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Developments in Journalism Theory About Media "Transition" in Central and Eastern Europe 1990–99

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ABSTRACT *This article explores developments in theorizing about media transition in Central and Eastern Europe between 1990 and 1999. Although the systematic findings of scholarly research are limited, the discussion below provides an overview of existing analyses and critiques of developments in journalism and media in their legal, economic, political and professional settings in post-communist countries. It is argued that the study of media transitions must embrace the valuable findings deriving from the scholarly tradition of cultural anthropology which greatly illuminate these complex processes. The article concludes that while studies of post-communist societies have "generated an interesting corpus of works and a passionate field for theoretical debates… we have to recognize that nothing essentially has happened in media theory: no new theory, no new concepts, no new patterns emerged from the media's evolution in these countries".*

KEY WORDS: *Journalism, Media, Post-communist, Theory, Transition*

Ten years after the fall of communism and the inauguration of the post-communist period, the amount of research-based information about media transformations has increased considerably and the number of books and articles published on this topic has grown apace. However, it is still unrealistic to present a definitive view about mass media in post-communist countries for a number of reasons.

First, the media system's evolution has been so rapid and, often, so unexpected, that findings are quickly overtaken by events: too often, after just a few months, an analysis becomes "history". Secondly, information about these changes is incomplete, unreliable and sometimes excessively partisan. Systems for monitoring the press are barely established and information related to media economics, distribution systems, audience demographics for specific broadcast programmes and media personnel's social and professional status is scarce and unreliable. The "distribution" of research areas is also unequal, with more information about media available in Central Europe and Russia than in the other post-communist countries. Thirdly, research on media development in transitional societies can be difficult to obtain or, sometimes, inadequate for definitive analysis. Studies based on field research are published in the language of the countries where the research was conducted and are usually inaccessible to foreign researcher. Moreover, articles edited in the few books and numerous academic journals with wider circulations reveal a

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partial vision because of their focus on "exotic" aspects of a topic, their thematic and ideological compatibility, or simply because they reflect the interests of an editor.

If a panoramic, "encyclopaedic", view is not (yet) possible, an analysis with a much smaller objective—that of a typological cartography—can be completed from already existing studies. This is particularly plausible because some studies published in recent years have tried to offer an overview of media "transition" (see De Bruyker, 1994; Splichal, 1994; Paletz *et al*., 1995; Cluzel, 1996; Giorgi, 1997; Sparks and Reading, 1998; Feigelson and Pelissier 1998) and because particular case studies provide a better understanding of the specific processes in different countries (Goban-Klas, 1994; Manaev, 1995; Gross, 1996; Nivat, 1996; Kettle, 1996; Nikolchev, 1997; Ellis, 1999). The main assumption of these works is that media transformation in these countries is not chaotic but follows a pattern (still under question) which underlines these processes.

Starting from the idea of homogeneity in the communist world and, implicitly, of the unity of the process of transition from the communist press to the democratic press, Jakubowicz (1996a, pp. 40–42) posits the steps necessary to realize this transformation successfully:

- an end to media control systems by abolishing state and party monopolies of the press, newsprint production, printing facilities, distribution, national news agencies and censorship. Finally, the abolition of state subsidies (with the exception of public service broadcasting);
- the creation of an appropriate legal framework through constitutional guarantees for freedom of speech and free access to information. New, fair laws concerning the press, intellectual property, media companies, telecommunications, as well as an anti-trust law specifically addressed to media institutions;
- the promotion of a democratic political life through regulations to limit political intervention in the press, councils ensuring the functioning of these regulations and laws, the creation of a fair system of access to the mass media for the representatives of civil society and supporting the decentralization of the mass media;
- the professionalization of journalists through laws and regulations to ensure professional autonomy, the acceptance and enforcement of codes of ethics to ensure professional responsibility, creating systems for representatives of civil society to "observe" and monitor the press, the development of systems for journalism education, and training.

The list of conditions for a successful transformation proposed by Jakubowicz is normative and based on an ideal image of the democratic press. He deals with four levels (the legal, the economic, the professional, and the political), which should ensure an optimum "transition" from a controlled, propaganda-orientated press to one which is independent, responsible and orientated towards civil society, by developing and interacting with each other. Accepting this model as a guide, we can measure the ways in which mass media have evolved in post-communist countries in these 10 years of "transition".

The Legal Framework

In all these countries, the new Constitutions guarantee individual freedom of speech and, whether implicitly or explicitly formulated, freedom of the press. In some countries these rights

are embodied in new media or communication laws: Poland (the 1990 law, modified in 1996; see Giorgi, 1995, pp. 82–89); Lithuania (1990); Estonia, Latvia, Russia (the 1990 law, replaced by the 1992 law; see Androunas, 1993, pp. 42–54); Ukraine (1993) and Belarus (1994; see Hiebert, 1999, pp. 90–3). The majority of countries, however, have not enacted press laws. After much turmoil and debate politicians, as well as journalists, seemingly agreed to a *status quo* based on the reasoned conclusion that no law would be convenient to all interests and that the present balance, created through a series of confrontations, negotiations and deals, is convenient for both sides (Petcu, 1998).

While issues related to a would-be media law were resolved by *ad hoc* conventions, economic, political and technical pressures demanded the fairly prompt enactment of legislation concerning broadcasting. Nearly all countries enacted broadcast legislation: Czechoslovakia in 1991, Poland and Romania in 1992, Hungary in 1995, Bulgaria and Russia in 1996. In some countries the legislation embraces both the public and commercial stations, in others only the commercial stations, but typically these are complemented by additional laws regarding the public broadcasting system. In essence, legislation deals with the functioning of commercial stations, establishing the legal bases for the national “Councils” which grant broadcasting licences, the criteria for the allocation of licenses and various other protocols and procedures, including the way to solve conflicts. However, this flurry of legislation has not resolved all the problems related to the functioning of broadcast media.

Careful analyses reveals, for example, that legislation has been unable to eliminate the influence of politics upon the media: Council members and Presidents are nominated and replaced by the Parliament (in some cases also by Government). The criteria of selection for Council members are usually largely political and the functioning of members can be subject to influence by Parliament. In essence:

even more dangerous is: (a) the imprecise nebulous, non-defined wording used and left open to interpretations by regulatory agencies and by the still not independent judiciaries, and (b) the degree of power assigned to national councils in charge of broadcasting—councils that are open to manipulation and control by the government, dominant political parties in parliament and/or by the presidency (Gross and Hiebert, 1996, p. 54; see also Sparks and Reading, 1998, pp. 131–54).

