IMITATIVE REVOLUTIONS
CHANGES IN THE MEDIA AND JOURNALISM IN EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

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Abstract

The essay examines a decade of changes in the media after the collapse of the socialist system in East-Central Europe. A unique transformation from socialism to capitalism makes traditional "middle-range" evolutionary theories of modernisation and (post)modern "detraditionalisation" inadequate to grasp the substance of the inordinate changes in the (former) Second World. Instead, an attempt is made to apply Gabriel Tarde's theory of imitation based on the triad consisting of innovation, imitation, and opposition. Tarde's theory of imitation as a general law of development seems to offer a valid explanation of these (r)evolutionary changes because it transcends the division between dependency and diffusionist modernisation theories, and identifies communication (technology) as particularly important on both accounts. Several oppositional tendencies in the ECE countries are identified which are, in different degrees, spread throughout the region and reflect the imitative nature of the new systems. The imitative tendencies are clustered in two broader groups: (1) those imitating external environment, primarily Western Europe and the USA, which comprise denationalisation and privatisation, commercialisation, inter- or transnationalisation, and "cross-fertilisation"; and (2) those "imitating the past", i.e. the former system of state socialism: renationalisation, and ideological (nationalistic and religious) exclusivism.

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Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing.

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

Since the very beginning of the social sciences, historical changes are probably the most pervasive topic in theorising. The dilemmas of social change, development and underdevelopment, progress and dependency proved particularly contentious in the twentieth century with the "division" of the former "one world" into three different worlds: the *First World* of advanced industrial capitalism in the West, the *Second World* of socialist (communist) countries in East-Central Europe (ECE) and some regions in other continents, and the *Third World*[1] of "underdeveloped" nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Although these terms were never precisely defined, they clearly implied the idea of fundamental differences between the "three worlds" in the past and, perhaps less clearly, in the future. The collapse of the socialist systems in the late 1980s formally reduced the complexity of the "worlds", but in fact the world of "post-communism" continues to appear as a distinct entity, as did the Second World earlier in the past century. Post-communism has been described as "a *sui generis* system which is marked by some democratic practices, with stronger or weaker commitments to pluralism, so that both political and economic competition have become reality. At the same time, anti-democratic ideas and practices are also current" (Schöpflin 1993, 63). This also applies to the transition processes emerging in the mass media, which are closely associated with the main actors and controversies of social changes in the region.

Most publications studying the media in East-Central Europe (ECE) focus on theoretical approaches and normative changes, while there is a lack of systematic empirical research and comparative data that would enable the identification of commonalities and the drawing of valid general conclusions. Although post-communist countries share many common experiences, there are no less significant differences between them in terms of their political, economic and cultural positions. As Holmes (1997, 4) argues, there is now even "far less of a basically common blueprint than there was up to 1989." It is difficult to generalise validly about the main tendencies in the development of the press and broadcasting during the last ten years in the countries as diverse as, for example, Russia and the Czech Republic, or Romania and Slovenia. Nevertheless, all of them experienced important changes in practical (political, economic, cultural) terms if compared with the former, more unified systems. Several countries are well advanced in the process of developing democratic political systems, but others have hardly made any progress, and some of them have even regressed. In all of them, however, changes in media systems represent an important political issue. In several vital points, discussions on the future of the media are divided along party political lines and related to the division of power among political actors. This process is seldom accompanied by a discussion — let alone systematic implementation — of the new media, such as the Internet, or a radical departure — with the exception of the privatisation process — from the former media structure. Whereas during the early period of transition many ECE countries saw a significant increase in the diversity of media owner-

ship compared to the communist era, the experience in recent years seems to be the opposite: an increased concentration of media ownership resembles similar to processes in Western Europe and the USA.

In the early 1990s, I challenged the idea that the burial of authoritarian practices in the former socialist countries would automatically bring about the rise of democratic political and media systems (Splichal 1994). My doubts were largely provoked by the fact that East-Central European societies were caught up in imitation of West-European practices in economy and society rather than examining the possible contributions of Western media systems to the specific situations in East-Central Europe that would contribute to a radical departure from the previous non-democratic activities under the socialist regimes. As Habermas argued, the peculiar characteristic of the democratic "revolutions of recuperation" in the ECE countries was a "total lack of ideas that are either innovative or orientated towards the future" (Habermas 1990, 27). The changes in media systems suffered from the absence of both theoretical foundations and citizens' participation. There were almost no forces setting up competitive models of social development. Imitative political and economic transformations across the region also endangered critical studies and new social movements as forces of democratisation. Another major source of contemporary problems in the former socialist countries is certainly an "uncritical critique" of the recent (socialist) past, which is still often considered the *only* cause of all problems arising *after* the fall of the old system. Since the late 1980s, many prophets of democratic changes have believed that East-Central European countries had no other history than that of socialism. Although it is beyond doubt that limited economic, technical, and staff resources hinder these countries from media restructuring and general progress, there are other impediments to the development of more democratic systems, which go beyond the direct consequences of the former system. We may relate them to a broader historical and geographic environment as well as new indigenous actions.

