti that the

head of the Russian state decided not to take part in the Summit of the member-countries of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Los Cabos, Mexico.” As can be seen from the example, first of all the phrase indicating urgent informing of the head of the country is introduced, which is of great importance in such cases: let us remember the subject and responsibility presumption of higher authorities. Along with it, the head-of-the-state’s being an object in the sentence (“...*the President was informed...*”) is in fact only seeming or conditional as it also indicates that the President *keeps the situation under control* and is ready to take certain actions. In the given case, cancellations of all the planned meetings and upcoming visits come to prove the above mentioned.

Then comes the August 26, 2004 issue of “Nezavisimaya gazeta” (Independent newspaper) on two air crashes that took place in Russia with an interval of two minutes. All the necessary components of informing about the actions of the President in emergency can be revealed without any difficulty here: the same indication of urgent informing of the Head of the State, urgent and periodical reports about his instructions, orders, etc.

Putin returned to Moscow

“Yesterday evening Russian president Vladimir Putin returned to Moscow from Sochi. News of the coincident air-crashes found Vladimir Putin in his residence ‘Bocharov Ruchey’ (Bocharov stream) in Sochi. By 3:30 am the Press Secretary to the President Alexei Gromov told the Russian information agencies that the Head of the State had “immediately been informed” about the tragedy and he at once began to give instructions to the ministers of security, defense and law enforcement agencies.”

Initially Putin assigned Federal Security Service as the main instance to investigate the crashes. According to the Press Secretary to the President, the Head of the Country “committed RF FSS to begin immediate comprehensive investigation in connection with the tragedy of airplane Tu-134 in Tula Region and disappearance of the airplane Tu-154 from radar screens in 138km from Rostov-on-Don.”

Such a choice indicates the fact that during the first hours after the tragedy, terrorist act was considered as the main lead. It was not by chance that the members of the top brass were called to the Head of the State to report about the progress of the search of the airplane and analysis of the causes for the accident. “Vladimir Putin constantly receives reports from the MES, FSS and other law enforcement agencies in Russia”, the semiofficial agencies reported in their morning news, quoting Alexei Gromov. So, at about 9 am Sergey Shoigu reported to the President about finding the crash site of Tu-154 airplane.

However, close to the noon, the attitude of the administration in connection with the tragedy in the air over Rostov and Tula regions changed. FSS stated that no signs of terrorist act have been discovered yet. The Moscow police did not at all consider explosion at the bus stop to be a malicious hooliganism. A short time ago, news was received from Sochi: a civilian official was assigned as responsible for the analysis of the happening. Vladimir Putin assigned Igor Levitin, Minister of Transport as the Chairman of the State Committee on investigating the reasons for the crash of airplanes Tu-134 and Tu-154. The President tasked the minister with submitting proposals for the committee staff within the shortest period, said Alexei Gromov.”

Here is another typical example. This is the statement made in February 2008 by the Press Secretary to the Armenian president in connec-

tion with the fire in the building of the RA Ministry of Justice. In this statement, along with components required for the genre that have been examined herein, there is indication on the actions of the President as the head of the executive power: “*The Head of the State was reported about the fire of the previous day in the building of the Ministry of Justice. President Kocharyan charged the law enforcement bodies to conduct relevant investigation to find out the causes of the fire. At the same time, the President tasked the RA Government with taking urgent measures to move the ministry into a new building and to resume its routine activities. Robert Kocharyan expressed his satisfaction with the work of the fire-fighting service, who managed to stop the fire from spreading to the neighboring buildings of the Cassation Court and the RA Prosecutor General’s office.*” This example will help us focus on one of the hidden semantic elements of the statement, which is widely used by the specialists in creating similar texts. In accordance with the action expressed by this or that verb, a more suitable denotation is selected to indicate the President. We should pay attention that in the given case the denotation-verbal pairs are arranged in the following way: *the Head of the State - was reported, the President - charged, Robert Kocharyan - expressed satisfaction*, which enable, along with ensuring the semantic variety of text, in the first two pairs, to show actions by Robert Kocharyan related to the event strictly as a president. The last pair in some way emphasizes his personal attitude to the actions of the fire fighters. Perception of this element mainly takes place on subconscious level, however, in certain cases it has strict specifics. Thus, if the President goes to a military unit, then his another denotation is applied – *Supreme Commander in Chief*, which cannot be used in cases not related to the armed forces of a country or having no special or targeted indication of that function of the Head of the State.

Finally, let us examine a statement, in which a public official's relevant emotional condition is expressed as a response to the statement of another person, which becomes, in the given case, a way of restoring the true picture of the reality. Here is a news report by the Armenian IA "Mediamax": *"Yesterday Peter Semneby, EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, said, "Armenian authorities have the full responsibility for establishing correct tone for the mass media, while avoiding direct interference." Semneby talked about this from Brussels in the telephone interview with Mediamax, commenting on the results of his two-day visit to Armenia." At the request of Mediamax the Press Secretary to the President of Armenia commented on this statement. "Mr. Semneby's statement puzzled. I do not think that in European countries the authorities are accountable for the tone in mass media. I do not see at all what tools can be used to implement this accountability. I do not know motives for Mr. Semneby's statement, nor about assessment criteria and information sources, but they are obviously far from being true. If Mr. Semneby made some efforts and studied the original cause of tension of pre-election polemics in Armenia, he would doubtlessly see that the authorities are the most restrained participant of the process. By the way, we are observing elections in Europe and, frankly speaking, mass media there do not exercise any special delicacy in their tone."* As seen from the example, in the given case we deal with refutation, expressed with the help of indicating general perplexity connected with the statement, which is emphasized by arguments of comparison. This is quite a widespread technique, implying application of a reciprocal, sometimes rather harsh criticism.

In any case, to indicate a certain meaning of the statement the phrase *"far from being true"* is used, which enables avoiding some ambiguity typical for this kind of statements.

In summary of the aforementioned, I would like to emphasize such an important psychological and social factor existing in any society, as the *need for an adequate response* by the authorities. In some way, this particular need is the generator of the genre of the statement. The society expects permanent accountability and response from the authorities to any significant process or event in this or that way related to the country, by which the use of all above-mentioned components in the statements is determined. Indication of urgent informing of the Head of the State, voicing assessment attitudes in relation to various events, the story about imperative actions by the President and restoration of the true picture of the events, do not end in themselves, nor are they strictly political PR. In addition to their intended effects, they serve for satisfaction of the mentioned need of the society, and in practice they implement the presumption of themselves being a subject and of the authorities being accountable.

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