

## Introduction

Press freedom provides both the oxygen of democracy and the laughing gas of infotainment and commercial exploitation. This has been something of a shocking discovery to make for people in Central and Eastern Europe. When they were trying to imagine, and plan for, a new media order once the Communist system had been abolished, they had visions of a media scene where everyone would “speak with their own voice”, the media would be socially-controlled and would serve as the forum of a serious, pluralistic public debate on fundamental issues of our countries.

The reality is somewhat different. In this paper I will try to provide a very general overview of that reality and put it in a comparative perspective to see what progress has been achieved since 1989.

Central and Eastern European countries are undergoing what may be called “systemic social transformation.” Accordingly, change in their media systems should be far-reaching. At the same time, media change can be treated as a litmus test of the more general process of transformation since, as Colin Sparks (1998, pp. 16-17) puts it, “certain features of the structures of society are more clearly illuminated through this optic [of media change – K.J.] than through others.” In this view, media transformation is an indicator of more general political change: if “the shift from communism to the new order in the region is really one of a shift between fundamentally different systems, then one would expect that to be registered particularly clearly in the mass media” – and vice versa, of course.

Given that 15 years have passed since the process began, we need to ask ourselves the question: when is transformation over? Has that shift between different systems been achieved? The trouble, of course, is that we have been like Columbus who set out on an epic journey in the hope of discovering the passage to India, but ended up discovering something else alto-

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## Post-Communist Media Development in Perspective \*

gether. We never really defined the goal of change in anything like a realistic way.

Moreover, one of the major barriers to successful media policy-making in Central and Eastern Europe is that the region is facing four centuries’ worth of policy issues to resolve – from the 17<sup>th</sup> century issue of the abolition of censorship (it was abolished in Great Britain in 1688 and in the region almost exactly three centuries later) to the 21<sup>st</sup> century issues of the Information Society. This creates a policy overload capable of taxing the capacity and resources of any country or region.<sup>1</sup>

Social transformation, understood broadly as social change, can never be “over,” of course. However, in the context of Central and Eastern Europe today, the question refers to a specific historical process of post-communist transformation. Determining when this form of transformation is over depends on whether or not it is seen as a teleological process, implying a pre-conceived or normatively defined end result, or a certain pre-determined set of outcomes. If, as suggested by Sparks, it is seen as serving the creation of a different social order, then transformation will be over when that has happened and the legacy of Communism (however that is defined) has been eliminated.

Assuming such a teleological understanding of transformation we may distinguish a number of principal criteria for assessing its progress:

1. The first criterion concerns the reversibility of change: i.e. has change (of whatever nature and proceeding in whatever direction) reached the point of no return? We may call this transformation out of the old order;
2. The second relates to the achievement of critical mass of transformation into a new order, even if shortcomings or legacies of the past still remain;
3. And the third principal criterion concerns the consolidation of the new order, coalescing into a new integrated whole.

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1 The present article is based on Jakubowicz’s book Rude Awakening. Social and Media Change in Central and Eastern Europe, to be published by Hampton Press, Inc., Cresskill, N.J.

Lukosiunas (1998) combines the first and the second criterion in assessing the situation in the Lithuanian media system:

“One may probably say that the first phase of the transition – which included the disruption of soviet media system and emergence of the new structure of the media which is capable of integrating Western journalistic practices and is ready to be integrated into the structures of Western media businesses – is over, and the next stage – which is to find its place and voice in united Europe – has just started.”

As for the second and third criterion, their application can be illustrated by reference to attempts to answer the question “When Is Transition Over?” by a number of economists who lectured at Western Michigan University during the 1997/98 academic year (see Brown, 1999). They all believe that transformation is oriented towards a positive result, i.e. the creation of a new order based on the Western model, and that progress can be measured by the degree to which this goal has been achieved.

Their answers could be grouped into three categories:

- Systemic, e.g. Kornai’s view that transition is over when three criteria have been met: when the communist party no longer has monopoly power, when the dominant part of the means of production is privately owned, and when the market is the dominant coordinator of economic activities;
- Concentrating on outcomes, as in the view that transition is over for post-communist countries when they have become members of the EU;
- And institutional, as in the view that transition would not be complete until three sectors had been aggressively reformed: state-owned enterprises, the financial sector, and government service provision.

In turn, Dahrendorf (1991, p. 86) specifies how the third criterion should be understood: transformation in post-communist Europe towards the goal of creating a liberal democracy and market economy would be complete when “social foundations” for them have been laid.

This underscores the importance of a cultural interpretation of transformation. It is not enough to introduce new institutions: what is also needed is the cultural foundations of those institutions, the values, attitudes and beliefs which make them work, and which encourage the people to take them for granted.

The importance of “culture-building” is forcefully underscored by Offe (1997):

“In the East, the cultural foundations of the new institutions [...] will have to be supplied after the fact and in the course of the actual operations of the new institutions of market and democracy. As long as the appropriate spirit and supporting political and economic culture is not yet in place, there is little that can immunize these new democracies and market systems against the dangers of opportunism, defection, erosion, and opportunist subversion of the newly introduced rules. [...] If institutions are seen to fail or to yield less than what was expected of them, the only thing that can ensure their continued validity and recognition is a firmly entrenched system of beliefs that supports them – not for the reason (at least for the time being) that they are useful, but because they are “right” and hence intrinsically deserving of support.”

Thus, the institutional and cultural approach does offer a way of determining when transformation will be over: transformation will be over when a new, internally consistent and functioning social order has been created and the full institutionalisation of the new organizations and their cultural foundations has taken place.

## Two Models of Post-Communist Transformation

The World Bank (2002) has categorized post-communist countries, combining analysis of political system type with that of economic policy, as shown in Figure 1.

A great number of factors influenced this differentiation of post-communist countries (some countries can be said to have moved into other categories since 1999). Considerable importance must be attached to initial conditions prevailing at the start of the transformation process, which in turn had their roots in particular countries’ historical experience.