Compared with the situation prevailing before 1989, the media in East-Central Europe have certainly made significant gains in liberalisation and pluralisation. However, in contrast to the demonopolisation of the state-owned media, which has made decisive progress,[2] other fundamental prerequisites of media democratisation — e.g., media differentiation, the professionalisation of journalists, access to the media — are far from being materialised. The monopoly of state-owned media was abolished everywhere, but television and radio-transmitting facilities and licensing of frequencies are still under direct government control, and the state-run postal systems often have near-monopolies in distributing newspapers and magazines. Politicians in all countries tend to constrain journalistic freedom by using or introducing anti-defamation laws to penalise journalists for writing openly about public officials and institutions. Particularly in the former Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Romania, and several of the former Yugoslav republics, poor economic conditions, the lack of a developed advertising market, continuing monopolies (e.g., of press distribution) and a considerable degree of state control (with subsidies and content-based criteria for registration of newspapers) leave little room for truly independent newspapers. Democratisation of the press is also impeded by slow progress in the professionalisation of journalists, understood both in the sense of highly developed individual skills and competences, and in the sense of collective professionalisation, in which

journalists perform a public service, and develop professional organisation to enforce this service ideal and to protect the autonomy of the profession.

In almost all the former socialist countries, broadcasting laws providing for demonopolisation and the introduction of the private sector have been adopted.[3] However, demonopolisation alone does not equal differentiation of the media and democratisation of the communication sphere. Both the ruling coalitions and the oppositional parties, as well as other political actors such as the Catholic Church, still tend to see (particularly public broadcast) media as a corporate "democratic" organ of the new "pluralist" party-state, i.e., in the same perspective as they were regarded by the former authorities. This old authoritarian conception of the total polity practised for decades by the old socialist regimes may be found in other activities as well, for example in controlling nominations of chief personnel in educational, cultural and health institutions, or in wooing intellectuals to become party members or ideologues.

Overt institutional censorship has been abolished in almost all former socialist countries in East-Central Europe, but not yet the state control of broadcasting. Although new media laws are generally (with some exceptions) more liberal than the old ones, they still have loopholes that offer governments the opportunity to influence the media and journalists. The need to re-regulate broadcasting was widely recognised, particularly in terms of creating procedures for granting licenses to new private/commercial broadcasters, but the process of developing new laws was politically contentious and therefore protracted. There were also genuine constitutional difficulties with the institutional arrangements for regulating and controlling public and private broadcasting.

Communist media systems were based on secondary content regulation that was expected to limit the flaws and "side effects" of media markets (e.g., different forms of publication or information subsidies), although no true market actually existed. That was probably the main reason for a complete disappearance of the secondary regulation during the re-regulation period in the 1990s: it was considered a form of state intervention, like in the former system. Consequently, even public media are not liberated from competition for (advertising) income; neither are they politically independent and protected against particularistic (political) interests. Mass media remain vulnerable to manipulation by political forces and, in addition, became dependent on commercial corporations, which limit resources, variety, and autonomy. It is obvious that the media are not inevitably instrumental to democracy; they are no less effective as instruments of manipulation. The underdeveloped economy is inhibiting the deployment of new information and communication technologies both in private and public sectors. Even the denationalisation of broadcasting — which resulted in a dual broadcasting system — turned into a paradoxical negation of the development of public service media.

Is a Genuine "East European" Perspective Possible?

The complex changing of the former "Second World" is a new, large and fickle subject of study. Changes in the media, to which this contribution is limited — and within that primarily concentrated on political and economic aspects — represent only a small part of the field. In contemporary widely spread national *social reports*, which usually include over twenty specific social issues from demography and environment to employment and political activities, mass media (together with lei-

sure) represent less than one twentieth of the subject (e.g., Miles 1985, 138-9). In terms of theories of social change, the emerging social systems in ECE countries may be perceived as essentially unstable and lacking uniformities in direction of change (see Appelbaum 1970, 126) as a consequence of radical political and economic changes, starting with the introduction of parliamentary democracy and market economy in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Yet the "velvet revolution" or "refolution" that brought about the transformation of the former socialist system was a peculiar kind of revolution. Revolutionary changes normally imply a radical departure from the past based on endogenous innovative actions that pervade the whole system. In the ECE countries, however, the transition started with an abrupt break with the past primarily based on the ideas that were revolutionary in the nineteenth century, such as freedom of enterprise, private property, freedom of political association, parliamentary democracy, and national liberation. The *imitative nature* of the newly emerging systems may represent an immense obstacle to the development of more democratic systems in the region, which is the crucial issue I want to discuss.

