LOVEBIRDS? THE MEDIA, THE STATE AND POLITICS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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Media Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe: Developing a Framework of Analysis

John Keane (1991, 52-53) notes that in today's debates on the media "the bodies of Tom Paine and other early modern protagonists of 'liberty of the press'" are being exhumed:

> *This is because in countries such as the United States, Italy, Poland, Germany and Britain a curious thing is happening. The old language of "liberty of the press", shaped by the ethos of private market competition, is making a grand return to the centre stage of public debate about the future shape of the mass media ... History appears to be repeating itself.*

History is repeating itself also in the sense that Poland and other Central and Eastern Europe are now the scene of the process which took place in most other European states already a long time ago: the disentanglement of the media from structures of the state, and political entities. As the old centralised command system of the Party-State is dismantled and the classical division of powers is slowly and painfully restored, the media must retrace the process which began with the original battle for liberty of the press in 17th-century England and subsequently spread to the United States and the rest of Europe. That resulted in what Alexander (1981) calls a process of **media differentiation**, i.e. the process whereby the media become "structurally free of directly inhibiting economic, political, solidary, and cultural entanglements" (Alexander 1981, 33), and are no longer "adjuncts to parties, classes, regions, and religious groups" (Alexander 1981, 27).

Disentanglement of the media from state structures is a fundamental prerequisite for the emergence of democracy since "in a democratic society the media is /sic/ in constant struggle with the state: it confronts the state as the populist counterpart to rational-legal control" (Alexander 1981, 25). In Central and Eastern Europe, the differentiation of the media can also be seen as an

element of the emergence of civil society, long pursued by dissidents and seen as an indispensable element of a democratic social system (Splichal 1993, 1994).

The evolution of media systems is, of course, the subject of extensive research (some of it is reviewed in Jakubowicz, Jedrzejewski 1988). Today, this problematic is greatly relevant in Central and Eastern Europe as scholars seek to capture the essence of the relationship between media change and social change and develop a general framework for analysing it (Paletz, Jakubowicz and Novosel 1994; Sparks and Reading 1994; Manaev and Prilyuk 1993; Frybes 1994). This bespeaks an awareness, well expressed by Downing (1994, 2-3), that to "understand media, there (in Central and Eastern Europe - K.J.) as elsewhere, we need to steer away from media-centric explanations (and) relate media to a series of processes and institutions in these nations, such as economic forces, international relations, the State, political movements..."

Actually, this question of the "fit" between the media system and its social environment long preoccupied Central and Eastern European scholars while the Communist system was still in existence. They were concerned that the media failed to keep pace with the more general process of social and political change.

John Dimmick (1986, 477-478) adopts the concept of socio-cultural evolution to explain change in communication industries resulting from change in the social environment:

> *Socio-cultural evolution is concerned with macro-evolutionary change in observable attitudes of social organization (e.g. media organisations - K.J.) arising from the interaction with the environment ... variation within a population or industry provides one precondition for evolution to occur. If sufficient variation is present, environmental conditions may operate differentially to favor or select organizations possessing certain attributes. The organizations favored by the environment may attempt to survive by adapting to the altered environment or may succumb to the pressure of environmental selection. In other words, socio-cultural evolution operates to increase the "fit" between a population of organizations and the environment.*

When the Communist system was still alive, some media scholars pointed to the incompatibility of the media system (whose evolution had, after all, been artificially stopped for political reasons) to the social situation. They argued, for example, that there was a "natural evolutionary tendency" on the part of society to press for democratisation of communication, reflecting its general economic and cultural development. This is in line with Alexander's (1981, 24) view that

> *the differentiation of the mass news media is a developmental process parallel to the 'classic' cases of differentiation which have traditionally been in the focus of attention, the emergence of the autonomous economic market, independent state and independent religious and cultural activities.*

Accordingly, Central and Eastern European media scholars believed in the 1980s that the Communist media system "lagged behind" general social development and should be allowed to "catch up" (Jakubowicz, Jedrzejewski 1988).