To simplify matters, we may identify two groups of countries: Type A and Type B. Figure 2 shows the difference between them in terms of factors facilitating or hindering successful post-communist transformation.

In discussing this set of factors, we may rely on Ekiert’s (1999) analysis of the importance of historical legacies:

- First, all successful (Type A) countries had earlier histories of political conflicts, liberalization attempts, economic reforms and experiments, and oppositional activities. Such developments under state so-

cialism produced more pragmatic communist elites, more viable private domains within state-run economies, and stronger cultural and political counter-elites. It seems that such histories of political struggle and reforms engendered a learning process on the level of elites and society alike that facilitated faster transition to democracy, better quality of democratic institutions, and more extensive liberties and freedoms. The kinds of knowledge and skills

that were acquired by relevant collective actors (ruling elites, opposition movements and civil society organizations, private entrepreneurs) under decentralized and pragmatic state socialism were an important asset after its demise. As a result, these countries and their new elites were more consistent and effective in implementing political and economic reforms;

**Figure 1.** *Political Systems in Post-Communist Economies, 1990–1999*

<b>Competitive democracies</b>	<b>Concentrated political regimes</b>	<b>War-torn regimes</b>	<b>Noncompetitive political regimes</b>
Czech Republic	Slovak Republic	Armenia	Kazakhstan
Slovenia	Bulgaria	Albania	Uzbekistan
Hungary	Romania	Georgia	Belarus
Poland	Ukraine	Macedonia, FYR	Turkmenistan
Lithuania	Russia	Azerbaijan	
Estonia	Croatia	Tajikistan	
Latvia	Moldova	Bosnia-Herzegovina	
	Kyrgyz Republic		

**Figure 2.** *Endogenous Factors Involved in the Fall of Communism*

<b>Type A countries: Factors creating conditions for relatively successful transition</b>	<b>Type B countries: Factors obstructing transition</b>
Relative prosperity	Low living standards, mass deprivation
High educational standards	Low educational standards
Survival of pre-Communist corporate identity/cultural tradition (depending on the strength of that tradition, but also on the duration of the Communist system itself in the given country)	Disintegration (or destruction) of indigenous cultural tradition and identity
Existence of an organized dissident movement and grass-roots pressure for change	Movement non-existent or weak
Relatively lenient treatment of dissidents	Harsh persecution of dissidents, traumatic conclusion of earlier crises, discouraging thought of further opposition to the Communist system
Dissident movement able to unite many social groups around its goals	Intellectual dissidents isolated
Existence of a reformist wing of the Party	Party “liberals” non-existent or weak
Earlier attempts of top-down reform	No such attempts
Population homogeneous from national/ ethnic point of view	Existence of national/ethnic tensions, or conflicts

- Second, these are also the countries that maintained more extensive relationships with Western democracies, international organizations, and the global economy in the past. They benefited from scientific and technical cooperation, trade relations, and received extensive aid in a form of expertise and capital inflows. All these factors clearly contributed to speedier and more successful transformations. The kinds of knowledge and skills acquired by all relevant economic and political actors in the past played a major role in designing and implementing transition strategies and shaping institutional change.
- Third, these were the countries where former communist parties lost power in the first round of democratic elections and opposition forces formed the first democratic governments. New political elites were more committed to change and accelerated the exit from state socialism.

**Idealistic Orientation**

The original search for this model had already been undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s by the intellectual and cultural opposition to the system. The clear tendency here was to think in terms that were antithetical to the old model, both in general socio-political terms, and with regard to the media system.

The dissidents hoped to avoid what they saw as inadequacies of Western media systems and to establish a “real public media sphere”,

offering broad possibilities for access to information and participation in communication processes to all individuals, for educational programs, and for the development of national culture, as well as serving as a watchdog against all kinds of abuses of political or economic power.

This was, then, a radical vision of direct, participatory communicative democracy.

**Figure 3.** Schematic representation of transformation in Type A countries.

Development of a facilitating historical legacy during the Communist period	Transition	More advanced and successful systemic transformation
History of political conflicts and reforms Economic liberalization under the old regime Pragmatization of Communist elites Political/cultural opposition Stronger ties to the West	Collapse of the system and initial elections	Earlier/more comprehensive economic reforms More secure procedural democracy/more freedom More dispersed power More competitive system More extensive integration with the West, regional and global economic and political structures

This is summed up in Figure 3.

As we will see below, prospects for change in the media are heavily dependent on whether a particular country represents Type A or Type B.

**Media Policy Orientations in Post-Communist Countries**

After 1989, Central and Eastern European countries faced the job of developing systemic media policy, i.e. of redefining their media systems. First, they had to settle on a model of the media system, with underlying normative media theories and concepts of the role of the media and journalism in society.

**Idealistic-Mimetic Orientation**

Proponents of the idealistic orientation, based on the concept of an open and plural media system and direct communicative democracy, realized – in the light of the immediate post-1989 situation (see the section on the atavistic media policy model below) – that the idealistic orientation would not get backing from the new governments. Nevertheless, they sought to add as many of its features as possible to the evolving “mimetic media policy orientation model”.

### **Mimetic Orientation**

This model assumed straight transplantation of the generalized Western media system with a free press and a dual broadcasting system.

### **“Materialist” Orientation**

The situation evolving in CIS countries after the fall of Communism in his country prompted the development of yet another orientation, based on the quite illusory view that emancipation or “autonomization” of the media could not be achieved by any other means than wholesale privatization of the media.

This “materialist” orientation has enjoyed the staunch support of private and foreign media owners and investors, determined primarily to undermine the position of state or newly emerging public broadcasters.