A unique transformation from socialism to capitalism makes *evolutionary* theories of modernisation and (post)modern "detraditionalisation" theories inadequate to grasp the substance of the inordinate changes in the (former) Second World.[4] *Theories of diffusion*[5], and media research based on the modernisation theories, argued that the mass media would transfer the economic and political models of the West to the newly independent countries of the Third World by spreading the message of modernity (Thussu 2000, 56). As Frederick W. Frey argued, "Development and modernization have certainly been convenient impressionistic umbrellas for loosely covering the immense changes involved in moving from a traditional to an advanced contemporary society" (1973, 340), but it is no longer self-evident what "an advanced" society may be. In addition, I share John Thompson's questioning of the validity of the general idea common to various modernisation theories that "the development of modern societies is accompanied by an irreversible decline in the role of tradition" (Thompson 1995, 179), because traditions — when in contact with other traditions and/or modern conditions — can also be a source of creativity and social dynamism. I shall argue in this contribution that one of the essential dimensions in the post-communist transformation is the relationship the emerging systems have (not) established to the communist and pre-communist past. Since *dependency* theories and theories of cultural *imperialism*[6] — a neo-Marxist critique of modernisation theories — assume the existence of an hegemonic exogenous power that pursues transnational corporate domination, they could hardly explain radical changes in such highly *isolated* social systems as those in Eastern Europe until the late 1980s. However, the dependency model fits the present post-revolutionary condition of the ECE countries as a typical periphery in relation to world centres (particularly the European Union), with little or no co-operation between peripheral countries themselves.

Colin Sparks (1998) identifies four specific theories aiming specifically at the explanation of changes that took place in the ECE countries after 1989, which differ in how they conceptualise the old economic and political system, the nature of changes (primarily social or political), and the nature of economic and political systems emerging from the changes, ranging from structural continuity to discontinuity. (1) "Total transformation" theory conceptualises the changes as both politi-

cal and social revolutions that profoundly changed all levels of society — from a totalitarian communist system to the market economy and political democracy. (2) "Social (counter-)revolution" theory stresses the impetus revolutions gave to economic progress while political changes are seen less significant. (3) "Political revolution" theory characterises the changes as a transition from the state-capitalist to private capitalist system, without substantial changes in state power and ruling class. (4) The fourth set of "what-revolution?" theories argue that "the collapse of the communist regimes, although visibly dramatic, did not in the end constitute any serious transfer of political or social power, and thus cannot really be termed a 'revolution'" (Sparks 1998, 78-92).

Beyond significant differences regarding the outcomes of revolutions (*What* has happened?), all the four theories in Sparks' typology neglect the process of transformation itself, i.e. *how* it happened, whereas the question of *why* the old system collapsed is almost superfluous after the decades of theoretical and empirical critiques of the inefficiency and untenability of the former political and economic system in the era of globalisation of the late twentieth century. The two opposing views present in the four theories that try to explain change in the ECE countries are *continuity* vs. *discontinuity*. These correspond closely with two main (and antagonistic) processes of social *adaptation* identified by one of the most prominent French sociologists of the nineteenth century, Gabriel Tarde — i.e. *accumulation* and *substitution*. Adaptation or invention[7] is one element in Tarde's theoretical triad consisting of *invention*, *imitation*, and *opposition*. His theory seems to be particularly relevant for our discussion of the post-communist transformation of the media because, in *L'opinion et la foule* (1901/1961), Tarde also examines the relationship between the means available to achieve specific goals and conditions restricting social actions, and identifies communication (technology) as particularly important on both accounts. As a matter of fact, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Albert Venn Dicey already applied Tarde's "laws of imitation" to explain social changes in Russia. Dicey suggested that particularly in "many Eastern countries, opinion — … — has for ages been, in general, hostile to change and favorable to the maintenance of inherited habits" (1905/1981, 4), and that in countries such as Russia, all the reforms have been performed without much deference to the local opinion, but were rather guided exclusively by ideas imported from elsewhere.

Let me briefly examine the basic concepts of Tarde's theory to demonstrate their relevance in theorising developments in the post-communist media and their political and economic environment. I am not suggesting that Tarde's sociological theory is either the finest universal theory of progress (which Tarde intended to develop) or the only possible theory to validly explain recent changes in the ECE countries. Yet while his theory is unsatisfactory on the global level, it is certainly useful — and perhaps even the only systematic and relatively plausible — theoretical framework to think about the early phase of the post-communist transformation.

Tarde defined imitation, along with opposition and innovation, as *universal sociological principles*. He suggested that innovations are more likely to be imitated if they are more similar to those already imitated, the closer they are to the most advanced technological aspects of society, and the more they meet the predominant cultural emphasis on novelty as opposed to tradition. This does not really help us to explain why ECE region should be expected to be more imitative than

any other region should. According to the above hypotheses, the contrary might be expected to be the case. However, seeking to explain *long-term* trends in imitation, Tarde introduced the difference between *unilateral* and *reciprocal* imitation. The latter is characteristic of more developed societies and the former of those less developed. In addition, Tarde saw *isolation* (which was typical of the former socialist countries) as an important structural factor that reduces inventiveness. Although Tarde did not elaborate these ideas, they represent a useful starting point for our discussion, together with his belief that "societies in their uninventive phases … are uncritical … . They embrace the most contradictory beliefs of surrounding fashions or inherited traditions; and no one notes the contradictions" (1890/1969, 181). As I would argue, the ECE development represents a typical case of *unilateral imitation*, intensified by the efforts of the new capitalist countries to join the European Union, which further reduces the need for intraregional co-operation.