The question, however, is whether it is possible to deduce what the media model in

a country should be from its particular stage of social change and socio-economic development and consequently to "prescribe" a normative model for it. This is attempted by Manaev (1994) who notes that the fundamental process of transition from the totalitarian to a democratic socio-political system should lead from **unity** to **diversity** as the main organising principle of society. Accordingly, genuine transformation of the media's place and role in the social systems of post-Communist countries should, in his opinion, lead to their emancipation or "autonomization" (which is another word for what Alexander calls "differentiation") and redefinition from an instrument of power to a form of interaction of different social groups, turning them into an element of civil society and participatory democracy. He views this process as having the following dimensions:

- political: the media become independent thanks to the separation of powers in the process of dismantling the totalitarian/authoritarian system;
- economic: the media cut their ties of economic dependence on institutions of power;
- social: the media become dependent on their audiences which evolve from passive objects to active subjects of communication;
- technological: the media incorporate and apply all the new technologies;
- professional: separation of fact and opinion, news and comment, leading to objective depiction of reality in the media.

Manaev recognises that this is an ideal-typical model of the new media system which it is difficult to translate into practice. He identifies a crucial factor which impedes this process: political "power turns out to be the most conservative factor of mass communication since, just like before, it perceives the society (the public) as an object in need of various influences, and mass media as an instrument for exerting such influence" (Manaev, n.d., 23; see also Johnson 1993 for a more general review of the situation in some Central European countries in this regard).

This is in line with much of the existing literature on the subject. Tehranian (n.d.) points to the importance of the political and ideological determinants of communication processes. Duch and Lemieux (1986) introduce political structures as an exogenous variable affecting communication development - on the assumption that "governmental attempts to control communications should vary across different types of political regimes, depending on the need of governing elites to preserve their control against competing interests" (Duch and Lemieux 1986, 5). These politically motivated attempts at control are assumed in their paper to affect both the choice of communication media to develop and the goals and aims of communication policy and regulation systems, reflected also in the choice of social institutions of the media applied in particular countries. Political considerations are seen as the crucial factor in the emergence of radically different systems of broadcast media in Europe and the United States in the 1920s and 1930s (Jakubowicz, Jedrzejewski 1988). Also Alexander (1981) sees them as the main reason why the process of media differentiation (i.e. separation from the body politic) proceeded along different paths in different Western countries.

Although it has to be accepted that that the pace and direction of change in the media is predicated on the pace of wider social and political change, i.e. on macrostructural factors, it must equally be recognised that a particularly important role in either facilitating or impeding media change is played by political considerations, involving especially the governing elite's view of what it needs to preserve its control against competing interests.

Policy Options in Transforming Central and European Media Systems

The range of possibilities in terms of media transformation in Central and Eastern European countries is extensive since in Western European countries a number of major, sometimes contradictory, processes have taken place in this field in past decades:

- "media differentiation", which began a long time ago, but has continued in the 1960s and 1970s with the transition of state- or government-controlled broadcasting systems into public service ones;
- professionalisation of journalists, a corresponding process which signifies a redefinition of journalists from propaganda tools to providers of competently collected and written information and non-partisan, impartial and neutral interpreters of social reality;
- media decentralisation and specialisation, promoted by both a public-service- and a market-driven desire to identify and cater for social and interest groups, as well as minorities inadequately served by mass-audience national media;
- democratisation, promoted by a powerful movement in Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, and in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, oriented to satisfying what was perceived as a general need to communicate and realise the right to communicate, to provide opportunities for social access to, and participation in running the media;
- demonopolisation and "deregulation" of the broadcast media in the Western world in the 1980s, resulting from the triumph of neoliberalsm (as exemplified by Thatcherism or Reaganomics) and involving a reduction of public interventionism into the media and abolition of state broadcasting monopoly, setting the stage for the emergence of a private sector of broadcasting;
- commercialisation of private and partly also public broadcast media as a result of subjecting them to market laws and the increasing role of advertising in financing them;
- concentration of ownership at national and international scale;
- internationalisation of content (especially of television and film) and in many cases of ownership, as well as of the scale of operation which in extreme cases means globalisation of some media conglomerates.

  Many of these processes were aided and promoted by the rise of new information and communication technologies.

Some of the policy measures needed to affect the evolution of the media system from unity to diversity, as postulated by Manaev, and to create free and democratic media (which requires media differentiation, professionalisation of journalists, demonopolisation, decentralisation, a degree of democratisation) are as follows:

1. The dismantling of the old system of controls and constraints on freedom of the press, and of the market, in order to eliminate the old "unity" as the fundamental organising principle and opens the way to social and media diversification. This must include abolition of: state monopoly of the media; state or party management of the media; censorship; licensing or discretionary registration of newspapers or periodicals (e.g. based on content criteria); administrative allocation of newsprint or printing

capacity; a distribution monopoly; government or state control over the national news agency and any other press agencies; government financing or subsidies for the press.

