

ROMANIA: PRIVATE VERSUS STATE TELEVISION

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Introduction

To speak about television and radio in Romania six years after the events at the end of 1989 seems to me to be both a difficult and a necessary enterprise. A difficult one, because radio and television proclaimed themselves to be “free,” and for a long time after December 1989, all the programs transmitted by the Romanian television were accompanied by the letters FRT (Free Romanian Television). The abolition of censorship and the free expression of ideas were proclaimed at Romanian Radio and Television after the message about Ceausescu running away was broadcast, and the two media became “people’s ideals.” At the same time, no other public institution, excepting the Presidency, was so much and so directly attacked by what might be called “civil society in formation.” Their criticism referred especially to the dependence of the Romanian radio and television on political power, and hence “betraying people’s ideals.” From this, the necessity to discuss the Romanian radio and television arises. Is the Romanian audio-visual landscape (in which television is only a part) the same as in the Communist regime, or has something changed during the last six years?

In order to offer a comprehensive view on the audio-visual realities in Romania, I will start from what can be called the beginning of the media market’s demonopolisation. I connect this with the changes that occurred at the regulatory level (The Constitution, The Audio-visual Law, and The Law on the Public Broadcasting Services). Secondly, I shall present some concrete examples to arrive at some conclusions about the actual state of the Romanian broadcasting. Finally, I shall come back to the process of media market’s demonopolisation — pointing to those aspects of the audio-visual sphere which are important for the emergence of a true democracy in Romania.

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The Beginning of the Romanian Media Market Demonopolisation Regulations: The Prospects of a Mixed System

Before 1989, one could hardly speak of any public media in Romania, because the political system had a total control and monopoly on every aspect of social life. The Communist Party and its leaders destroyed all attempts at alternative voices, other than the official ones. George Schopflin put it very clearly when he referred to Romania under the Soviet-type regime: "The atomisation of society was nearly total, and a deep-seated anomie and very high levels of coercion were in function" (Schopflin 1993, 240). The official media — newspapers, magazines, journals, radio and television stations — were "people's property." In fact, they were under the direct censorship by political authorities. There were no attempts at breaking this complete monopoly of the Party, as was the case in other East European countries. After 1985, the domains of social, economic and political life were subjected to huge cuts in money and personnel. Romanian national radio — which began to broadcast in 1928 — reduced by half its transmission time. The number of newspapers dropped from about one hundred to around forty. The worst situation was that of Romanian television, which nearly ceased to exist, broadcasting only two hours a day (Dragan 1993, 22; Botnariu 1993, 2). Under such circumstances, the only mass communication channels available to the entire population were of two kinds: (1) the foreign radio stations which broadcast in Romanian — such as Radio Free Europe, Voice of America and the British Broadcasting Corporation; and (2) the television programmes broadcast in neighbouring countries.

After 1989, the first real market which appeared in Romania was not of a strict economic type — it was what I am tempted to call "The Information Market." The printed press reached in 1992 two thousand titles — a peak comparable with the flourishing period of the 1930's (Dragan 1993, 23). As compared with other parts of the Romanian society, the printed press is still a completely demonopolised market — where the state has no legal power, and the only law which governs its activity is that of market competition. But there is a great difference between two kinds of media market: **the printed press market** which, as regards its channels and products, is unlimited, and **the audio-visual market** which depends on a limited set of available broadcasting frequencies. As in other European countries, the Romanian state took an active role in regulating the latter. In considering the juridical stipulations which govern the media field in Romania, one must start from the general observation that the model for the Romanian legal system is the French Constitution. As in the case of France, the co-existence of private and public interests was expressed in the construction of a mixed system of property in the audio-visual field. The old state-owned radio and television stations are obliged to share a common status and competition with the privately owned ones. The stipulation for the existence and development of private property in Romanian society (and in the media as well) is crucial for the understanding of the subject under analysis. For the first time, after fifty years, private property is not only mentioned as of equal status compared to state property, but is also the beneficiary of the stipulations of Article 41 of the Romanian