As Tarde further maintains, imitation is always based on a desire to achieve a certain goal or to solve a problem — an idea central to systemic modelling, where the process of goal attainment is controlled with feedback, a process of "returning a deviation back within the control boundaries." In contrast to feedback, Masuda adopted from linguistics the concept of "feedforward" that he defined as "a controlled development of the current situation to change it to a more desirable situation" (Masuda 1983, 131). The essential difference between feedback and feedforward — which both imply control in moving toward a goal — is in that the former is based on the fixed boundaries of control, whereas in the latter the boundaries are adjusted dynamically to changes in relationship between the subject and the object. The process of feedforward includes both the external environment on which the subject of action works and the subject of action itself. Feedforward is fundamental to "situational reform" — a process in which the *existing situation is changed into a new situation that is consonant with the subject's goals and satisfies his wants*. In the action to achieve a situational reform, the subject of action controls itself to adapt to a desirable situation.

This is exactly what is primarily changing in contemporary processes of globalisation in both East and West: the *boundaries* of processes of integration and differentiation. While formerly the upper limit of integration was represented by the nation state, now increasing complexity fosters a shift in the upper limits of integration and, consequently, limits the sovereignty of nation states. If no differentiative counter-processes toward individuality and freedom exist, i.e. a genuine *opposition* in Tarde's sense, the process will end in "a complex, stateless network of trans-national managing bodies: agencies of large-scale imperative co-ordination in the fields of demography, ecology, energy, goods distribution, research and development, and regulatory law generally" (Giner 1985, 263). Yet not all the political and economic actors, including nation-states, are in the same position.

Masuda (1983, 131-135) distinguishes between four types of feedforward. The most rudimentary is "dependent feedforward" in which the subject of action is dependent on the external environment.[8] In primitive societies, it has the form of taboos or divine laws, which permit of no autonomous action. According to Masuda, this feedforward process is a negative and passive one, and does not stimulate developmental changes. Due to the absence of control over the dynamic boundaries, it actually limits the development to unilateral imitation. This is the process

Dicey observed in Russia a century ago: a process of social changes entirely guided by ideas imported from elsewhere. Similarly, Jože Mencinger, a well-known Slovenian Euro-sceptic, observed that the process of joining the European Union transformed Slovenian politicians in mere bureaucrats who fill in forms received from Brussels.

This points to another Tarde's fundamental difference between two ways in which progress through imitation is effectuated: *substitution* and *accumulation*. The ECE "negative and passive" progress, to use Masuda's terms, is only unilateral (=passive) and based on substitution (=negative). Changes are introduced through the substitution of former institutions,[9] and only exceptionally through accumulation. However, uncritical imitation of democratic institutions developed in older democracies may be a risky business. As Benjamin Barber (1992, 63) demonstrates, "importing free political parties, parliaments, and presses cannot establish a democratic civil society; imposing a free market may even have the opposite effect." Instead, Robert Dahl (1991, 15) suggests that the countries in transition to the inauguration of democratic institutions should "discriminate between the aspects of the mature democratic countries that are essential to democracy and those that are not only *not* essential to it but may be harmful."[10] Otherwise, an enduring imitation can establish a long lasting, even institutionalised dependency. Thus the conservative Austrian government, for example, officially proposed in January 2001 to the four ECE countries who expect to join the European Union by 2006 — Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovenia — to form a sort of Central European "Commonwealth" with the leading role of Austria — an alliance clearly resembling the old-time Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire that perished in World War One.

The extreme case of substitution is the process of lustration initiated — in more or less institutionalised form — in a number of ECE countries.[11] The "cosmopolitan models a la Klaus, Balcerowicz and Sachs" in the economy (Zeleny 1991, 4), advertised by many ECE governments, represent another example of imitation through substitution, that had no theoretical and practical value, but effectively cleared the way to the colonisation of ECE economies.

Another clear, perhaps even extreme, example of a pure substitution is the case of the "right to publish opinions", which became a constitutional right in Yugoslavia in 1963. In the eighties, this right — together with the right of reply and the right of correction — were widely used by citizens (mostly in the press). An important precedent occurred in a lawsuit when the Supreme Court of Slovenia ordered the main daily newspaper in Slovenia *Delo* to publish an article by a citizen criticising a high political functionary (1985). This case became a celebrated one for editors, journalists, and (critical) citizens. However, when in 1991 the Slovenian Ministry of information proposed amendments to the former Law on public information adopted in 1985, it suggested that it was necessary "to cut out the provisions related to the publication of opinions" because "this citizens' right represented a great achievement of civilisation under the conditions of one-party system, but in a plural society and developed information market, such a citizens' right, or duty of the media, is an anachronism; the media will be forced to publish opinions important for the public primarily because of the pressure of competition." Some Western prophets of democracy regard even the internationally enacted citizens' *right to reply* as a repressive instrument in the new ECE democracies because it "could force papers to double in size, making printing and distribution costs soar"

(e.g., Schmidt 1996). This thesis imitates the liberal theoretical argument about the free "marketplace of ideas" which would create an informed citizenry, able to make rational decisions. Although there is no doubt that these arguments are aimed at establishing free press not inhibited by authoritarian interference, they betray another dogmatism by underestimating the tendencies of mental homogenisation and monopolisation inherent in a market-driven media system.