2. Media freedom and autonomy can be illusory without a legislative framework providing at least basic legal and institutional guarantees of that freedom and autonomy. What is needed is media (press and broadcasting) laws protecting the freedom of the media and their access to information, and introducing only such regulation of, and restrictions on press freedom as are necessary in a democratic society (e.g. for reasons listed in paragraph 2 of Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights): a telecommunications law, a copyright law, company law, anti-monopoly law; banking and other laws creating normal business practices, enabling media establishments to operate in accordance with the rules of market economy;

3. Free media are not necessarily democratic media in terms of a fair and representative reflection in their content of the full range of views, or of access and participation and social accountability of the media. Deliberate public policy promoting democratisation of the media is required for this purpose. This must include a system of regulation and oversight which eliminates government or political party interference into the operation of the media; creation of a broadcast regulatory body which ensures observance of the law and the adoption of broadcasting policy guided by general public interest and not narrow political interests; a procedure for appointing the top management of public broadcasting media which depoliticises the process and prevents political or administrative pressure from being brought upon that management; rules for fair coverage of elections and access by candidates to the media; rules for fair access of political parties, trade unions, employers organisations and other ranking and representative bodies to air time on public radio and television; a programme and information policy ensuring reflection in media content of A diversity of opinions and ideas and a wide range of social and political and cultural values; finally a system for lowering barriers to market entry for new media, especially those created by smaller groups and organisations or minorities (tax exemptions or reductions, lower postal tariffs, lower licence and frequency fees, etc.);

4. A free market and economic growth are needed to fuel the development of the private, advertising-financed media sector.

Clearly, progress in these areas depends on progress on democratising society and the system of government. Other processes mentioned above will also unfold as these societies evolve and when conditions for them to happen have been created. As can be seen, these include economic conditions, involving especially the creation of an open, free-market economy. In Table 1 we seek to show in general terms which process is predicated on change in which field of social life.

Table I: Processes of Media Change as Determined by Change in Key Areas of Social Life

Politics	Politics, Economy	Economy
Differentiation	Decentralisation	Demonopolisation
Democratisation	Specialisation	Commercialisation
Deregulation	Internationalisation	Globalization
Professionalisation		Concentration

Transformation of Central and Eastern European Societies: A General Overview

The process of fundamental, systemic transformation in Central and Eastern Europe is analysed and interpreted in many ways. Jadwiga Staniszkis (1994) believes that it has taken three forms:

- a "top-down" revolution, decreed and managed from above;
- an implosion, involving a collapse of all or most institutions and general disintegration of the state;
- an evolutionary change, involving formal and symbolic continuity with the past while gradual change of the socio-political context gives old institutions new meaning and new patterns of functioning.

The form of transformation unfolding in a given country will determine to a considerable extent how fast and comprehensive media change in that country will be. Staniszkis considers the Polish case, for example, to be one of a top-down revolution, with the state caught between the need to achieve a breakthrough and the continuation of old laws and institutions. It has shown itself to be unable comprehensively to control and manage the process of change, especially in the sphere of social consciousness, people's attitudes and convictions. Hence the modernising elite is, according to Staniszkis, out of touch and largely unable to communicate with the majority. This, we might add, has resulted in an unwillingness on the part of that elite to give up control of at least some of the media, so as to be assured of the ability to distribute its message.

Lamentowicz (1944) says that Poland was able to adopt a policy of shock therapy in pursuing the introduction of market economy largely because of the existence of a mass Solidarity movement which in the beginning provided the first Solidarity government with a strong popular base. The lack of such large social constituency in favour of fast economic reform resulted in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the former GDR in the adoption of centralised, statist policies of economic transformation (Wiatr 1993). Romania, Belarus and Ukraine are another case altogether, with barely the beginnings of market economy being introduced.

The very same dissident and opposition leaders who had insisted that Communist regimes accept, or reconcile themselves to, the development of civil society which "would populate the wilderness separating the individual from the /Communist/ state" (Smolar 1991, 15), "now - after they had gained power - abandoned that language in favour of the classic concerns for the state and the market" (Smolar 1993, 40). They argued that the development of a full-fledged party system would be premature and that society should remain as united in facing the new challenges as it was in resisting the Communist system. Therefore, they hoped to maintain Solidarity as a mass social movement, providing a focus for popular backing for the process of transformation, and delay as much as possible the emergence of political parties, with all the political differentiation and power struggles that would bring in its wake. That policy involved effectively stifling some of the grassroots movements (such as the "civic committees" created to conduct the election campaign of Spring 1989) which could have provided a foundation for the emergence of civil society (Fraczak 1992).