### **“Atavistic” Orientation**

There is no doubt that the new power elites were unwilling to give up all control of, or ability to influence, the media (Jakubowicz, 1995). As Brečka (1993) correctly notes, the new governments (even democratically-minded ones) were taken aback and stung by what they considered to be completely unjustified critical treatment from the highly politicized press. They felt cut off from public opinion and unable to deliver their message to the population. Many were beleaguered and insecure and their power base in society was by no means stable. Accordingly, they sought to delay transforming existing monopolistic government-controlled broadcasting systems into autonomous public service systems and even more so demonopolising radio and television which would give their political opponents a chance to start broadcasting to the population. They believed, and some still do believe, that as the new democratically elected governments they deserve the support of, and have the “right” to use radio and television to promote the process of reform, although more often than not this has taken the form of manipulation for propaganda and political purposes.

Typical of this approach was the demand (seen by some as the real beginning of the Hungarian “media wars”) made by István Csurka after the first Hungarian free elections 1990, for “a media controlled by the electoral winners” (Arato, 1996, p. 225). In Bulgaria, this principle came close to being written into the law:

“In July of 1996, the Socialist-dominated Parliament passed a highly controversial broadcast media law (Zakon za radioto i televiziata). The law allowed, in effect, the political party in power to have control over the state-owned National Television and National Radio. Soon after, the Constitutional Court ruled the major provisions of this law invalid.” (Nikoltchev, 1998/99)

### **Settling on a “Standard” Model**

The real story after 1989 was that the emergence of at least two groups of post-communist countries. In more advanced (Type A) countries, the partitocratic system, together with the politicization of all spheres of public life and political culture of post-communism, favoured control of the media by political elites. In less advanced (Type B) countries, an autocratic system of government, involving the power of state administration or the oligarchs over the media and an underdeveloped civil society, largely undermined prospects for media freedom, turning them into the voice either of the state, or of political or vested interests.

Professor Slavko Splichal of Slovenia has called the result a “paternal-commercial system”. He has also pointed to “Italianization of the media” (i.e. close ties between politics and the media) as the main distinguishing feature of the post-communist media system.

As a result, the media model characteristic of the present stage of transformation is a combination of the mimetic and “atavistic” media policy orientations. It is hard to describe precisely which elements of which model shape the media most in particular countries, but as a general rule Type A countries have acquired more features of the mimetic model, while Type B countries retain more of the atavistic model.

### **Media System Change in Post-Communist Countries: An Overview**

“The new media scene is surely much better than it was, let’s say, ten years ago,” says Galik (2003, p. 204). This is no doubt true in relation to a great majority of post-communist countries. With the exception of Central Asian countries, the media situation practically everywhere is certainly incomparably better in practically every respect than it was under the Communist system. Nevertheless, it is far from perfect, but then – so are the media in any country.

We can identify at least eight processes or clusters of complementary or contradictory processes of change in post-communist media systems:

1. Demonopolization and (partial) remonopolization
2. Commercialization and marketization of media systems
3. Change as regards media freedom and independence
4. Democratization
5. Pluralization and diversity in the media
6. Professionalization of journalists
7. Development of public service broadcasting
8. Internationalization and globalization

### 1. Demonopolization and (Partial) Remonopolization

Demonopolization is by no means universal or complete in post-communist countries. In countries like Belarus, Ukraine, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – also Russia – media are either all controlled by the State, or by oligarchs close to the state; private or opposition media are persecuted or simply banned.

In such countries, demonopolization – meaning the existence of non-official and uncontrolled media – is achieved by means of the Internet and a handful of low-circulation newsletters. This is, in a way, a digital-age reincarnation of the Soviet-era dissident samizdat.

Everywhere, demonopolization was followed by a veritable flood of new publications. In Hungary, the number of newspapers and periodicals on the market trebled within 18 months. In Romania the number of titles rose from some 30 before the revolution to some 900-1400 afterwards. For a time there was even no obligation to register newly launched newspapers and periodicals in that country.

Demonopolization of broadcasting was more difficult. Not only had old regulations to be lifted, but also entirely new broadcasting laws had to be adopted, and that was a protracted and conflict-ridden process.

In many countries, demonopolization was followed by media concentration. In war-torn, non-competitive or concentrated regimes, media concentrations are mostly politically-driven, evidence of incomplete transformation and of continuity with the previous era. Most of the media moguls make their money elsewhere and spend it on the media in order (as described by Lange, 1997) to “buy a voice, control a voice or have the ability to let others use that voice.”

Elsewhere, media concentration is promoted by more familiar market mechanisms, involving mergers and

acquisitions between existing media companies, often involving action by foreign media conglomerates interested in entering a market (see below: Internationalization and globalization). The old media system fragmented very quickly and was replaced by a market-oriented system that rapidly began to integrate itself into the world media market, with a clear trend towards monopolization (or concentration) of local market.

### 2. Commercialization and Marketization of Media Systems

The more transformation is advanced in a post-communist country, the more market mechanisms shape the media scene – and the more the oxygen of democracy is squeezed out by the laughing gas of the tabloidization of all the media. This is additionally promoted by the appearance and activities of foreign media companies that usually pursue strictly market-oriented goals and introduce business and managerial know-how.

Features of a media system shaped by market forces include such elements as segmentation of audiences (including separation of elite and popular media, and identification of market niches in both broad areas), stress upon entertainment rather than on educational or informative content, a preponderance of advertising-oriented content, media concentration (see above), etc. (Adamowski, 2002, shows how even the impoverished population of Russia has, by creating a differentiated demand for various types of newspapers and magazines, been able to bring about the supply of these publications).

A good case study of this situation is provided by Hungary, for example, where foreign investors took over both the national and the regional political newspaper market in a couple of months early on in the transition period and turned the previously state-dominated “command industry” into a market-driven media system (Bayer, Galik, 2002).

The following structural changes could be noted in the 1990s:

- Popular/tabloid titles appeared on the scene in 1990 and the fight for readers' attention began between the political and the tabloid press;
- Middle-of-the-road newspapers have been squeezed out of the market: they either transformed themselves into tabloids or went out of business;
- The magazine industry has expanded enormously compared to the pre-transition era:

- People started to spend more money and time buying and reading magazines;
- The supply of radio and television channels grew continuously during the 1990s, attracting audience attention and advertising budgets to the competing electronic media;
- Freesheets containing some editorial parts next to advertisements and distributed to the public in different forms have been common and started to siphon advertising revenues vital for survival out of the industry.