In other words, imitation through *accumulation*, which combines new and old desires, as Tarde would put it, should be the preferred option. There is no doubt that centralised socialist economy based on state ownership was both *economically inefficient* and *inimical to democracy*. But it would be also mistaken to believe that free markets and private property are the only (or, at least, the best) alternative in *both* respects. The question of an alternative to *laissez-faire* is particularly important for such vital activities in civil society, such as education, science, culture, and communication. Although an advocacy of any form of socialised markets and social ownership is regarded highly suspiciously in the period of the proclaimed *laissez-faire* doctrine in ECE, it should be acknowledged, as Blackburn (1991, 234) claims, that "the imposition of narrow commercial criteria menaces the integrity of civil society and hands the initiative to rapacious commercial interests."

Such a critical view is particularly needed, as also Becker (1992, 13) argues, not only because the extent and forms of privatisation of the mass media in ECE exceed what has been practised in Western capitalism, but also, or even primarily because ECE countries are becoming a kind of experimental zone for those strategies of privatisation initiated by Western media capital, but which are still held back by social responsibility doctrines in the West. A policy not willing to restrict or oppose the operation of the free market in the media is clearly in favour of *corporate speech* rather than *free speech*; it is far from being a continuation of the ideas of the former democratic opposition in Eastern Europe. Jakubowicz (1992, 72) once said for Poland, "The results of the Solidarity revolution and the rule of post-Solidarity forces are almost the reverse of what was originally intended." A similar observation by Czech journalists was reported by Duncan and Rosenbaum (1999, 3), which indicated that "While Czech journalism did provide a forum for political debate in the 1990s, journalists perceive they had less influence on the government and society than they thought they would after the Velvet Revolution."

Imitation through substitution of a Western-type capitalism is also problematic because of immense *cultural* specificities (differences in traditions, lifestyles, national identities) that are certainly not known to, or understood by, those "irresponsible foreigners who do not distinguish between Mongolia and Slovenia" but were nevertheless invited by post-socialist governments to act as economic saviours (Mencinger 1991, 25). In *political* and *economic* terms, ECE countries are often closer to developing rather than developed countries. Thus, the concepts and strategies, which may well apply in the developed market economies of the West, are not wholly or directly appropriate to the former socialist countries. In addition, there is a great variability in patterns of change in developed countries themselves. Japan, for example, is a typical case of successful *accumulation* rather than *substitutional* imitation of Western capitalism, with a significant economic role of the state and week civil society (Morishima 1990, 62). Accordingly, when discussing forms of ownership, Cui (1991, 65) confronts imitation with another Tarde's

basic principle — *innovation*, emphasising that "when we think of reforming state ownership in existing socialism, we need not search for a single 'best' form of ownership and adopt it once and for all. The most important lesson of human progress is that the 'experimental space' for innovation should be kept open." That would imply that even state ownership might still be an efficient form of ownership in some sectors of economy.

Imitative Tendencies in the ECE Media Systems and Antidemocratic Politicisation

Imitation, particularly if reciprocal, may well lead to real innovations. I do not intend to discuss the general positive consequences of imitation in the ECE countries (which are clearly represented, for example, by newly designed parliamentary political systems and the establishment of the private economic sector). Rather, I will concentrate on the negative and specific consequences brought about by imitation in the media. Several structural tendencies or strategies[12] in the ECE countries may be identified which are, in different degrees, spread throughout the region and reflect the imitative nature of the new systems. Six tendencies are particularly important for the development of new or future media systems: (1) renationalisation, (2) denationalisation and privatisation, (3) commercialisation, (4) inter- and transnationalisation, (5) nationalistic and religious exclusivism as two forms of ideological exclusivism, which are usually (6) "cross-fertilised." These six imitative tendencies could be clustered into two broader groups: (1) those imitating *external environment*, primarily Western Europe and the USA (2-4, 6), and (2) those imitating *the past* (1 and 5). The two groups oppose each other, but this kind of opposition is not likely to cause any *innovation*; rather, it validates Tarde's idea that "when societies are in their uninventive phases, they are also uncritical" (Tarde 1890/1969, 181). The six strategies are elaborated below as separate tendencies only in order to make them more clearly identifiable, but in practice these strategies strongly interact and form specific "clusters" in individual ECE countries. Furthermore, since comparative analysis is not based on detailed studies of individual countries, the generalised tendencies do not imply uniformity in empirical terms; the empirical forms of tendencies may (and do) vary greatly. Since so much has happened during the last decade in this region, which has not been systematically scrutinised by social scientists, empirical evidence is largely derived from non-scientific secondary resources, such as newspapers. Almost every statement in this article could be supported with references to news, reports and commentaries in printed and electronic media, including web sites, often in non-English languages, but citations and references are limited to what I believe is useful for those who would like to pursue a particular subject.

Re-nationalisation

Re-nationalisation is the strategy of imitating the media policies of the former dominant (party-state) political power. Since not all opposition produces innovations, not all forms of state intervention in the economy and society — as a typical opposition to the newly materialised free market principle — should be considered welcome "innovations." In almost all countries in the region, the new governments — regardless of their specific political orientation — did not hesitate to *imi-*

tate regulations and strategies of the former regimes to retain control over national broadcasting, either directly by appointments of boards, directors and editors, or in a more indirect way through budgetary and other economic instruments (e.g., state advertising). Governments "justified" their essentially undemocratic control over the media with the argument that some of the old restrictions must be maintained until democratisation could be successfully accomplished. "In particular," the argument went, "the media have to be controlled because they are not yet ready to act responsibly, as democracy requires" (Kovács and Whiting 1995, 118).