The legal provisions concerning broadcasting stations in the public sector, as well as their implementation, give the state institutions (no matter which parties or which ideologies are in power) the power to control information and the programme contents of public service stations. Splichal wrote, metaphorically, about a “paternalistic–commercial” model, based on a dual way of functioning, in which newspapers and commercial broadcast stations are rapidly integrating in a liberal–commercial logic, while the public system is state-controlled, “rhetorically” invoking the responsibility to educate and inform the national audience (Splichal, 1992).

Many of these countries now have laws which protect intellectual property (the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania and Hungary for example). In principle, these laws should eliminate or limit the phenomenon of pirated television and radio programmes, audio and video tapes, CDs, etc. In reality, even in countries where these laws exist they

are not efficient because the newly created agencies lack both the necessary resources and competencies to monitor the implementation of laws and regulations. For their part, governments are sensitive to allegations that they are reactivating "censorship" and consequently act carefully, discreetly and minimally. In addition, the "pirate" networks became more sophisticated and represent a remarkable commercial force and influence: they apply all means, from corruption to direct threats. Examples of such threats are found in the Czech Republic and Romania, where the leaders of the NGO that fought to impose severe controls were physically attacked by "unidentified groups". The big losers in this situation are the companies that produce media programmes (in 1997, one estimate suggested that the pirate video tapes produced in Bulgaria alone cost Hollywood $5 million in lost royalties). In relative terms, similar losses are suffered by local artists (composers, performance artists, writers, painters and sculptors, film and movie people), who receive only a small part of their rights.

The privatization of the press was accomplished in the absence of an appropriate legal or regulatory framework. Governments and the various agencies, the businessmen and the journalists were obliged "to cope with a rapid transition to a harsh and anarchic market economy", which led to "a deluge of irregular practices, corruption and mismanagement" (McNair, 1996, pp. 494, 495). In fact, the term "privatization" is used to describe a heterogeneous set of phenomena. So far as newspapers are concerned, it refers to taking institutions (publications' titles, premises, equipment, organizational structures) from state control and placing them under the control of other agencies: local or international business groups, professional journalists' associations, investors, banks, etc. In the audio-visual sphere, where the state has retained its influence (if not control) over the respective institutions, it is variously about leasing one of the channels of national television to foreign or local groups (for example in Hungary or the Czech Republic), splitting the public station into various companies in which the state retains some share of ownership (for example in Russia), or transforming it into a public foundation (as in Hungary).

Privatization of print media was achieved via two routes. First, by the process of *spontaneous privatization*, which occurred immediately after the crash of the communist system and involved journalists directly taking over their publications. The second route, *state mediated privatization*, involved transfer organizations whose mission was to end state enterprises in the newspaper press. The first route can be explored a little by generalizing Nikolchev's observation about the situation in Bulgaria: "Yet, the manner in which *Orbita* and some other publications underwent their change of status could hardly be defined as privatization. The only real thing that journalists from this paper managed to privatize was their own expertise" (1997, p. 130). From a more dramatic perspective, Androunas described privatization as follows: "An editorial collective emerges as a 'founder', as the law says, of a mass medium. In fact, it looks more like expropriations, reproducing the old mode of behavior of the Bolsheviks after the 1917 revolution […] The logic of the journalists is quite simple: we make the newspaper; that means we have all the rights to be its founders" (1993, p. 20).

It is a difficult and contentious matter, of course, to decide whether taking over an institution with a "revolutionary spirit" represents privatization. But if we are willing, still, to accept this term, then *spontaneous privatization* created

the first private press enterprises, formed by neo-communist type co-operatives. By taking over the titles, the premises, the equipment, the legal status of the publications and profiting from the quasi-monopoly over the local market, these enterprises developed either as autonomous businesses or as joint ventures with foreign groups. Obviously, not all experienced the same evolution. In some cases, journalists very quickly gave up their rights of ownership to foreign investors, as happened with the local press of Hungary and Czech Republic. On other occasions the new enterprises sought the support of local banks or business and political groups: this occurred, for example, in Russia, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria. In Romania and Bulgaria a group which was more business-orientated started to develop the institution, acquired shares from other members of the staff, launched new titles, and formed companies in which they had control.

Poland is an exception in the region, because it established a governmental agency to nurture and encourage the privatization of certain media outlets, but this created numerous controversies, mainly concerning how best to divide the shares. In the first phase of liquidation, 18 significant newspapers were sold to different groups, 70 titles were "delivered for free to journalists' cooperatives" and 60 "were sold via public tender" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 77; pp. 111–15). The *Zycie Warszawy* was acquired by the Societa Televisiano Italiana and Warszawy Press, a company formed by 45 of the publication journalists, co-ordinated by its editor-in-chief; the metropolitan daily *Express* was bought by the Solidarity Press Foundation; the *Razem* weekly by the populist party Independent Poland Confederation; and the daily *Dzienniek* by National Christian Association. In all these cases the procedures were very flexible and the money paid to acquire these titles was below market value (Goban-Klas, 1994, pp. 221–3).

The Economic Framework

The post-communist media market represents an extremely vast and attractive territory. This market's potential is estimated at 400 million consumers (Yartzeva, 1998, p. 214) but, because of the different levels of economic development in different countries, the revenues generated by the market are not yet significant. One relevant indicator is the balance between the number of households which have a television set and the advertising investments in television. In 1996, these figures showed the distribution shown in Table 1 (over). It is clear from the table that the Central European countries attract considerably larger advertising investments, undoubtedly expressing the anticipation of a more hopeful profit outlook, while the Eastern countries are of only relatively marginal interest to advertisers.

In the Czech Republic, 19 of the 25 daily newspapers are controlled by foreign capital. The German group Passau Neue Press controls 47 local publications. The Swiss group Ringier owns the successful tabloid *Blesk*, the weeklies *Profit* and *Reflex*, holds a 51 per cent share of the daily paper *Lidove Noviny* and owns (according to a Czech estimation) shares in 28 daily and 69 weekly newspapers. The French group Hersant used to control the dailies *Mlada Fronta* and *Brnensky Vecernik*, but after it left the East European markets in 1994, these daily newspapers passed into the control of the Rheinische–Bergishe group. The German groups are by far the most influential in this market: Franken Post has 8 titles, Mittelrhein Verlen controls the *Express* and *Zemedelska Noviny* publications, and Bauer has three

Table 1. Television advertising by household

	Advertising investments (in millions)	Number of households (in millions)	Advertising investment per household
Bulgaria	23.3	2.82	$8.2
Croatia	28.6	0.8	$32
Czech Republic	134	3.6	$30
Hungary	430	3.8	$113
Lithuania	5.5	1.9	$2.8
Poland	939	11.8	$46.6
Romania	48.7	7	$6.9
Russia	1,038	56	$18.5
Slovakia	45	1.9	$23.6
Ukraine	70	17	$2.3

publications (Frybes, 1996, pp. 60–2; Giorgi, 1995, pp. 27–30; Kettle, 1997, pp. 46–52). As far as broadcast media are concerned, the largely successful television station *Nova TV* was launched by the American group Central European Development Corporation (through its CME subsidiary); the entire CME network (with stations in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Ukraine) was recently bought by SBS, an American capital-controlled group. The radio stations *Europa-2* and *Fun* are financed by French capital, *Rock FM* by English companies while *RTL Prague* is owned by the huge German group CLT.