The picture is completed by the clear dominance of commercial television over the public service one.

All in all, the Hungarian newspaper and magazine markets are described as following by and large the rules of developed/mature markets. In newspaper publishing, local monopolies are common and there are very few new market entries. Freesheets gain market share at the expense of other newspapers. The overall consumer magazine circulation has levelled out, but new titles keep coming to the market, as well. Consumer target groups are becoming narrower and the advantages from economies of scope are becoming more and more obvious. Further consolidation seems inevitable in both markets.

### 3. Media Freedom and Independence

#### *Political System and Media Independence*

At the risk of some oversimplification, one could point to different policy orientations as regards media independence in different types of political systems:

1. Authoritarian regimes in most cases pursue a proactive policy of full subordination of the media, censorship and administrative control;
2. Non-competitive democracies maintain extensive control of state/public broadcast media and are likely to make use of licensing to keep opponents of the regime off the air. To begin with, their policy vis-à-vis private broadcast and print media was usually a reactive one, responding to cases when they challenged the government or public officials (this may include "censorship by killing" and "censorship by physical assault and intimidation"). More recently, pre-emptive strategies to prevent hostile or critical coverage became more common, including (as in Russia or Ukraine) pressure on old media oligarchs to give up their media holdings and turn them over to people or companies selected by the power elite.

3. For their part, competitive democracies (Type A countries) accept extensive media freedom. The system does, however, encompass politicization of public media and use of a variety of methods to influence or control the media, whenever possible.

#### *Media Economics and Independence*

There are two main reasons why media organizations in many post-communist countries are unable to sustain themselves on the market:

- Slow pace of economic reform, leading to an underdeveloped market economy and therefore an impoverished public and an underdeveloped advertising market (driving down revenues from sales and advertising) – this applies primarily to Type B countries, and especially all CIS countries;
- An overabundance of media outlets, resulting from (i) political or other extraneous reasons for establishing newspapers or broadcasting stations, regardless of the cost or prospects for their self-financing; (ii) early enthusiasm for launching new media once the Communist system was abolished, (iii) simplified procedures for awarding licences to broadcast before new broadcasting laws were passed, often to cronies of the current government (after the fall of Milosevic, Serbia was said to have up to 1000 radio and television stations), and then institutional failure of licensing authorities (acting under pressure to license as many stations as possible, no matter what the economic prospects), resulting in their inability to put the broadcasting market on a sound economic footing by adjusting the number of stations to the size of the market (or indeed to put an end to pirate broadcasting).

With too many media organizations chasing inadequate sources of revenue, the result is a foregone conclusion: in order to survive they must find other sources of finance: government subsidies or money from political parties, local authorities, business or other. Financial dependence translates into lack of editorial autonomy.

#### *The Law and Media Independence*

New political elites everywhere have sought to apply a wide variety of measures either to control the media or curb their "excessive" independence and autonomy. In many countries, such issues as access to official information, or generally freedom of information legislation, protection of journalistic sources, state secrets

laws, defamation, libel and privacy provisions, manner of licensing/registration of newspapers and publishers, accreditation of journalists, journalists' professional rights and obligations are all hotly contested in the process of drafting and implementing the law in terms of media and journalistic freedom. In addition, national security and contempt of court laws are often invoked in seeking to curb media freedom. In many cases, relatively "liberal" provisions of early laws were later revised, or revisions were attempted, to introduce a greater measure of political control.

#### 4. Democratization

Very little has been done to achieve true democratization of the media system or media organizations.

Democratization of media organizations themselves may take the form of making the media, their ownership, management and content, more democratic and socially representative. In a few cases (Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Croatia) has some effort been made to involve civil society in policy-making as well as management and oversight of public service broadcasting organizations and to ensure pluralism of content. Everywhere else, most of the main decisions are left firmly in the hands of the power elite. There are practically no cases when the appointment of broadcasting regulatory authorities and governing bodies of public service broadcasters, including their top management, has been made apolitical. While practically everywhere broadcasting legislation guarantee access to air time for top government officials, and in some cases also to political parties, there are few provisions for access to air time for other organizations or segments of civil society.

An attempt at democratization has, in some countries (Poland, Macedonia) taken the form of measures to provide for some advantages for non-profit broadcasters. Despite these and other isolated moves, it is clear that the "civic," or "non-profit" sector has not emerged in any significant form in post-communist countries – at least not by way of legislation and due to efforts by public authorities. If it has, it has taken the form of alternative or radical media.

#### 5. Pluralization and Diversity in the Media

Naturally, evolution of the media system still under Communist rule contributed to greater diversity of media provision, both in terms of the range of content and functions performed by the media. In the first

period, there emerged literally hundreds of new print media titles, with every new political party and organization rushing to establish its own newspaper or periodical. At that point, however, the market and audience preferences took over and it soon became clear that there was no demand for party or indeed politically-oriented media.

Still, there is no doubt that the market model has delivered the kind of diversity it is suited for – but only to the extent to which market conditions made it possible. Previously neglected types of press publications are appearing in great numbers, including educational and popular-science publications, those for hobbyists, women, young people, entertainment-oriented publications, advertising free-sheets, erotic and yellow-journalism titles.

In terms of political diversity of the media, post-communist countries may generally be divided into three groups.

- In authoritarian regimes, as noted above, there has been little or no real demonopolization, media independence is practically unknown, and therefore there is no room for political diversity of any kind.
- In concentrated, non-competitive regimes, the media are (or, as in Russia, were until recently) largely controlled by the "oligarchs." Such "pocket media" have had little to do with journalism as such. They should more properly be seen as PR and propaganda arms of political-cum-economic groupings which need the media to maintain their position and fight competitors.

De Smaele (2002) has commented that in countries like Russia, the result is a pluralist but not an independent (autonomous) press. Pluralist, in the sense of representation in the media system of a broad range

of political expression, opinions and interests. In this sense, she says, post-communist Russia is hardly less pluralistic than older democracies.