In some countries, as for example in some former Yugoslav republics, the broadcasting acts of the 1980s have been changed to (re)establish the control of the state over radio and television organisations typical for earlier periods of socialism. While in the former self-management system, the right to participate in appointments to managing and editorial positions in the media was granted to media workers, the amended broadcasting acts in all Yugoslav republics have abolished this workers' right and made it a privilege of either the government (e.g., in Serbia, Vojvodina, Kosovo, Croatia) or the parliament (Bosnia and Herzegovina). Only in Slovenia was this right of media employees reintroduced in 1994, after a four-year interruption (Splichal, 1999).

Although some new *forms* of broadcasting regulation are deemed to imitate West-European systems, *access* to the "public" broadcasting is either still severely limited to political élites in most countries of the region — in some countries even only to those of the ruling coalitions — or commercially based. Broadcasting regulatory authorities (councils) as the main regulatory bodies are, as a rule, appointed by parliaments or (partly) even by governments. They often perform only a minor part of regulatory activities, which often does not include issuing secondary legislation, granting broadcasting licenses, monitoring compliance with the conditions laid down in law and in the licenses granted to broadcasters, or supervising public service broadcasting organisations. Even if these tasks are performed by the broadcasting authorities, they themselves are under the influence of political power and without appropriate means to monitor (all) broadcasters. Even when a company is found to be violating the law, no effective legal action is taken, either for political reasons or because legal ambiguities. In particular, broadcasting authorities have no means to follow the recommendations adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on measures to promote *media transparency*.[13] Consequently, their role in media policy is more or less insignificant. This also applies to special supervisory bodies of public broadcasters. In both cases, the access of civic associations, societies, and movements to the institutional forms of media management and control is severely restricted in practice, which clearly violates the Recommendation R(2000)23 of the Council of Europe on the independence and functions of regulatory authorities for the broadcasting sector, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 December 2000.[14]

An almost endless list of cases indicating that the media and regulatory authorities are under a strong influence of the State and political parties could be produced. The Bulgarian broadcasting law, for example, provides "citizens with an opportunity to get acquainted with the official position of the State on important issues of social life."[15] A similar provision exists in the law on Slovak television (Skolkay 1999, 6). It also grants the President, the Chairman of Parliament, the Prime Minister and high-ranking officials the time to address the audience on national television and radio. These provisions could be easily misused by the government

to propagate its own political goals on national television, which would distort the balance of access to television in favour of the ruling party. In a country like Bulgaria, which actually never experienced democracy, providing the government with preferential status in public radio and television exacerbates the authoritarian legacies of the past. The right of government to decide also applies to broadcasting licenses: the licensing of the first commercial TV operator in Bulgaria in 1999 was decided by the Council of Ministers and the State Evaluation Committee, which was comprised of government officials appointed by the Prime Minister (Ivantcheva 2000).

Control over television is even more direct in Croatia, which is one of the few European countries without a commercial television channel at the national level. Although local commercial television broadcasting was legally permitted in the mid-1990s, economic and regulatory constraints have precluded the rise of true competitors to the state-owned national broadcaster. Even in the press industry, the establishment of a private distribution monopoly in the hands of the conservative governmental party HDZ (which was in power until 2000) endangered the advancement of an independent press.

A standard reproach to journalists in the new capitalist countries by the new political élites is that they had served the communist system, which ought to authorise the new élites to control the media. As Galik and James (1999) argue in the case of Hungary, the charge of lingering communist sympathy among journalists deflects attention from a more fundamental problem — "not that the old *leftist* élite is in control of the media, but that the old leftist *élite* is in control." Indeed, in a number of countries, such as Yugoslavia, Ukraine or Belarus, the old élites continue to control the media. In the majority of the ECE countries, newly elected conservative governments succeeded in taking over control and redirecting the media toward conservative political goals by using public funds or legislative means. What should trouble us in these developments is not a particular (conservative) political orientation, but the fact that governments try to concentrate control over the media in their hands against the interests of the publics.

An excessive example of a political warfare over television took place in Hungary where in late 1991 — in the period when the media law was still pending in the parliament — the government and the opposition came into conflict with regard to government control over the state-run media. The ruling parties claimed that the national broadcasting media retained a communist orientation and wanted to increase their influence over the media, but the opposition accused them of merely wanting to use the media for public opinion campaigning.[16] Controversy between governmental and opposition political parties culminated when Prime Minister Antall fired the presidents of state-owned radio and television to replace them with pro-government candidates. President Göncz refused to countersign the dismissals, arguing that such actions endangered the democratic system, which gave him the right to block government actions as determined by the constitutional court. The parliamentary opposition supported him, while the government again turned the constitutional court to determine if Göncz had by his actions broken the law, which according to the constitution is the only reason for the impeachment against the president. The constitutional court's verdict was Solomonic: according to one principle, the president cannot refuse to dismiss state officials if requested by cabinet, but according to an equivalent principle, he is a democratic

safeguard against the excessive power of the government. The conflict was partly resolved when the radio and television presidents themselves resigned, but the Hungary media war did not end until December 1995 when the media law finally passed the parliament. According to the law, public foundations manage the three state-financed television stations. However, despite the fact that the law calls for boards with an equal representation of government and opposition parties, Orban's government decided in 2000, after negotiations with the opposition turned out a failure, to put the nation's public broadcast media under control boards composed entirely of governing (conservative) party members. According to the *Washington Post*, the Hungarian government has been criticised for awarding broadcast frequencies to its right-wing supporters, for excluding independent broadcasters, and for police harassment of journalists who write critical stories.