In Hungary, it is estimated that 80 per cent of the capital invested in the mass media is foreign-owned (Giorgio 1995, p. 5). Consequently, the local press has for some time been controlled by the German group Axel-Springer. In the national press, a few press giants invested heavily in the newspaper market: Hersant acquired the daily *Magyar Nemzet*; MGN, the daily *Magyar Hirlap*; Murdoch, the daily *Mai Nap* and the weekly *Reform*; Bertelsmann, the daily *Nepszabadsag*. For Hungarian broadcast media, the groups CME, Leo Kirch and TF-1 participated in the privatization of the public channel *MTV-2*, the group CLT launched *RTL Club*, Murdoch used to hold 50 per cent of the shares of the *NAP-TV* station, while the Time–Warner group controls the most important cable operator, Kabelcom. In local radio there are investments from Austria (MBB) and Germany: Springer-WAZ, Kapsach-ITT (Giorgi, 1995, pp. 16–19; Frybes, 1998, pp. 57–9; Hiebert, 1999, pp. 104–5).

In Poland, the Hersant group was the majority shareholder in eight daily and several regional newspapers. After 1994, it sold most of the shares to the German group Passau Neue Press but retained control of the prestigious daily newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*. Alongside Passau Neue Presse, Bertelsman owns three publications, and Bauer publish six magazines. The Swiss groups Swiss Jurg Marquand and JMG Ost Press own several daily and weekly newspapers: ORKLA (Norway) controls six regional dailies; Il Sole-24 (Italy) is the majority shareholder in the *Nowa Europa* publication, and Fininvest (Italy) has shares in *Zycie Warszawy*. Prior to the enactment of the audiovisual law, the Italian group S-Tei (the controversial Nicola Grausso) had built a considerable media empire including Zanussi Film Studio, Warszaw Documentary Film Production and 13 television stations. After the law came into force, the group was not granted the licence and it

pulled out of the Polish market. In radio, the Hersant group is active through *Radio-Zet, Radio RMF Krakow, Radio Arnet*. CME has 12 licences for radio and one TV channel. British New European Investment Trust has *Radio-S*, and Procter & Gamble has shares in *Radio Obywatelskie* (Giorgi, 1995, pp. 21–4, pp. 93–4; Cluzel, 1996).

Foreign capital, although less active, is also present in the other post-communist countries: (a) in Slovakia, through Ostrich and German capital in the written press (Skolkai, 1997); (b) in Bulgaria through German groups and through Ringier (Hiebert, 1999); (c) in Romania, in the written press, through the groups Ringier, which owns the weeklies *Capital* and *TV-Mania*, the dailies *Libertatea* and *Gazeta sporturilor*, the women's magazines *Unica*, *Lumea Femeilor* and *Hachette*; in television through CME (Coman, 1998b; Simion, 1998); (d) in Russia, French capital is active in radio, and American capital in television (Androunas, 1993; Nivat, 1996; Hiebert, 1999); and (e) in the Baltic states, Scandinavian and American capital are active in broadcast media.

According to Giorgi (1995, pp. 4–5), the most important actors in media markets are middle-sized groups, such as Ringier (Switzerland), Passau Neue Press (Germany) or Bonnier (Sweden). In the newspaper press, foreign capital used several strategies including: initial investments in the local press (because of the smaller costs and relatively weak competition); buying shares in the national dailies; creating local editions of successful titles and launching popular newspapers with editorial copy based largely on cheap sensationalism. In broadcast media, these groups either participated in the "privatization" of some public stations' channels or, more typically, launched new stations drawing on the unoriginal but successful recipes of American-type "show-biz" formats.

The mass media in post-communist countries experienced not only a forceful entry of foreign capital but, even more importantly, an invasion of western programming. An analysis of the structure of broadcast media contents in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Lithuania, Romania, Russia and Slovakia in 1995 revealed that programmes originating from the West represented over 40 per cent of the broadcast fare (Coman, 1996b) with movies, series, music and documentaries tending to dominate programme contents. Also important to mention are programmes in languages indigenous to the region that are copies of western conceptualized programmes. Foreign production companies and groups use a variety of strategies to conquer these markets, from promotional sales to offering package or barter deals (De Bryker, 1996, p. 124).

In general, the structure of media ownership in these countries is very diverse. In the newspaper press there are independent publications as well as publications owned by the state, by parties, or by church. The independent papers may be controlled by joint ventures (with local and foreign capital), by local groups, by associative structures or by cultural, educational or civic organizations, etc. In the broadcast media organizational structures seem more streamlined with public service broadcasting being clearly separated from its commercial counterpart. There are no signs as yet of monopolies, but the large trusts are increasing their media holdings, with the inevitable consequence of diminishing numbers of independent publications and stations.

An additional highly visible organizational feature is the association of significant press groups with other "sources" of finance. When evaluating this phenomenon, it is clear that local groups face great difficulties, some associated with the inherent complica-

tions of an emerging market economy, others with the crises of "transition": i.e. the abolition of state subsidies; higher prices for raw materials, energy and distribution; a still weak market for advertising; lack of modern equipment; outdated systems of transport and telecommunications; the unregulated competition of foreign print and broadcast media and the absence of the usual forms of state assistance—the only assistance available is VAT exemption (Goban-Klas, 1994; Coman, 1994b; Frybes, 1998).