Ivan Sigal has named Russian news coverage "a part of politics." "In such circumstances," says Izvestiya-journalist Sergej Agafonov, "a free independent press is doomed, but an unfree and dependent press can flourish" [...] Alexei Pankin speaks of a unique result: "a genuinely pluralistic unfree media." However, a pluralism that derives the right to exist from the presence of different power groups in society is an uncertain pluralism. Hence, when the different power groups join forces because they feel threatened in their positions, as was the case in the 1996 presidential elections, this pluralism dies (De Smaele, 2002).



- In competitive democracies there is more genuine political diversity.

The public policy model works (if at all) by means of state subsidies and other forms of assistance to the media, and maintenance of state or public broadcasting. Limited media assistance schemes are in operation in many post-communist countries.

## 6. Journalistic Professionalization: Watchdogs, Lapdogs and Attack Dogs

There is, of course, a great deal of fine journalism in post-communist countries. However, given the circumstances described above, it is not surprising that conditions for professionalism and independence of media professionals are not fully developed. For example, it is doubtful if any formal safeguards of internal independence (editorial statutes, conscience clauses, effectively policed codes of conduct and codes of journalistic ethics, effective separation of editorial offices from sales or advertising departments, or of media from other parts of business organizations they may be part of) exist anywhere in the region. Journalists are often deprived of basic job security and protection vis-à-vis their employers.

Other structural factors include lack of market conditions for the financial success (and therefore independence) of the media. As a result, the administration, political organizations or business interests simply control the media and their contents. Government subsidies for the media exacerbate the situation from this point of view, creating direct media dependence on funding which is often politically motivated.

However, there are also other, more deep-seated reasons why the watchdog role is often rejected. Because of the traditional role of the intelligentsia in Central and Eastern European countries, journalism is often conviction-driven and didactic. By subordinating their work to promoting social and political change, journalists opt for a partisan, advocacy-oriented and campaigning style of writing, bordering at times on propaganda. In addition to any paternalism inherent in the traditional Central and Eastern European role of the intelligentsia, this is sometimes sincerely meant as a sense of responsibility for one's country. This ties in with the "Italianization of the media", intensifying the confusion as to what role journalists should play in post-communist societies.

Privatization and commercialization also affect media and journalistic autonomy, subordinating media performance to market requirements. When this is combined with demoralization of journalists by pov-

erty, ubiquitous corruption, political and other control of the media, the result may be willingness (or necessity) to sell their services to the highest bidder. If in such circumstances we have to do with "pocket media," then we may regard journalists as "lapdogs" of the owners of their places of employment, or of the power elite in general. They may perform a role approximating that of "watchdogs," but not on behalf of society and the public interest, but on behalf of, and in ways dictated by their masters, primarily reflecting power struggles and current (and changing) interests and alliances of particular oligarchs.

A frequent phenomenon is sensationalism, a concentration on exposing the real or imagined crimes or transgressions of the mighty. In short, this is tabloid journalism, a blending of facts and opinions, real events and trivial fictional material, news and entertainment replaced factual and reliable accounts of daily, particularly politically relevant events. Here journalists turn into "attack dogs", eager to publish each day a "shocking true story" about a public figure, as likely as not involving an invasion of privacy, defamation or scant, badly researched information dressed up as "investigative journalism".

## 7. Public Service Broadcasting

In general, public-service broadcasting – where it exists – is so far generally seen as failing to deliver on its promise of independence and political impartiality, as well as of serving as a mainstay of the public sphere, and of delivering diverse and pluralistic content of high quality. Many of the stations are heavily in debt and their audience share is falling, especially in countries where national commercial radio and television stations have been licensed. Many are caught in a downward spiral caused by, among other things:

1. Traditional and badly designed organizational and management structures, involving many collective bodies divided along party lines, incapable of fast decision-making and mainly concentrating on blocking each other's actions;
2. Heavy political control, resulting both from the politicization of the process of appointing top governing authorities, turning former State radio and television into "parliamentary" rather than public broadcasters, or indeed amounting to its "re-nationalization";
3. Frequent management and leadership crises and changes of top management, resulting from political interference;

4. Lack of funds and programming know-how required to compete with commercial broadcasters, sometimes coupled with exaggerated insistence on non-commercialism which additionally weakens those stations' ability to hold their own in the face of aggressive competition by commercial broadcasters;
5. Self-censorship of journalists and programme-makers who can expect little protection from their superiors when they run afoul of politicians or some influential organization.

These outward manifestations of crisis are accompanied by problems of a far more fundamental nature: lack of social embeddedness of the idea of public service broadcasting and lack of a social constituency willing and able to support public service broadcasters and buttress its autonomy and independence. Transplanted into post-communist countries in the process of "transformation by imitation", they have not, generally speaking, been able to win support and a constituency in civil society.

## 8. Internationalization and Globalization

Central and Eastern European countries could be divided into three groups:

- Those where the "rush" took the form of an influx of films, television programming and other media products, but not of investments. That had the effect mostly of stunting the already limited prospects for growth of indigenous content production;
- Those, like the Baltic countries, whose political stability, economic growth and development of market economy offered the prospect of profits for investors, but which are too small for the big players;
- And those, like Hungary, the Czech republic, Slovakia and Poland, with some action also in other countries, which were seen as promising enough for large-scale investments.

Thus, media system internationalization has political, economic and cultural dimensions, so its direction and pace are naturally influenced by the circumstances prevailing in each country.

Some observers have called this entire process of "colonization of the East by the West". A study of foreign ownership in Central and Eastern European media conducted by European Federation of Journalists points to "the growing domination of the media by foreign media groups through a process of market colonization which has taken place since 1989".

Still, if it was "colonization" – which is doubtful – it was colonization by invitation, as Central and Eastern European countries usually opened their doors to foreign media investments.

Internationalization of reception and internationalization at the organizational level expanded the media landscape available to the public. At the same time, by setting in motion consolidation and concentration of media markets, it began to reverse their extreme deconcentration after the collapse of the old media system.