The question of re-nationalisation not only concerns the broadcast media, which are in all ECE countries partly under direct political control ("public service broadcasting"), but also the press which is *de iure* entirely privatised. A case study that examines recent efforts by the Hungarian government to use public money to establish a right-centrist newspaper (Galik and James 1999) shows that the government advocates a "hybrid paternal-democratic model" (Splichal 1994, 139) which overlays the existing commercial foundation. It is `paternal' in that the government on behalf of the people determines how these principles get put into practice, and `democratic' in that the principles do indeed demand public support for ideologically diverse media. Although the government's fundamental insistence that it is unacceptable to leave the allocation of informational resources to the market could lead to a more democratic reorganisation, in practice this is equated the endorsement of media diversity with the support to the conservative media.

De-nationalisation and Privatisation

After decades of state-controlled media, it was widely believed that freedom of ownership, and particularly private ownership, is the guarantor of democracy and a free press. Privatisation was seen as the only strategy that could reduce, and possibly even abolish, state intervention in the media. During the early post-Communist period, one of the most significant characteristics of ownership changes in the press was the elimination of the previously dominant role of the state. Practically all newspapers, and some local radio stations, were privatised, and a number of new privately owned and commercially oriented radio and television stations were set up. East Central European countries have generally embraced liberal-pluralist economic and political models. Here, press freedom is equated with private ownership by individuals, and the market is seen as the surest safeguard against state interference. In practice, the disentanglement of state property and its conversion into private property has been intensely political. Governments did not withdraw completely and the press throughout the region is still heavily saturated with politics. Besides intervening through media- and cultural policies, some degree of direct or latent state ownership could be still found in many print media sectors, particularly in the form of shares in the media held by privatisation funds with government representatives on their managing boards. Some new governments also tried to stimulate the establishment of "politically friendly" newspapers. A case in point is the recent effort by the Hungarian government to use pub-

lic money to establish a right-centrist newspaper. Similarly, the first Slovenian post-Communist government financed the establishment of a privately owned conservative daily, the owners being primarily party officials.[17] Even the licensing of new broadcasting stations was often much more a party-political decision than the result of identifying the needs and interests of publics, e.g., through public hearings, as practised in some Western countries. Rather, channels were allocated based on the selection of the most appropriate (or highest) bidder. As Vartanova (1999, 1) argues, "the long-standing authoritarian tradition of state pressures over the Russian media has marginalised the scope of market activities of independent newspapers or TV stations. In recent years state owned and Government run media have got a dominant position at the media market being increasingly used for getting political benefits, not revenues."

This is not to say that some of the new owners in the ECE countries did not seek profit at all. On the contrary: When the Czech daily *Lidové noviny* (samizdat before 1989) was transformed into a joint stock company in 1990, the "dissident founding fathers" were granted shares at the price of CZK 20,000, and the editorial staff for CZK 10,000. The Ringier Company paid for a share eight times more than a shareholder has invested, about CZK 80,000. Yet *Lidové noviny* only appeared on the market in 1990, so that their owners just collected profit of their own activity, unlike other dailies and magazines that were established on the media market long time ago and the new owners actually collected profit without having had any merit for the assets. The model privatisation procedure was, as Milan Šmid reports, the following: The editorial staff or part of it formed a company with a minimum capital required by the law. The staff as a whole left one day the original publisher (who may have "suddenly" decided to close down the company) to start publishing the next day virtually the same paper under a slightly different name, and distribute it to the subscribers of the original paper. Such were the cases of the communist youth daily *Mladá fronta* that was substituted by *Mladá fronta dnes*, *Zemedelské noviny* (Farmers daily) transmuted into *Zemské noviny* (Land News), the leading communist daily *Rudé právo* (Red Right) changed into plain *Právo* (Right).

The most outrageous were the cases of the film studios Barrandov and television station TV Nova. The government sold the studios to a Czech company Cinepont at the price of CZK 40,000 for a share, but Cinepont later sold a share for no less than CZK 4,000,000. The initial input of CZK 40,000, which was the rent for the broadcasting frequency, later brought the owners of TV Nova about US $ 5,000,000 for the contract with the CME as the exclusive programming and advertising provider (Šmid 1999).

Yet despite a variety of problems and impediments, the number of private broadcasters grew in the first half of the decade. Public radio and television stations have definitely lost their monopoly, although in some countries they lack competition at the national level. The media industry — which was supposed to be subject to regulation — became in some countries (where it succeeded in acquiring licenses for nation-wide broadcasting, e.g., in the Czech Republic) a very powerful partner of political actors, whereas in other countries it remains (informally) controlled by political parties. In both cases, such a "partnership" substantially decreases the autonomy and role of regulative bodies. On the other hand — and for many reasons — the mass media are likely to provide support for the establishment, in gen-

eral, and government, in particular, primarily to avoid informal or formal "inconveniences" related to licenses. The increase of mutual influence between political and economic establishments and the media does not allow for a liberal media market with a diversified supply of newspapers and broadcast programming as "planned" by the new political forces in the period of political upheavals.