The most common form of "alliance" is the absorption of the press outlet into an economically stronger group, usually associated with a bank. Thus, in Hungary, after Hersant and Murdoch pulled out, the Hungarian Credit Bank took over the publications *Magyar Nemzet*, *Mai Nap, Szabad Fold, Nap TV* and *168 ORA*. The Hirlap Kiado publishing house, financially supported by three state-owned banks, took over the daily *Magyar Hirlap*, while Posbank controls the publications *Kurir* and *Viaggazdag* (Splichal, 1995). In the Czech Republic, the Invetnici Bank supported the television station *Premiera*, while in Romania the *Curierul Romanesc* press group (which was initially financed by Bancorex) combined with the hotel trust owned by the Paunescu brothers. In Russia, the Gazprom group of the former Prime Minister Viktor Cernomirdin is the majority shareholder, through the Imperial Bank, in the dailies *Izvestia* and *Trud*, the Itar-Tass press agency, the weeklies *Profil* and *Afaceri*, the radio stations *Voice of Russia* and *Radio Mayak*. The Oneksim Bank (where Anatoli Ciubais, another former Prime Minister, is majority shareholder) controls the daily *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, the weeklies *Express* and *Nouvelles de Russie*, *Radio Rossia* and television channel *RTR*. Incombank (connected with the mayor of Moscow, Luri Lujkov) owns shares in the local network *TV Centre*, the cable operator *GKT*, *Radio Moskwa* and in the publications *Moskowskaya Pravda* and *Vetchernaya Moskva*. The Logovaz consortium (of Boris Berezovski) includes the Media Most group, which owns the daily *Segodnia*, the weeklies *Sem'dei* and *Itogui*, the television network *NTV* and the radio network *Echo Moskwy* (Nivat, 1996, 1997; Yartseva, 1998).

The inability of local media groups to develop solely on the basis of the capital invested in the press and the revenues won in the media market produces these mergers with foreign groups, or the integration of these indigenous media groups into corporations with diverse commercial activities. In the first case there is a risk of subordinating local press institutions to foreign interests and, consequently, of subordinating their editorial voice to external interests and ideologies. In the second case, the press is subordinated to political–economic interests (other than those of the civil society) which leads to the weakening, or even loss, of its status as an independent "power"; to the disappearance of the control ("watchdog" function of the press and to the civic responsibilities of journalists.

The Professional Framework

The birth of numerous new publications and radio and television stations brought about a rapid and uncontrolled increase in the number of those who work in the journalistic field. This does not necessarily mean that the number of professional journalists increased: only the number of those employed by enterprises which produce media goods increased. It was assumed that the newcomers, who were far more numerous than those with some experience in the communist press, would bring a new, non-ideologized ap-

proach, a greater social responsibility and more professionalism to the journalistic task. However, as Gross argues,

> **while some progress has been made in professionalizing the field, to date the region's journalism is not of a caliber consonant with that of its Western neighbors. Their partisanship and inclination to propagandize and their lack of professional standards and ethics are leftover traits from the precommunist era, refined and hardened by the communist experience, its exigencies and teachings" (1996, p. 94).**

Those who work in the post-communist press form a highly heterogeneous socio-professional group. Although only a few sociological inquiries have explored the corporate professional character of journalists in Eastern Europe (Plenkovic and Kucis, 1995; Vihalemm, 1995; Gross, 1996; Coman, 1998a; Pisarek, 1998; Oledzki, 1998; Kovats, 1998), some general traits are identifiable.

First, the group is dominated numerically by young people who began working in the media after 1989. The majority does not have a relevant academic background or training. They present themselves as an antithesis to the old guard and consequently they promote: (a) an ideology of "negation", (b) a sentiment of necessary superiority, based on the idea that those who have not worked in the communist media were not touched by the communist ideology and (c) a certain professional self-sufficiency, based on the idea of a "mission" in the name of which they have chosen the press, a mission which does not require any critical self-evaluation, nor journalism education and training. According to Pisarek, they are the "Pampers generation—confident, thinking they are better than anybody else, but totally ignorant professionally" (1998, p. 206).

Secondly, journalists consider themselves to be an "elite" within society, both because of their background (most of them have university degrees) and because of the role they assume for themselves (see Plenkovic and Kucis, 1995; Vihalemm, 1995; Pelissier, 1995; Coman, 1998b); but their understanding of the role of the media is confused. Most of those who work in the press define themselves as "representatives of the fourth estate", but they display little understanding of this role. Typically, the adversarial perspective is dominant with journalists considering that their role is to oppose "power" (no matter which party or group is in power), to criticize it and to uncover its abuses:

> **A related lesson was the mistaken emphasis placed on defining the role of news media as a watchdog and as a Fourth Estate. The existing sociopolitical and (pre) professional culture misinterpreted such emphasis and definition to mean a news media that can best serve a transition by being partisan, an attack dog, a 'counter power'. It became a double negative when the frustration of being unsuccessful as a counter power resulted in the news media generally degenerating into sensationalism, entertainment, superficiality, even banality (Gross, 1996, p. 161).**

Thirdly, the heterogeneous character of the group is also reflected in the dispersion of professional organizations; in most countries there are at least two professional associations, frequently competing with each other for members and highly politically orientated. Thus, in Bulgaria there is the Journalists' Union and the alternative union Podkrepa; in Hungary, the Hungarian Association of Journalists co-

exists with the Community of Hungarian Journalists and the Association of Hungarian Catholic Journalists; in Lithuania, the Lithuanian Journalists' Union rivals the Lithuanian Journalists' Society; in Poland, the Association of Polish Journalists competes with the Association of Journalists from the Polish Republic and the Association of Journalists from the Catholic Press; in Romania, the Society of Journalists from Romania exists alongside the Romanian Journalists' Association; finally, in Slovakia the Journalists' Slovak Union co-exists with the Slovak Journalists' Co-operative.

Fourthly, control of the profession and the disciplining of those who fail to respect professional rules is difficult to achieve. In these countries several professional and ethical codes have been adopted with some belonging to professional associations and others originating from the larger press outlets. However, the lack of any evidence to suggest that these codes are respected, or that those who fail to support them are sanctioned by the journalistic community, combined with the absence of any unitary code, signals that journalists are unable to impose a professional culture or any common values and norms of behaviour. "All these practices go beyond the notion that news and professionalism is culture specific. They reflect an absence of even most rudimentary outline of professional norms or, to put it differently, it is the absence of norms that give journalists 'carte blanche' to do as they please" (Gross, 1999a, p. 23).

Fifthly, the way in which journalists are trained or educated also varies along with the length of time, quality and importance which is assigned to that training. In spite of considerable support from western countries to develop journalism education and short-term vocational training, most of the new journalists receive the knowledge necessary to do the job in the newsroom: "on-the-job training". Only time will tell whether these new graduates of such varied training and educational programmes can alter the professional landscape. A 1994 study of journalism education conducted by the Freedom Forum, for example, included 59 faculties and training centres in 17 countries from the region. This figure is far from exhaustive. According to Professor Yassen Zassourski, there are around 50 faculties and departments of journalism in Russia alone. Broadly speaking, journalism education is characterized by several features: (a) it is, in most countries in the region, dominated by an unduly theoretical perspective with few courses of a vocational character; (b) it suffers from a chronic lack of modern equipment for the development of journalism skills; (c) in many countries there is a lack of locally adapted practical manuals for journalism and few of the basic theoretical books have been translated; (d) groups of teaching staff are only recently being established (through scholarships, contacts with foreign teachers, readings, etc.) and they do not enjoy the same prestige as staff and colleagues from the longer established academic disciplines; and (e) the representatives of the profession of journalism display indifference (if not antipathy) toward journalism education—in these circumstances attracting journalists to work with students and convincing owners and editors that hiring the product of a journalism education programme is beneficial to them are very difficult tasks. So:

there is a sense that university and vocational journalism education will remain an integral part of the landscape of the new East/Central Europe and the new nations of the former Soviet Union. However, what these programs will teach, with what suc-

cess, and what role they will play within academia, mass media, and society at large is an open question (Gross, 1999b, p. 178).