The diversity profile of post-communist media systems was extended by the introduction of many new media products, especially new types of publications (e.g. periodicals tailored for a variety of market segments such as new sorts of magazines, tabloids, business papers, etc.) and programme services in broadcasting. Naturally, sources of finance were also enhanced, both by direct investments and by the influx of Western advertising. Advertisers and advertising agencies were encouraged to move into Central and Eastern European countries if they could work with the same media companies as in other markets.

Also public regulation and control of the media was affected by the presence of foreign media companies. Their appearance changed the equation by facing local political and power elites with new types of players: large international companies which expected the same regulatory system as at home, and could not be controlled or influenced in the same way as fledgling local media companies.

## Is Transformation Over? Comparison with "The West"

We can now go back to our original questions about transformation and try to decide whether media transformation is over or not.

Our first question was: is change reversible? That does not appear to be the case. To the second question – whether critical mass has been achieved in the creation of a new media order – in the more advanced post-communist countries the answer in general is positive.

Let us go back to the main criteria. Concerning the outcome of the process – some post-communist countries have become members of the EU. As for institutions, the institutions of the new media order have by and large been built. Whether they are working properly is a matter of discussion. And then there was the

third criterion: Transformation is over when the problems and the policy issues confronted by today's 'transition countries' resemble those faced by other countries at similar levels of development.

A secondary criterion concerns the impetus behind continuing change: is it still directly related either to the original drive to overthrow the Communist system, or to efforts to eliminate its legacy? In other words: are the reasons for the present situation in the media directly related to the legacy of the Communist system, or are they inherent in the system of liberal democracy and market economy?

The answer is quite difficult. It is not very hard to detect the Communist legacy in our contemporary reality in Central and Eastern European countries. Certainly, to go to the third question about the end of transformation, the "social" and "cultural" foundations of the new system are far from complete. The institutions of the new order are there, but the norms and standards of their operation are not yet fully grounded in social consciousness.

However, when one looks at Western European countries, it becomes clear that media in post-communist countries face many of exactly the same problems as do the media there.

Sparks (2000, *passim*) argues that there is not much to choose from, in terms of media freedom and democratic communication, between "economic effects on the media, derived from ownership patterns [as in Western Europe – K.J.], and political effects, derived from the action of governmental and state structures" [as in Central and Eastern Europe in the past and today – K.J.] and both are "enemies of popular expression and popular democracy." Moreover, both commercial media and political media "follow a logic which places them on the side of power." Thus, Sparks is saying, if the mimetic media policy orientation was expected to bring an answer to the all ills of the Communist media model, then the problem was with the naïveté of those who held this view, and not with the Western media whose inner logic and true nature they failed to understand. That view of Western media seems to be supported by Curran and Park (2000, p. 14) who note that "in many countries the owners of private media are part of the system of power, and use their authority to muzzle criticism of the state".

Lichtenberg (2002, p. 173), for example, points to the following consequences of commercialization as constraining media freedom:

1. More often than not, contemporary news organizations belong to large corporations whose interests influence what gets covered (and, what probably is more central, what does not) and how;

2. News organizations are driven economically to capture the largest possible audience and thus not to estrange it with coverage that is too controversial, too demanding, too disturbing.

Herman (2002, p. 65) claims that ownership and advertising have become ever more important as factors influencing media performance: "Newsrooms have been more thoroughly incorporated into transnational corporate empires, with budget cuts and even less management enthusiasm for investigative journalism that would challenge the structure of power. In short, professional autonomy of journalists has been reduced."

All these consequences of commercialization for the mainstream media can be observed in Central and Eastern European countries as well.

### **Post-Communist Media Transformation: Just a Case of Westernization?**

What should we conclude from all this? How can we assess the process of change so far?

Much has been made of the fact that what Central and Eastern Europe embarked on in 1989 was "transformation by imitation", or "imitative development". Is it, however, just a case of imitation?

In 1995, the German author Hans Heinz Fabris formulated his well-known four possible scenarios of how the situation might develop in Central and Eastern European media:

1. "Westification" of Eastern European media: Eastern Europe could become "a supplemental engine for the Western European media industry" and end up with the status of "quasi-colonial dependency";
2. "Germanification" of the Eastern European media landscape, with German media firms investing heavily in, and becoming dominant on, those markets;
3. Continuation of two different media cultures, with Central and Eastern European countries regressing into authoritarian regimes;
4. "Perestroika" in Western Europe, which itself would adopt the Central and Eastern European pattern of a politicized public sphere, marked by growing nationalism, regionalism and ethnicity.

To this, we might add a fifth hypothetical scenario: "Perestroika" in the West, by imitation of the success of the idealistic media policy model in Central and Eastern Europe, resulting on far-reaching democratization of patterns of social communication. The problem, of course, is that this media policy model was rejected in post-communist countries from the start, so it never had a chance to succeed.

Fabris believed that both scenarios 1 and 3 might apply, with scenario 2 also succeeding in a part of Europe. He saw no likelihood of scenario 4 becoming a reality.

It is already clear from our analysis that successful media change amounts mostly to “Westification,” combined with “Germanification,” though of course capital being invested into Central and Eastern European media is certainly not only German. While “quasi-colonial dependency” seems much too strong, there is no doubt that relations between post-communist and Western media markets are clearly asymmetrical and will remain so for a long time to come.

What accounts for “Westification”? We have mentioned “imitation” and “transplantation” as the driving forces of change in post-communist countries.

These concepts merit closer attention. Should they be understood as deliberate copying of existing or past arrangements (as is indeed the case when EU candidate countries harmonize their laws with the *acquis*), or as natural repetition, or recreation (replay) of the same processes in comparable circumstances, when more or less the same factors and forces impact on the situation as in other countries, or as in the past?