That approach was less democratic than might have been hoped. It was also doomed to failure insofar as the preservation of unity was concerned. While society had been united in the face of the common enemy, that unity could not be sustained once that enemy was gone (Synak 1992). The differences which were once artificially suppressed

both by the efforts of the Communist state to create an appearance of united support for the regime, and by the special circumstances of resistance to it, now exploded into an infinite variety of political parties (some 250 today). Their emergence was additionally spurred by the ideological confusion of Polish society and its search for an answer to the intractable problems of the transition period. As a result, what emerged was not civil society but "a political society" (Korbonski 1994).

It is in this general context that the media policy of the post-Communist governments has to be examined. They liberalised the print media immediately, but sought to hold on to state radio and television — Hankiss (1993) shows that this was true also in other Central and Eastern European countries — in order to control powerful media of communicating their ideas to an increasingly disgruntled and disenchanted society. They felt cut off from public opinion and unable to communicate their ideas to the public. So, they can perhaps be forgiven for feeling that they needed support from at least some media. The need to re-regulate broadcasting was widely recognised, particularly in terms of creating procedures for granting licences to new private/commercial broadcasters, but the process of developing new law was politically contentious and therefore protracted. There were also genuine constitutional difficulties in that the institutional arrangements for regulating and overseeing public and private broadcasting usually reflect a country's system of government — but areas of competence and division of power between the various state authorities and branches of the government were still being agreed upon as the broadcasting law was under discussion.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, the Polish-American politician and political scientists, provides perhaps the fullest (if unavoidably simplified) framework for analysing post-Communist transformation by distinguishing three major stages of the process, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Stages of Post-Communist Transformation

STAGE 1 (1-5 YEARS): THE BREAKTHROUGH	STAGE 2 (3-10 YEARS): CHANGE TAKES HOLD	STAGE 3 (3-15 OR MORE YEARS): EMERGENCE OF A STABLE DEMOCRATIC ORDER
POLITICAL GOAL: Transformation - Introduction of the basics of democracy, a free press, an end to the one-party system, development of an early coalition oriented to promoting change;	POLITICAL GOAL: from transformation to stabilisation - new constitution and electoral law, elections, decentralised local government, stable democratic coalition, new political elite;	POLITICAL GOAL: Consolidation - emergence of stable political parties; a democratic political culture takes root;
ECONOMIC GOAL: Stabilisation Šof an economy in crisis - K.J.Ć Elimination of price controls and of subsidies; end of collectivisation; early, haphazard privatisation	ECONOMIC GOAL: from stabilisation to transformation - banking system, small- and medium-scale privatisation, demonopolisation, emergence of a new business class;	ECONOMIC GOAL: steady economic growth - mass privatisation, emergence of a capitalist lobby and of a culture of private enterprise.
LEGAL REGULATION: Elimination of arbitrary state control over all areas of life.	LEGAL REGULATION: legal regulation of ownership and business;	LEGAL REGULATION: emergence of an independent judiciary and legal culture;

Adapted from Brzezinski 1994.

Brzezinski distinguishes four groups of countries in Central and Eastern Europe:

1. Those where transformation into pluralist, free-market democracies is already under way and is unlikely to be turned back, i.e. Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Slovenia and Estonia; they have reached the second stage (with Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary poised to enter the third one);

2. Countries with optimistic prospects for the future, but still vulnerable politically and economically, including Slovakia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Albania, Romania, Lithuania. According to Brzezinski, Bulgaria and Lithuania are close to entering the second stage of transformation, but all the others in this group are still in the first stage;

3. Countries whose political and economic future will remain undecided for at least a decade, that is Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbeidzhan;

4. And those with a less than optimistic outlook for the future, that is Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia, Moldova. According to Brzezinski, not one country in this group is well advanced in the first stage of transformation, and some have not even entered it yet.

If we assign major processes of media liberalisation, emancipation and change to each of these stages, we may obtain in Table 3 presented trends as they are likely to happen in each stage.