Sixthly, the profession is divided along at least two axes: these axes may be designated the "role conception" and the "social position". According to the first, the roles identified by Pisarek for Polish journalists can be generalized: the *militant* (preoccupied with shaping opinion and influencing the public); the *disk-jockey* (centred on entertainment and "infotainment") and the *artisan* (careful to respect the professional values). According to the second axis, however, the profession of journalism has become increasingly divided between the "barons" and the mass of those who pursue practical journalism. The euphoria and solidarity initially apparent after the fall of communism disappeared was replaced with fights and conflicts to impose a "dominant coalition". The great majority of journalists is not protected against the abuses of bosses, not by law, not by clear conventions, not by a professional tradition. In addition, in the East European landscape a number of "media moguls" appeared: these former journalists, now powerful businessmen, represent a force in the media field (and in politics) in their countries (see Hiebert, 1999, pp. 113–15). Examples abound. The Polish Zygmunt Solorz (who owns and controls the powerful channel *Polsat*) and Wojciech Fibak (owner through Fibak Investment Group, of *Gazeta Poznanska* and *Express Wieczorny*), the Russian Eduard Sagalayev (who runs *TV-6*, a station with 60 million viewers) and Vladimir Gussinski (*Radio-Most*), the Czech Vladimir Zelezny (who controls *Nova-TV*), or the Romanian Adrian Sarbu (who controls a media system which includes two TV channels, a radio network, three dailies and several weeklies, a press agency, a publishing house) offer selected examples of these new "Moguls". This phenomenon signals the divisions within the profession and the appearance of media leaders seeking political power, whose names are linked with the press empires of the next millennium.

Consequently, those who work in the press find themselves in a situation characterized by ambivalence: they share a prestigious status, but also that of an ingrate. As representatives of the press they have a certain social prestige, but are also targets for pressures from the political arena ("the freedom of the press does not mean the freedom of the journalists"—Pisarek, 1998, p. 210). The forces of the market economy, moreover, already make them feel threatened by the spectre of unemployment. Journalists enjoy a certain visibility, but also suffer from "a lack of trust and ties" with their audiences; they claim to have a "mission" but their claim (and performance) is stigmatized by their failures.

In the way newsrooms are managed and the obedience of journalists towards, publishers, directors and editors, the media and journalists generally fail to serve as models of democratic beliefs and values. In fact journalism (a) contributes to suspicions about democracy; (b) often increases rather than decreases the intolerance for opposing parties, beliefs and preferences; (c) does not contribute to an atmosphere that increases willingness to compromise with political opponents or that enhances pragmatism and flexibility; (d) increases mistrust of the political environment and cooperation; (e) does nothing to encourage moderation in political position and partisan identification or civility in political discourse; and (f) contributes little to political efficiency and participation (Gross, 1999a, p. 23).

The Political Framework

The relationship between the press and the political world in the post-communist era has mobilized the greatest energies—both in theoretical debates as well as in research. Obviously, the state's direct control over the media has been dramatically reduced, especially for print journalism. Additionally, many thousands of new titles have appeared in the press market as a result of private initiatives. In Belarus approximately 640 publications were launched in 1994, in Bulgaria around 2,600 (1995), in the Czech Republic over 2,500 (1991), in Hungary about 1,500 (1991), in Lithuania over 1,500 (1991), in Romania over 1,200 (1995), in Poland about 7,000 publications with over 4,000 believed to be still active (1993), in Russia 4,800 daily newspapers and 36,000 periodicals (1990), in Slovakia about 770 active publications (1993) and in Ukraine more than 5,000 registered titles (no data about the number of the active ones) were established.

The same explosion of new outlets was evident in broadcast media: in Bulgaria there were 44 television stations and 85 radio stations (1997), in Lithuania 30 television stations (1994), in Poland 19 television stations and 30 radio stations (1993); in Romania 53 private television stations and 157 private radio stations (1995); in Russia there were over 400 local television stations (1997).

Importantly, the media landscape in these countries has been decentralized, witnessing the growth of both local and specialist publications which developed and won larger readerships. Both constituted a privileged area for foreign investors, which led to improvements in technical presentation and quality, making them more attractive than many national and less specialist publications. For their part, broadcast stations have very specialized characteristics: radio stations work to the formula music–news–talk-show while television stations broadcast local programming with specialized programmes being broadcast by western stations (CNN, EuroNews, Eurosport, MCM, VOX, Cartoon Network, Discovery, Animal Planet, TNT and HBO) which dub programmes or provide subtitles. Although the state has lost much of its control over newspapers and sections of broadcast media, it has retained influence over public radio and television stations, press agencies (although in countries such as the Czech Republic, Romania or Russia active and reliable press agencies have emerged) and the distribution system for newspapers and magazines. In some countries the councils which grant the licenses to broadcast also remain under governmental, but not parliament, control.

Despite the fact that the state is only one media owner among many, its influence and power continues to be substantial. As Splichal observes, "broadcasting is still, as it was before the political changes, largely subordinated to the state authorities and party elites rather than to public accountability" (Splichal, 1994, p. 48). This influence is both direct and indirect. It is direct in areas where the state's representatives have control. There have been a number of celebrated disputes to win control of public television stations, for example in countries such as Hungary where between 1990 and 1995 the public television station had four directors (Lanczi and O'Neil, 1997, pp. 89–93; Sparks and Reading, 1998, pp. 139–42). In Romania the public television station also had four directors between 1990 and 1996), while Slovakia had eight directors for its public television station between 1990 and 1998. Control of public news agencies

is also contested: in the Czech Republic three managers were changed between 1990 and 1993. The extent of direct state intervention was evidenced by the way that the Polish President fired two members of the Audiovisual Council in 1994, and the conflict in Russia during the takeover of ORT, which ended with the tragic death of the director and journalist Vladimir Listiev.