A Czech author, Milan Šmid (1999) has pointed out that while the media system is affected by politics, economics and technology, in fact the key variable in shaping Central and Eastern Europe is of a political nature “and can be defined as ‘political culture’.” One could accept that with regard primarily to Type B countries, where lack of economic growth and privatization, as well as inadequate development of market economy, deprived many media of an economic base and left them at the mercy of those who were willing to fund them to further their own political or other interests. Lack of proper separation of powers, and of separation of the economy from politics has contributed to an overwhelming predominance of political society over economic and civil society, including the public sphere.

In Type A countries, politics and political culture have certainly been very important, but the market has played a role of equal significance and ultimately will become the main determining force. Because of this and other factors, media evolution has gone further in Type A countries, incorporating (in addition to demonopolization which may be the primary process in Type B countries), also globalization, commercialization and commodification of the media. Market mechanisms are also affecting Central and Eastern European media in much the same way as in Western Europe and elsewhere.

Thus, if, given similar initial conditions (procedural democracy, however unconsolidated, and an emerging market economy, however immature), societies are likely to produce similar social or media arrangements, then we may begin to understand the whole process better, including why the dissidents' dreams could not be realized. Imitation, yes, but also be re-creating rules of the game which indigenously produced the same result as elsewhere. This is a question of crucial importance, because acceptance of this interpretation would offer a key to understanding post-communist transformation.

In any case, commercialization and marketization of the media is certainly likely to be one of the dominant trends in media system change in the future.

### **Media Policy Challenges for Post-Communist Countries**

Below, we will briefly review policy challenges still to be resolved in the process of creating a new media system. Regardless of the question of whether post-communist transformation itself is over or not, major policy issues loom ahead. Given European integration and the growing similarity between media markets in some post-communist countries, and Western European countries, we may find a comparative approach useful in trying to anticipate future processes in Central and Eastern Europe.

The major sources of difficulty in this process are as follows:

- Completion of the process of media system democratization as originally planned requires an interventionist policy in line with the “public service” orientation. The problem is that public interventionism into the media in post-communist countries has until now usually militated against the democratic operation of the media, and this cannot be expected to change soon;
- European integration and the approach of the European Union provide support, rather, for the “industrial,” market-oriented policy orientation. This is potentially fraught with serious consequences even in countries with a well-established democratic system and an entrenched political culture of democracy (see McChesney, 2003), and may be even less suited for post-communist countries in their present stage of development;
- The “industrial” policy seems to be favoured also by the EU strategy of developing the knowledge-based economy and promoting entry into the Information Age which the new members will be expected to

adopt. This is a further complicating factor as most post-communist countries do yet not appear ready to formulate and pursue policies in this area.

### **Demonopolization - Remonopolization**

In many Western European countries, the trend is towards liberalization of the market, as governments realize the need to promote the growth of national and European media companies and conglomerates capable of competing on the global market. It is likely that those Central and Eastern European countries which have introduced some curbs on media concentration will replicate this trend, out of recognition that competitiveness on the larger European or global market may require acceptance of concentration (at the expense of the emergence of media oligopolies at home) to prevent the market being taken over by foreign conglomerates altogether.

It seems likely that Central and Eastern European countries may, in this instance at least, "leapfrog" a stage of development and go from extreme deconcentration caused by the manner of dismantling the Communist media system to far-reaching concentration, without an intervening stage of being able to put in place legal curbs on monopolization of the media market. This may be aided by the fact that most of the measures of this nature were designed for the relatively closed media markets in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and are much less effective at a time of globalization and the new technologies.

### **Commercialization and Marketization of Media Systems**

Here, again, the choice is between the "public service" and "industrial" orientation. Naturally, transformation requires acceptance of a free market as concerns the commercial media. The question is whether a public policy model for delivering diversity and democratization of media institutions and the media system in general should also be in operation. As we will note below, maintenance of public service broadcasting, and the choice of model of PSB, is also likely to become a major issue in this respect.

### **Growth of Media Freedom and Independence**

The "idealistic orientation" assumed a "centrifugal model", with the media removed as far as possible

from the power centres and centralized control. The reality in Western countries is, as noted above, that an opposite trend was becoming stronger, i.e. a "centripetal model" of ever greater political power and stature of (especially large) media organizations, with their growing role in political decision-making. With Central and Eastern Europe set to replicate this process to some degree, prospects for true autonomization of the media are not optimistic. Convergence and the growing economic and strategic importance of information and communication technologies may lead to an even greater interlinking of communications policy and regulation and general government policy.

### **Democratization, Pluralization and Diversity in the Media**

As we have seen, most post-communist countries have a long way to go yet before the basic elements of media independence and freedom of expression are safeguarded. This does not augur well for any regulatory or interventionist efforts to promote greater diversity or democratization of media organizations, or of the media system itself. Rather, as the "industrial", market-oriented policy orientation gains the upper hand, we may see greater reliance on the market and the new technologies to create conditions for more voices to be heard and for delivery of market-driven diversity.

### **Professionalization of Journalists**

Professionalization of journalists, and upgrading of journalistic skills and ethics is high on the media change agenda in post-communist countries. The need for it is appreciated more and more by the journalists themselves, as they learn to avoid mistakes that in many countries may lead to defamation cases resulting in high damages or even imprisonment.

There is, to some extent, a feedback relationship here. Journalistic impartiality and professionalism are predicated to some extent on respect for media independence by the authorities, and on the existence of a normally functioning media market. On the other hand, journalists are aware that any lapse of professionalism on their part will be used by officials to justify negligence in pursuing their freedom of expression commitments. Journalistic associations and unions should censure any violations of journalistic ethics, but their fragmentation, politicization and lack of stature

and authority makes any efforts in this direction quite ineffective.

It remains to be seen how such a change can be reconciled with the tendency noted above, of the media becoming alienated from society as an independent "Fourth Estate". In any case, this element of media change clearly forms part of the "cultural" aspect of the process. As such, it is dependent first of all on the institutional aspect, including proper regulation of the media and proper functioning of the media market. Secondly, it is also dependent on the cultural dimension in the form of high political culture and self-restraint by power-holders in their dealings with the media – which in turn requires strong enough pressure on power-holders by civil society to encourage them to exercise such self-restraint.