Table 3: Media Change at Different Stages of Post-Communist Transformation

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3
1. Dismantling of some of the main features of controls characteristic of the old media system; 2. Demonopolisation of the printed press; early signs of commercialisation; 3. Beginning of decentralisation and specialisation (especially of the print media); 4. Fast internationalisation of content (especially on television).	1. Adoption of the first laws creating the legal framework of press freedom, including some basic elements of democratisation; 2. Continued commercialisation; 3. Continued decentralisation and specialisation (extending also into the electronic media, as private stations begin to look for market niches; 4. Early signs of journalist professionalisation in a few successful independent private media; 5. Elements of globalization as foreign capital moves into the printed press and broadcast media. 6. First signs of media concentration.	1. Continued development of the legal framework (including amending or revising some recently passed laws to eliminate loopholes) in order to create legal and institutional guarantees of media autonomy and regulate the economic aspects of the media market; 2. Continuation of all other processes which began earlier; 3. Media differentiation and journalist professionalisation acquire momentum as political stability and growing prosperity defuse conflicts which prevented those processes in stage 1 and 2. 4. Media concentration and globalization threaten to subvert gains achieved in media emancipation.

This enables us roughly to predict the stage of advancement of media transformation in particular countries, though of course the precise order and succession of events in any particular country will depend on local conditions and may be different. In general terms, however, only in a country well into the third stage is there potential for the emergence of a free, autonomous and democratic media system, free from entanglement in, and control by, the state. Apart from any legal and institutional arrangements, a system of free and democratic media cannot be created without a stable democratic system of government in an open society, based on a social consensus regarding the political and economic system of the country, a stable party system, and economic growth in the conditions of a market economy. This is the real and indispensable foundation of press freedom and a democratic media system. If these conditions are not met, all the other measures listed above will be ineffective, because a conflict-ridden, highly politicised society unavoidably drags its media into its conflicts or wars, uses them as a major means of waging those conflicts and in the process destroys their independence, impartiality and professionalism.

The need for these macrostructural conditions to be met before a fully free and democratic media system can be created is clearly shown by the situation in other regions of the world.

Brzezinski's classification also enables us roughly to predict the approach adopted to the media by new political classes in countries of particular groups in terms of institutional and cultural politics (Blumler, Dayan and Wolton 1990). Institutional politics can be described as mechanisms of state-media relations and the legal, normative and structural constraints (Gurevitch and Blumler 1983) applied by the state and other social actors to gain as much influence over the media as is needed to have the power to govern. Cultural politics concentrates on ways of affecting which meanings is produced and the choice meanings to be disseminated by the media. Table 4, comparing strategies pursued in institutional and cultural politics in democratic and undemocratic states, can be useful in predicting roughly where media policies in particular Central and Eastern European countries can be placed on the dimensions shown in the table, depending on their progress in creating a stable democratic, free market system.

Table 4: Policy Continua of Strategies Pursued in Institutional and Cultural Politics

Methods used in institutional politics		Methods used in cultural politics	
Democratic States	Undemocratic States	Democratic States	Undemocratic States
informal	administrative	cultivation	propaganda thought control
few media political	all media political	most	least
		verisimilitude in representing reality	

According to Brzezinski, no Central and Eastern European country has progressed to the third stage. Countries in all groups have seen, and continue to see, very strenuous efforts by some parts of the political establishment to constrain freedom of especially the broadcast media by using means of institutional and cultural politics typical more of undemocratic than of democratic systems. Almost everywhere, at one time or another, political and economic instability has caused all-encompassing politicisation of social life due to a continuous struggle for power — and that certainly prevents differentiation of the media and professionalisation of journalists.

What Progress Has Been Achieved?

Compared to the situation prevailing before 1989, the media in Central and Eastern Europe have of course noted great gains in their liberalisation and pluralization. However, progress has been limited and there is still a long way to go.

Demonopolisation, differentiation, professionalisation of journalists and a degree of democratisation as defined above are fundamental prerequisites of media change in Central and Eastern Europe. Of these, only demonopolisation has made decisive progress. True, in countries like Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Bulgaria or Romania, poor economic conditions, lack of a developed advertising market, continuing monopolies (e.g. of press distribution) and a considerable degree of state control (including subsidies and, e.g. content-based criteria for registration of newspapers, leaving authorities the discretion in whether to register a publication or not) leave little room for an independent press, but state monopoly is gone.

As far as radio and television are concerned, a broadcasting law providing for demonopolisation and the introduction of the private sector has been adopted in Czech and Slovak Republics, Romania, Latvia, Poland, Estonia, Slovenia, Ukraine, Croatia. Also countries without a broadcasting law have instituted some provisional mechanisms for licensing private stations.