The state interferes indirectly via: (a) economic pressures which include increasing the prices of raw materials, transport, energy, by failing to cut VAT or not providing other facilities; or, in a positive way, by according subsidies only to those media groups which support its actions (see Splichal, 1994; Ellis, 1999). The state also applies political pressures. In Russia the Minister for the Press, M. Poltoranin, threatened to close *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* for publishing an interview with the Prime Minister of the Ukraine, who mentioned the possibility of a Russian nuclear attack on the Ukraine. Similar demands were made for the closure of the newspapers *Den* and *Sovetskaya Rossiya*. In the Czech Republic, the chief editor of *Telegraf* together with 17 of his colleges had to resign because of government pressures (for further examples see Kettle, 1997, pp. 53–6; Milton, 1997, pp. 19–21; Sparks and Reading, 1998, pp. 157–62). The state may also apply judicial pressure, as when the Romania President Lliescu sued a journalist from the *Ziua* newspaper for having damaged his public image, while in Poland the former Prime Minister Jan Bieleki sued several newspapers for defamation.

However, state interference is not the main problem confronted by the post-communist press; the acute partisanship that dominates the media is more problematic. In Goban-Klas' formula, "the press [has] become pluralistic, but not independent". This partisanship reflects inherent social tensions and competing political groups' perception that in the struggle for power media have become "the main instrument for politics. Their vision of the media is one-dimensional, over-politicized and simplified, believing in a missionary role for journalists and an ideologized press" (Goban-Klas, 1997, p. 37; see also Androunas, 1993, pp. 54–68; Splichal, 1994, pp. 71–3; Korkonossenko, 1997; Mickiewicz, 1998, pp. 52–3; Hiebert, 1999, pp. 83–7; Gross, 1999a, pp. 22–3). Journalists and owners have not resisted these types of pressure (and temptation) and have allowed themselves to be dragged (or have frenetically jumped) into this transformation of media into a mouthpiece for the various political parties, factions and groups. As Mikhail Gulyaev argues, "the primary function of mass media in Russia is not to attract and hold large audiences for advertisers, but to attract and hold large audiences for individual politicians, who either control or strive to control the mass media" (Ellis, 1999, p. 104). Many politicians, moreover, promote themselves in the Council of Audiovisual or in the Administration Councils of various publications as well as television or radio stations: some, of course, will themselves be owners of media institutions. As a result "undemocratic democracy is served by partisan journalism, a pluralism of opinions and little information" (Gross, 1996, p. 160).

In these conditions the promotion of democratic political strategies including the elimination of political pressures on the media is still a distant objective. The non-governmental organizations and representatives of civil society rarely receive the support and the attention of the press, even in the period before elections.

Another specific post-1989 phenomenon is the "depoliticization" of the press or, more correctly, the replace-

ment of political debates in newspapers with cheap scandal and entertainment. Eastern European countries have witnessed the triumph of yellow journalism generating a changing style of journalism by privileging sensational news; in this way newspapers create a new and sensationalized way of understanding reality. Titles such as *24 Chasa* (Bulgaria), *Blesk* (Czech Republic), *Blickk* (Hungary), *Nie* (Poland), *Evenimentul Zilei* (Romania), *Novy Cas* (Slovakia) and *Kievskie vedomosti* (Ukraine) constitute a "tidal wave" of tabloid newspapers and oblige other daily newspapers, and even television and radio stations, to refocus their editorial priorities towards these revised news values. Clearly this new tabloid phenomenon has reduced the ideological tensions in political debates reported in the press, as newspapers prefer increasingly to represent political phenomena as the product of personal conflicts or dramatic accidents rather than as related to structurally rooted conflicts of interests.

Ultimately, a possible public sphere based on arguments and reason has been replaced by another arena dominated by dramatic gestures and emotionally laden messages. Several studies monitoring the press during election campaigns reveal the bias in favour of the ruling group and, more significantly, draw attention to the fact that (as media theoreticians already know although some continue to contest) the press has only minimal influence on political attitudes and behaviour during elections (Gross, 1996; Jakubowicz, 1996b; Mickiewicz and Richter, 1996; Leidner *et al.*, 1997; Stefan, 1997). Such a reality can surprise only those who, forgetting the conclusions of more than 50 years of research on the social effects of mass media, believe that the transition in Eastern Europe is so special that it changes the generally known behaviour of the public. There is another reality that must be acknowledged: the decreased credibility of journalists and, implicitly, the press. In these conditions press messages, both partisan and sensational, had only a modest effect on readerships and failed to perform the same mobilization of opinion they had achieved during the period of social movements generated by the fall of communism. As O'Neil observes,

> **Openness created cacophony and the expansion of press diversity also created the means by which old hatreds could be publicly expressed. Real news often gave way to sensationalism, yellow journalism and tabloid coverage […] Foreign capital, in many countries, came to dominate the most important media assets, raising questions about information monopolies and external control over again. At the governmental level as well the new democrats were often less than thrilled with an open press. State run television and radio have in many cases developed into a mouthpiece of the new regimes […] Between market and state, the media continue to run the risk that the power over information will be reconsolidated into the hands of a few, a re-etatisation to the detriment of civil society (O'Neil, 1997, p. 2).**

These lines express the contrast between the expectations of western observers (philosophers, journalists, researchers and politicians) together with the intellectual elite in Eastern Europe and the real evolution of the media landscape. The feeling that "things haven't come out as they should" emanates from many studies or essays dedicated to post-communism. This sentiment reveals a sad truth in history: the expectations and theoretical (utopian?) formulae of intellectuals concerning social development are rarely confirmed by the real course

of events. To understand why a note either of accusation or regret emerges in many texts dedicated to the post-communist press, we have to understand the theoretical framework and conceptual model informing developments.

The Theoretical Framework

Media developments in Eastern Europe reveal another problem: in this case a conceptual one. Scholars who study the recent history of post-communist countries emphasize the lack of any adequate theoretical framework, both for the general socio-political process of "democratization" and "capitalization" and for media "transition". If these studies deal with the *transformation* of *the press system* in a geographically well defined *region*, it is necessary to find answers to the following questions:

1. What is the area of study? How is it to be limited? Otherwise, how many cases have to be studied in order to obtain a valid generalization?
2. What are the characteristics of the initial as well as the final state of this process? Are they clearly defined? What characteristics are more influential in this transformation?
3. What concepts and theories can be used to explain these phenomena? How significant is the influence of these scientific tools in creating a certain way of understanding the whole process?