Yet another element in this many-sided equation are the interests of media owners. Journalistic professionalization and independence depend largely on the results of this multidirectional feedback relationship.

### **Development of Public Service Broadcasting**

The enormous difficulties this institutional form of media operation is encountering in becoming established and accepted in Central and Eastern Europe can, of course, be regarded as unavoidable teething problems. Given firm and consistent support for its development over a considerable period of time, in the context of the consolidation of democracy, it might have a chance of taking root. The question, however, is whether that condition can be met.

Moreover, debates in particular Western European countries and within the European Union show that commercial broadcasters and media entrepreneurs have long used their influence and power to wage a campaign to marginalize public service media as a market competitor. In the media policy environment of the early 21st century – based on recognizing limitations of government and policy-making, while competition and self-regulation are promoted – PSB is increasingly portrayed as part of this campaign as an exception to the "normal" rules applying to broadcasting and audiovisual industries.

Post-communist governments do not manifest a great deal of dedication to the development of public service broadcasting. If withdrawal of support for strong, well-financed public service broadcasters capable of holding their own on the competitive market does indeed pick up momentum in Western European countries, they may use this as rationale for "solving" the highly contentious and troublesome issue of PSB

by opting for the "monastery model", entailing marginalized channels dedicated to correcting market failure by providing content the market will not of itself distribute.

### **Internationalization and Globalization**

Two orientations in global media policy-making can be identified: a "globalization" vs. "anti-globalization", or "free flow" vs. cultural diversity perspectives.

In line with this distinction, two competing models for cultural policy are applied by various states.

These models are as follows:

1. The global market approach defines culture as a commodity and thus in international trade cultural products should not be given any special treatment different from other commodities in the international trade regime. According to this model, government protection of the periodical publishing industry is unacceptable because the proper role of national governments is simply to ensure that markets for commodities, including cultural commodities, are functioning freely. The best way to protect culture, therefore, is to ensure that cultural industries can succeed in a fair and open marketplace.
2. The local culture model is based on the recognition that culture is not a commodity but rather a way of life which is propagated through not only markets, but also local communities and states. In this respect, in the international trade regime that recognizes the contributions of communities and governments, culture requires special consideration. In other words, an appreciation for the benefits of open markets must be balanced by a recognition of circumstances in which those markets can have destructive consequences.

Application of the "local culture" model thus justifies various forms of protectionism and State intervention into the market to sustain the national culture.

While Central and Eastern European countries would no doubt have liked to apply the "local culture" model, their ability to do so was limited by a number of factors, including international integration and liberalization of markets.

Some, especially CIS or post-Soviet countries have introduced relatively stringent measures to prevent internationalization of contents, claiming the need to preserve national culture, language and identity.

Sooner or later, measures of this nature will be eliminated, as post-communist countries conform fully in their legislation to international standards. The question remains whether the policies of international

organizations are indeed appropriate to their circumstances (i.e. the promotion by the EU of the “European quota” at the expense of the “domestic production quota”). This may produce a backlash as the populations of new members of the European Union perceive a threat to their national and cultural identity.

Another interesting issue in this regard is what contribution new EU members will be able to make to the development of the organization’s media and audiovisual policies, and how much they will be able to influence them. Here the gap between the two parts of Europe seems particularly wide. While the EU concentrates on largely technical and economic aspects of the media, as well as on the new technologies, new member states are still grappling with basic systemic issues of media system development, of high political sensitivity. At least at first, they may consider the EU’s concerns as largely irrelevant to the issues facing them in the process of transformation.

### ICTs and Information Society

This is a new policy area, partly imposed on Central and Eastern European countries by the EU. The response of the region to the challenges of the Information Society has, in most cases, been slow and inadequate. Among the exceptions are Estonia and Slovenia, both of which recognized the potential for growth and for leapfrogging from the “Pre-Information Age” in which all Communist countries found themselves, to the age of the Information Society. Still, Central and Eastern European countries generally lag far behind Western European and other developed countries in terms of penetration of new communication technologies (Gourova *et al.*, 2002). Gradually, the situation began to improve, especially in the more advanced post-communist countries (see DG Information Society, 2001; Gourova *et al.*, 2002). Nevertheless, it was still accepted in 2002 that EU candidate countries were faced with enormous challenges in their attempt to catch up with the development of a knowledge-based economy, use the full potential offered by the Information Society and avoid a digital divide with the EU.

### Conclusion

Since 1989 Central and Eastern Europe has had a number of rude awakenings:

- The first – the anticlimax of the early post – 1989 years - when it was discovered that the removal of the Communist system not only does not solve all

problems, but in fact creates a host of new ones; when the leaders of the opposition were found to be squabbling politicians, not necessarily averse to corruption and arrogance, and democracy was discovered to be a system of constant conflict instead of the national concord and harmony that many people expected.

- The second when the ideas and ideals which had kept the opposition alive and served as an inspiration to rise up against the Communist system, had to be discarded overnight as impractical and useless.
- The third when the true nature of the capitalist system became apparent.
- The fourth when European reunification turned into a tedious process, often seen as humiliating, instead of the joyful embrace of long-lost brothers.
- And the fifth when the realization sank in that “Westernization” and “Westification” are the best that can be hoped for, and that Western Europe appears to think that Central and Eastern Europe has nothing of value to contribute, except its markets.

All these unrealistic hopes and hurt feelings can be perhaps seen as a testament to how distant from reality the fond hopes and expectations of people in the region once were. They should not be underestimated, however. This is not the end of history. The people of Central and Eastern Europe are only beginning to come out of the trauma of change and to gain the self-awareness and confidence they need to begin to act. So far, they have relied on the guidance of others: opposition leaders, new political leaders of the post-communist period, Western governments and advisors. Sooner or later, however, they may begin to act of their own volition, based on their own appraisal of reality. If and when that happens, it will signify a new chapter of transformation.

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