However, demonopolisation does not equal differentiation of the media. In countries of group 2, 3 and 4, the umbilical cord between the media and the authorities has hardly been weakened. A common strategy of disposing of newspapers once controlled by the Communist party has been to allot or sell them to various political parties in order to create a "pluralistic press system". In all countries of the region, the collapse of the Communist system was followed by a press boom, with political parties, organisations and associations seeking to establish newspapers or periodicals capable of speaking for them. Even papers determined to be impartial and independent must in some cases look for political patrons, either for financial reasons (to gain a source of financing), or because a conflict-ridden political scene leaves them vulnerable if they do not enjoy the protection of at least one side of that conflict.

In most countries demonopolisation and differentiation are impeded by the economic situation. In countries of the 3 and 4 group, a lack of economic development and of a free market creates major barriers to the demonopolisation and commercialisation. Bazyler and Pomar (n.d.) have this to say on the subject in the context of the Belarus situation:

> *If there is to be any alternative to government-owned or wholly subsidised media, there must be other sources of financing. While in many countries, the*

private market can support media through the purchase price and through advertising, this is not feasible in Belarus due to poor economic conditions. Commercial television and radio must rely exclusively on advertising, and cable television on the cost of subscription. Due to high inflation, low salaries and rising living costs there is little purchasing power among consumers. If media organs which relay on sales charged enough for a profit margin, they would find almost no-one able to afford their products. For the same reason, it is hard to solicit advertisements, as businesses also do not see the consumers as being able to absorb the cost in the prices charged. Furthermore, few businesses have sufficient income to seriously invest in advertising. As a result, many private media organs operate at a deficit and others without a substantial profit ... Loans are extended at very unfavourable terms due to exorbitant inflation rates and there is very little capital being circulated for investment. The difficulty in acquiring capital in turn makes it very hard to purchase needed equipment and technology. This problem especially affects the electronic media, but even newspapers incur problems due to, for example, the cost of paper or the price for publication ... Additional burdens are imposed by government through control of organisational structure and financial relations. The government also collects taxes which subsume a large portion of any profit margin. Producers seeking to obtain broadcast time on government-owned electronic media pay significant costs, such as 50% of the advertisement income, to air their programs.

Also in later stages of transformation, the state of the economy and the development of the free market is crucial in terms of media development, especially in capital-intensive media such as television. In many countries, including Poland and Hungary, it is argued that without foreign investment into the media it would have been impossible to improve newsprint and printing quality, modernise editorial offices and, primarily, to establish and equip radio and television stations. Also, it is argued that growing commercialisation of the media and their subordination to the laws of the market will not enhance their prospects for autonomy and a democratic manner of operation (Sparks and Reading 1994).

All that has served to perpetuate the organic connection between the media and politics. This is particularly true of broadcasting, even though some form of public-service broadcasting has emerged in the countries which have adopted a broadcasting law (of course, the real meaning of the concept of public-service broadcasting and the actual role played by these broadcasting organisations in particular countries is determined by the local conditions). The new governments were taken aback and stung by what they considered to be completely unjustified treatment from the highly politicised press. They felt cut off from public opinion and unable to deliver their message to the population. So, they were not happy about the prospect of losing the media they could still control. Also the new political parties, seeking to win public attention and to establish their identity and gain support in competition with dozens of other parties, exerted what pressure they could on the broadcast media and protested against any case of real or imagined discrimination.

Hankiss (1993, 3-4) explains what some of the consequences of that situation were:

In those countries where - after the collapse of the communist regime - a dominant party, or a dominant personality came to power, public television and radio could not escape government or presidential control. This was, or has been, the case in Czecho-Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia.

In group 3 and 4, governments or presidents still exert direct administrative influence and are able to interfere into the work of state broadcasting organisations practically at will, by decree (for a description of the situation in Russia see *International Affairs* 1993, and van den Berg 1994). In Slovakia, which inherited the liberal 1991 Broadcasting Act adopted in the then Czechoslovakia, a more elaborate system has had to be developed. Under the Slovak law amending the Act, the broadcasting licence awarded by the Slovak Radio and Television Broadcasting Council has to be confirmed by the National Council (the country's parliament). In 1993 another law was passed, providing that if ten per cent of MPs propose a change in the membership of the Slovak Radio and Television Broadcasting Council and the Boards of Slovak Radio and Slovak Television, both directly elected by parliament, that proposal must be discussed and can be carried with a simple majority. This gives the governing coalition the ability to subordinate the Council as well as public radio and television to its wishes. In Poland, such direct interference is impossible, so the President who wishes to ensure compliance with his wishes by the National Broadcasting Council must resort to a long-drawn out campaign to intimidate it and to look for shaky and easily challenged legal grounds to replace at least the three members of the Council (out of 9) he himself has appointed.