First, it is difficult to define the area of research in ways other than the conventionally geographic. The area described as "Central and Eastern Europe" or "post-communist countries" involves many different regions, socio-political systems and historical situations. Between Baltic and Balkan countries, between Central European countries and those on the eastern extremity (Russia, for example, reaches to the far Orient) there is only one common point: all are ex-communist countries. Therefore, the question is: was communism a system so homogeneous and oppressive that it could erase in 50–70 years all distinctive elements, derived from different cultural values, histories, religions and languages? The ideological disputes between theories which sustained the doctrine and the global communist movement and those which argued for its national diversity, mobilized energies and initiated many polemics on the short but tumultuous history of socialist systems. For the purposes of this discussion, the essential problem is another: were these political, social and cultural systems and these ideological commitments sufficiently strong to create a homogeneous communist mass media system? If the answer is "yes" it means that post-communist mass media must follow, in all countries, the same pattern and same evolutionary steps; indifferent to other factors (which will be "accidents"). If the answer is "no", then the evolution of mass media systems in these countries is arguably autonomous and divergent and the identification of common structural themes risks speculative extrapolations.

Most studies with a regional focus immediately assume, without any detailed conceptual debate (except the doubts expressed by Splichal, 1995, pp. 24–5), the truth of these hypotheses, with roots in a super-state, supercultural and unhistorical perspective (see Jakubowicz, 1994, 1995; Sparks and Reading, 1998; Splichal, 1995; Frybes, 1998; Johnson, 1999). As a consequence, if scholars are critical of the theoretical and concrete profile of the final point of the "transition" (the democratic society and the democratic media system), they share in the

assumption that communist systems and communist media were homogeneous.

The conjunction between a stable past system and an uncertain future leads to the conclusion that the deficiencies, contradictions and dysfunctions of "media in transition" are relicts of communist behaviours and mentalities. As Splichal observes, "In a sense revolutionary changes in East–Central Europe represent 'revolution' only in terms of revolutionary means, because they do not (yet) imply a radical transformation of fundamental societal structures" (Splichal, 1995, p. 132). For O'Neil, "The trajectory of media change (or lack of it) in Eastern Europe is to a large extent guided by institutional legacies carried over from the old order" (Lanczi and O'Neil, 1997, p. 83), while similarly Sparks and Reading argue that, "In terms both of structure and personnel, the media show singularly little transformation, and what there has been is best understood as a mechanism for ensuring social continuity in the face of political change" (Sparks and Reading, 1998, p. 106); and so on.

The legacy of the past was seen as a dysfunctional relict, an obstacle to the achievement of the new, democratic; media understood as sources of crisis. I believe, by contrast, that the source of crisis resides in the liberal media system, with its market battles, political struggles, ethical challenges and professional pressures. In this new and turbulent environment, the communist patterns (the product of a culture which is familiar to—and manageable by—both new and old journalists) offer a "stability factor", which facilitates control over the system and its transformation. The communist heritage is the functional piece of the puzzle, because it allows people to face and manage change, to avoid threats and to drive it in conformity with their needs, interests or fears. So, from my anthropological perspective (which is not normative), in this process of social and cultural transformation, the new disturbs and the old conforms; journalists handled the process by changing the discourse (adapting it to the new requirements) and by preserving the operational norms, behaviours, networks and values—all in order to master the process. This prompts another conclusion: in this process of "transition" the most influential factors are not those located in the final phase (the "democratic" media)—too utopian, too abstract, too contradictory and too normative to be followed by the subject of the process of change—but those characteristic to the previous stage, more concrete, manageable and operational in dealing with the pressures of change.

The theoretical paradigm in which these phenomena were discussed has recently become a topic more important than the transformation itself. At the heart of all research are two kinds of theories: the *public space* or *public sphere* (ideas, debates and free speech are democracy's base) and *roles and the social effects of the press* (mass media have an influence on society and individuals, congruent or divergent referring to a certain assumed mission).

Theories of the public sphere or public space (although still problematic both in their theoretical assumptions and concrete referents) place the press in a privileged position, as a facilitator of public debates (and agent of public opinion changes) and a precondition for the existence of the modern public sphere. In communist systems the public sphere, as an intermediate space between the state and the private realm, disappeared. Worse, it is invaded by the etatic sphere, which replaces free and uncontrolled debates with the propagandist discourses of the official press: "in other words, the

public sphere became equal to a media system which was owned by and controlled by the state or directed by the party" (Sukosd, 1990). Two research directions exploring the relations between the state, the communist press and society have emerged from here: some focus on the efforts of the cultural elite to create an alternative public sphere while others (not so numerous) explore how the development of a mass culture and cultural consumption led to a public without ideology and a transfer from this propaganda space.

These research directions have been similarly pursued in interpreting the post-communist media revolution. Numerous studies have illustrated media contributions, but ultimately failure, to create a new public sphere and a responsible public opinion: they insist on press resources to mould public opinion and shape attitudes (see subtle critiques of these presuppositions in Gross, 1996) and deplore the failure of media to create a civil society. In essence, these studies have tried to find an answer to the contradiction between the standard public sphere model and the political and economical structures of post-communism. These studies reveal that both political and market factors have exerted a negative influence retarding the development of a public sphere and democratic media institutions (see Becker, 1990; Sukosd, 1990; Sgard, 1992; Splichal, 1994; Jakubowicz, 1995; Novosel, 1995; Sparks and Reading, 1998; Frybes, 1998; Mills, 1999). Few analyses have pointed out the failure of the intellectual elite when it tried to satisfy both moral principles and political exigencies or to discover and implement adequate strategies to resolve the crises of post-communism (see Thom, 1994; Mastnak, 1991; Manaev, 1995; Pasti, 1995; Gross, 1996). In contrast, many studies have illustrated how quickly the products of mass culture have penetrated East European markets prompting the jettisoning of civic values in favour of consumer values (see Splichal, 1992; Becker, 1993; De Bruycker, 1996; McNair, 1996; Verdery, 1996).

The theoretical model of the press' social role is synthesized by the well-known typology of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm. In this typology, the coupled liberal–public service (centred on the dialectic between freedom of speech and civic responsibility) is opposed to the coupled authoritarian–communist (centred on the dialectic between dominance and resistance). Despite the fact that other researchers have proposed more complex typologies (see McQuail, 1987, p. 111) and even though Sparks and Reading have announced its failure (1998), the "four theories" remains a fundamental typological category. Analyses of the communist press (see Fejto, 1952, 1969; Lendvai, 1980; Walter, 1982; Mattelart, 1995; Semelin, 1997) have confirmed and "classicized" this model of a press which is highly ideologized, totally dominated by the political power, which works as a mass mobilization machine and which is staffed by zealous journalists–propagandists without civic conscience. Studies of this period have insisted (from a theoretical perspective deriving from powerful media effects theories and to the exclusion of other research themes), on the dominant function of the press and have focused on the attributes considered fundamental, from the perspective of occidental democracy's experience, to any press system: free access to information, freedom of speech, the objectiveness of reporting, the autonomy of press institution, the moral responsibility of journalists, etc. Communist mass media were considered in a rather mechanical fashion as simply a propaganda-making "machine". As a result, studies focused on the oppressive dimension (confirming through

different case studies the validity of the initial hypotheses and general theoretical framework of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm) or on the "resistance" zones (especially: intellectual dissidence, *samizdat*, the alternative press, mass media and the penetration of western culture), with their function of "additional disintegraters" of the official ideology.