One could thus actually say that the old broadcasting systems which had previously been controlled by the Communist party are in some cases being "re-nationalised" and turned into a government agency or, at best, a national, politicised and quasi-commercial public broadcasting system. So, one observer was moved to note that "as a result of state and market-commercial logic of the social and media restructuring, a kind of paternal-commercial media system is developing" (Splichal 1992, 21), with broadcasting operating according to a paternal logic, and the printed press according to the commercial one.

Differentiation is also held back by efforts of politicians in countries of all groups (e.g. the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania) to constrain journalistic freedom by using or introducing anti-defamation laws to punish journalists for writing openly about public officials and institutions (Rosenberg 1994).

Differentiation is also impeded by slow progress in the professionalisation of journalists, understood both as the raising of journalistic skills and as "collective professionalisation" understood as process in which a profession develops a service ideal and develops a code of conduct, a professional organisation dedicated to enforcing it and implementing the service ideal, as well as to protecting the autonomy and standing of the members of the profession (Windahl and Rosengren 1976). A redefinition of journalism from advocacy, propaganda-oriented to impartial-reporter or watchdog function, an autonomous professional group serving the public and not the authorities or the owners of the media is an indispensable element of media differentiation.

On the first issue, in many countries journalists lack the skills to provide the audience with the information it needs to have to assess developments and government policies. In Poland, "journalists have not yet learnt the simple truth that thorough investigation of an issue and objectivity form the foundation of good journalism ... media do not reflect or articulate the needs, interests and opinions of huge segments of society" (Jerschina 1994, 13). Because the Slovak journalists have no tradition of pressing government leaders for answers to nettlesome problems, in the run-up to Slovakia's separation from the Czech Republic, Meciar was able to conduct his negotiations concerning separation, contrary to his earlier stated policy of staying within the federation, "while leaving his own Slovak public in the dark ... Slovak journalists never held the prime minister's approach to close scrutiny. Most Slovak media ... never explored the impact that separation would have on the Slovak economy and standard of living" (Druker 1994, 7). This is a common complaint in most Central and Eastern European countries.

On the second question, continued political involvement of the media slows down professionalisation defined as the transformation of the journalistic community into an autonomous professional group dedicated to a public service ideal[1]. No Eastern European country has been able to pass a new press law assisting such a process, but primarily this is due to the journalists' involvement in politically committed media, and to their own personal inability to separate their political views from their profession. This is a heritage of the past both in the "old guard" of journalists once employed by official media[2] and in the "new guard" of those once writing for dissident, underground media (who could be described as fitting the Leninist definition of "journalists as mass propagandists, agitators an organisers" even more than the other group). One example is the situation in Romania is a country where profound political involvement of the media has led to the birth of "combative, militant journalism, concentrated on ideological issues and a discursive discussion of opinions which combined news with comment and paid scant regard to objectivity. Consequently, the younger journalists became very much like their older colleagues and dedicated their services to propaganda" (Coman 1994, 35). Many journalists regard freedom of speech as freedom to express their own views or biases, or continue to define themselves as "guardians" or "leaders" of society, called upon (by virtue of their superior access to information and understanding of the situation) to be in the forefront of political developments. The view of journalism as politics conducted by other means dies hard.

Democratisation as defined above is proceeding slowly, e.g. in terms of regulating election-time access to the broadcast media (Jakubowicz n.d.; *The Russian Parliamentary Elections* 1994; *The Moldovan Parliamentary Elections* 1994; Babunski 1994). However, many other forms of democratisation are held back by efforts by politicians everywhere to gain privileged access to air time and newspaper pages on demand (Jakubowicz 1993).

All this lends substance to Splichal's (1994) view that instead of media autonomy and differentiation, what Central and Eastern Europe has so far seen is, by and large, "Italianization of the media", i.e. development of a media system traditionally associated with Italy, in which (1) the media are under strong state control; (2) the

degree of media partisanship is strong; (3) there is a strong degree of integration of media and political elites; and (4) there is no consolidated and shared professional ethic among media practitioners.

In turn, this supports the diagnosis of the so far limited nature of transition in Central and Eastern European media: "it is (hard), given the legal and economic framework (of the media) that is evolving, to see how there will be any great extension of the power of what is often called žcivil society'. The direct beneficiaries of the new and genuine openness of the systems are the political elites, not the ordinary people" (Sparks and Reading 1994, 268).