The theoretical landscape of "media transition" might be complemented to great advantage by other approaches, inspired by cultural anthropology. Even though many anthropologists have studied or reflected on the "transition" (see the works of Beck, Burawoy, Dunn, Hann, Humphrey, Kligman, Kideckel (1993), Sampson, Verdery (1994, 1996) and others) they were more interested in the "classical" or "traditional" themes of this discipline: for example, questions concerning identity, ethnic relations, ritual construction (old and new), kinship (especially the gender aspects), property and power distribution and symbolical fights over legitimacy. Anthropologists have been less attracted to media and to journalists' "tribes", considered (perhaps) as too "exotic" compared to the usual subjects explored by this discipline.

In the anthropological approach to media evolution, a paradigm born and successfully applied in anthropological research is transferred, *mutans mutandis*, in media analysis. I would like to mention here the "theatrical" or "dramatic" framework, inspired by Kenneth Burke, which was utilized by Sarah King and Donald Cushman and their contributors (1992) and later by Gina Stoiciu (1995), in order to reveal "the information environment that mass communication processes created and the meanings of events and scenarios that people derived from that" (King and Cushman, 1992, p. 158). A second approach is inspired by Victor Turner's theories on the role of ritual in organizing change and managing crisis and by the attempts to use ritual process as a paradigm for social change. The studies by Shinar (1995) and Coman (1994a, 1995, 1996a) suggest a model of post-communist transition rooted in ritual-like transformations, in which media play the same role as myth (in traditional societies) expressing, organizing and confronting the new meanings.

I believe that cultural anthropology has a strong point when it suggests that all these questions were debated:

mainly by reference to state-level practices alone: the machinations of dictators, bureaucracies and secret police. When individuals are considered, they are often viewed as homogenized masses struggling to break free of unnatural socialist constraints and reassert their universal (capitalist) human nature […] More to the point, macro-level analysis of East-Central European societies have been shaped by the leading role of the disciplines of economics and political science in Eastern European Studies and by the Cold War pressures to mythologize those societies and the power of Socialist state (Kideckel 1993, 4).

We have to look also at the (so-called) "micro-level" in order to see how individuals and groups have dealt with media and, more generally, with the communist and post-communist systems.

The public has never behaved as a "passive" mass, willing to accept press messages without criticism. Numerous recent works, inspired by the theoretical framework of "cultural studies", have illustrated the different ways in which the products of the cultural industries are "manipulated" by individuals as well as the variety of possible

negotiated or oppositional "readings" which can be made of mass media messages. A fresher approach to the way in which the messages of the communist press were received, processed and used will show numerous *modes d'emploi* specific to different public categories, the spaces of doubt, negation and escapism, the fields for the negotiation of meaning and the range of freedom for audiences. Applied to the post-communist press, such analysis will show (because as far as I know nothing of this kind has been undertaken) the public's "mode of use" of the press, of trust and distrust zones, and it will specify the dominant options concerning the consumption of products offered by cultural industries, and also the concern for the search, process and use of information provided by mass media.

It must not be forgotten, moreover, that journalists (as a cultural elite) have negotiated, in subtle and non-contractual ways, "the field of symbolic action" through a game of compromises. They were not merely a "transmission belt" for the state's orders, but a partner, sometimes submissive, sometimes embarrassing, in a game whose prize was control of this formidable resource represented by the means of mass communication. Journalists from the communist period have not simply spread propagandist information and opinions, but also symbolic values. Obviously, their scope for freedom was considerably less than for journalists in western democracies. However, a certain space for manoeuvre, a certain ensemble of symbolic negotiations and a certain double-talk has existed in all those years, and this reality (which implies a less mechanical vision of the communist press's functioning) should be studied, starting from the theoretical frameworks established by (in Schudson's view) an anthropological or cultural approach to the "sociology of news production". Such a perspective could offer more interesting explanations of some attitudes and behaviours of older and newer journalists from the post-communist press, their ability to imitate dominant discourses and the apparent ease with which they negotiated their new privileges and spheres of action. It is apparent that post-communist media's evolution does not represent so much a failure of a professional elite to reach an ideal model (that of a democratic mass media), as a victory of a social–professional category, in its struggle for the control over a professional field and for economical, social and political advantages (see Gross, 1996; Pisarek, 1998; Coman, 1998a).

Finally, it is important to analyse media not only as a means of socio-political influence (and consequently as a contested arena for disputes between political, economical or professional groups), not only as a support for rational deliberation (information and opinion), but also as a symbolic space, as a field where narratives, images, values and myths are confronted in a search for meanings, worldviews and identity.

Conclusion

The fall of communism generated political hopes and mass euphoria. It echoed in the scientific field: it was believed that the "transition" is a new (or, at least, specific) phenomenon, which will change not only the media landscape in these countries but also the theoretical framework of communication studies. After 10 years of research, study and debates, I think we have to recognize that *nothing essentially has happened in media theory*: No new theory, no new concepts, no new patterns arose from the media's evolution in these countries. Analysis confirmed the main theories about the

social or political effects and functions of the media, about the “cultural industries” and the media economy, about “the production of news” and patterns of professionalization. They also confirmed the (still) controversial character of other theoretical constructs concerning the relations between the media and public space, social development, electoral campaigns or the social construction of specific worldview. Post-communist media did not create a new “model”—they represent a mixture of the already known “models”, combined in proportions which vary in accordance with the historical, geographical and cultural characteristics of each country in the region under discussion.

Even if they do not change significantly the theoretical landscape of communication studies, post-communist media generated an interesting corpus of works and a passionate field for theoretical debates. Beyond the descriptive and normative works available on Eastern European media, a comprehensive analytical work related to the realities of the region’s socio-cultural, political and economic transition since 1990 is (still) missing. I believe that gap is soon to be filled, and I have in mind at least one work whose analysis of media contributions and effects is not nearly as negative as their systemic and professional development might suggest (I am grateful to Prof. Peter Gross for allowing me to consult the manuscript of *Unperfect Evolution: Media, Civil Society, Political Culture and Democratization*: working title). Perhaps our expectations were to high. In truth, 10 years is too short a period in which to develop a profound and subtle understanding of such a complex process and to construct a new theoretical approach. It is possible that only now, when the media “transition” is almost settled and the pressures of the rapid changes and of the surprising transformations are less obtrusive, that scholars can find the necessary detachment and the new perspectives for a rich theoretical construction.

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