Epilogue

As if complementing Brzezinski's diagnosis of the situation in the region, Lamentowicz (1944) says that Central and Eastern European countries face different prospects for the future. Some will consolidate their democratic institutions. Others will be bogged down in a stalemate between democracy and creeping authoritarianism. In still others, the state will be abolished by a massive explosion and/or bureaucratic implosion. Clearly, that will directly affect processes of media transformation. In the best case, if Johnson (n.d., 15) is to be believed, by the time countries like Poland, the Czech and Slovak Republics and Hungary are serious candidates for the European Union, "their media systems will be virtually indistinguishable from those of today's western Europe" (which also means that the process of their relative differentiation from the state should progress much further than today). It remains to be seen, given the widespread criticism by many Western scholars of their media systems, whether this is a prospect to be relished.

Notes:

1. Jerschina (1994) notes what he calls a transitional process in the Polish media consisting in the development of solidarity among journalists as the fourth estate and an interest group. This may be a first step towards professionalisation as understood here, but at the moment it promotes irresponsibility and lack of accountability and "professionalism" understood as a defensive occupational ideology based on rejection of anybody's claim to influence the performance of journalistic functions (Golding 1982).

2. A special case is represented by Hungary, where the take-over of much of the printed press by foreign capital almost immediately after the collapse of the Communist system has led to freezing the "old-guard" editorial staffs largely unchanged. While that removed them from direct involvement in the country's political battles, it enabled them, according to at least one observer, to express their political biases: "those who praised the USSR and the superiority of 'socialist values' now explain how bad and incompetent the current government is" (Lovas 1993).

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ŽVRGOLJUBČKI? MEDIJI, DRŽAVA IN POLITIKA V SREDNJI IN VZHODNI EVROPI

KAROL JAKUBOWICZ

POVZETEK

Zgodovina se ponavlja: na Poljskem in v drugih državah srednje in vzhodne Evrope v tem času teče proces, ki se je že davno začel v večini evropskih držav — osvobajanje medijev od države in politike. Čeprav nedvomno velja, da sta hitrost in smer sprememb v medijih odvisna od hitrosti spreminjanja širšega družbenega in političnega okolja, torej od makrostrukturnih dejavnikov, pa je hkrati treba priznati, da gre v spodbujanju ali oviranju sprememb posebej pomembna vloga političnim presojam vladajočih elit, ki si želijo ohraniti ali pridobiti nadzor nad mediji. Možnosti spreminjanja medijev v vzhodni in srednji Evropi so številne in se lahko "zgledujejo" po zahodnoevropskih spremembah v zadnjih desetletjih, ki vključujejo medijsko diferenciacijo, profesionalizacijo novinarjev, decentralizacijo in specializacijo medijev, demokratizacijo, demonopolizacijo in deregulacijo, komercializacijo, koncentracijo lastnine ter internacionalizacijo vsebine. Za spodbujanje razvoja svobodnih in demokratičnih medijev je potrebna vrsta ukrepov (medijske) politike za dokončno odpravo omejitev svobode tiska, za oblikovanje pravnega okvira s temeljnimi zagotovili svobode in avtonomije, za sbodbujanje tržnega gospodarstva in za zagotavljanje "korektivnih mehanizmov", potrebnih za dostop do medijev, participacijo in družbeno odgovornost medijev. Napredek na teh področjih je povezan z napredujočo demokratizacijo družbe in vladanja, torej s temeljno, sistemsko transformacijo, ki bo v veliki meri tudi določala, kako hitre in globoke bodo spremembe v medijih. Prva faza sprememb vključuje odpravo ključnih oblik nadzora, značilnih za prejšnji sistem, odpravo monopolov, začetke decentralizacije medijev in internacionalizacije vsebine. Druga faza prinaša novo medijsko zakonodajo, nadaljevanje komercializacije, centralizacije in specializacije, začetke profesionalizacije novinarstva, elemente globalizacije tujega kapitala ter prva znamenja koncentracije medijev. Tretja faza pomeni nadaljevanje oblikovanja nove medijske zakonodaje ter sploh vseh procesov, ki so se začeli v prvih dveh fazah; odločilni postaneta medijska diferenciacija in

novinarska profesionalizacija, hkrati pa medijska koncentracija in globalizacija začenjata ogrožati pridobitve medijske emancipacije. Posamične države nekdanjega komunističnega bloka so v različnih fazah liberalizacije in pluralizacije, povsod pa demokratizacija poteka dokaj počasi, predvsem zato, ker si politične elite prizadevajo ohraniti privilegiran dostop do medijev.