Due to miserable economic conditions one cannot expect that powerful local media moguls would flourish in East Central Europe. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions both in the field of the press and broadcasting, like the late Miklós Fenyö in Hungary (owning a national daily, several magazines and other media,[18] Wojciech Fibak in Poland, who later tended to cooperate with foreign investors in forms of joint ventures, or Vladimir Zelezny in the Czech Republic who won a license to broadcast on a national channel.

Commercialisation

It is necessary to distinguish between "traditional" re-nationalisation and "modern" cross-fertilisation, and therefore a distinction should be drawn between the privatisation and the commercialisation of the media. Not only private newspapers and radio and television stations choose to entertain and satisfy mass demand (and powerful advertisers) in order to increase readership and audience, and hence profits. Public broadcasters have gone the same way because they are surrounded by private economy, which substantially limits their production autonomy (Negt and Kluge 1973, 191). As a consequence, even public service media are obliged to use the same strategy — they react to the environment simply as business companies. For example, the results of the measurement of audiences become a sort of "television money", that determines the value of programming. Public broadcasters are managed according to the same principles as any other company, and they are directly involved in transactions with private (foreign) suppliers of programs and equipment, which are often in a monopoly position

A kind of *paternal-commercial* media system is emerging, with a tendency to privatisation and commercialisation of the media (particularly the press) on the one hand, and the exercise and maximisation of political power over the media (television in particular) on the other. In many countries in the region with developing market economies, the lines between political and business interests are blurred. Competition for consumers causes competition for the latest news and makes journalists vulnerable to politics. Political authorities intervene in journalism either directly through interviews and press conferences, or indirectly through "information subsidies" (making information available to journalists on a *quid-pro-quo* basis), influence at least the journalistic agenda setting function, if not attitudes and actions, and eventually make journalism subsidiary to *public relations*. Tabloid journalism was a "salvation" of the press from conflicting powers. The 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. This in turn results in an increased number of lawsuits against journalists, based on the legal provisions that they should not harm the rights to privacy and reputation of individuals.

Like in other parts of the world, journalists in the ECE countries have no specific professional standards to meet. Journalism lacks the objective criteria that would place it in the same social position as the "true" professions, which would

ensure journalists against external interference. The standard reproach to journalists in the former socialist countries by the leaders of the new political parties is that they had served the old system, which ought to justify a tight control over the media by the new élites. Thus, a draft "Law of Journalists" submitted to the Romanian Senate attempts to define journalism and provides guidelines for the Romanian media.[19] Along with ethical guidelines and guarantees of access to information, the proposed law limits the access to professional journalistic activity in Romania to those who have a "journalists' card." Following the Italian model, in order to be issued with a card journalists have to pass an examination administered by the professional association. According to the proposed law, Romanian journalists would have the right to create professional associations, a credit union, and a so-called "senate" for the mass media that would consist of journalists, media owners, representatives of the National Broadcasting Council and non-governmental organisations. One of the basic tasks of this `senate' will be to serve as a watchdog for journalists' violations of professional standards.

Inter- and transnationalisation

The state of the economy and the development of the free market are crucial for the development of capital-intensive media such as television. In many countries in East-Central Europe it was argued that without foreign investment into the media it would have been impossible to improve newsprint and printing quality, modernise editorial offices and most importantly, to establish and equip radio and television stations. Thus, all countries in the region made media markets *accessible for foreign capital*. Post-communist media became increasingly internationalised in terms of a direct or indirect inflow (through foreign or domestic media) of media contents, foreign investment and ownership, and imitative regulation and organisation. In particular, foreign investments and ownership contributed to a move away from the previously over politicised media and from the direct influence of the state. The resulting media are sometimes — certainly not always — less dependent on the present party politic situation. In addition to foreign capital, innovations include the import of Western managerial and professional practices in the media operation, and a diversification of media products, e.g., classes of magazines, tabloid newspapers, and new types of programming. But the kind of programming resulting from internationalisation is often remote from public interest. The domination of foreign companies can hamper the democratic and community functions of the media, since they are less concerned with national and cultural developments. This tendency is fostered by the growing pressure of transnational corporations, which has forced state broadcasting authorities to make more channels available and give way to private and foreign broadcasters. Foreign media ownership is frequently seen as a threat to indigenous media industries. Foreign companies are usually more powerful, thus they contribute to the concentration of markets and can hamper the development of local media firms, which have little chance to compete on equal terms.

Media internationalisation and globalisation may have opposing and controversial consequences: on the one hand the international circulation of cultural products may enrich national cultures if adopted creatively by the local populations, but on the other hand it may help to extinguish local cultures. However, in East-

Central European the consequences of this process are predominantly negative, because all countries in the region became merely its "recipients," but not its actors. In a number of countries in the region, for example Hungary, Poland, and Czech Republic, more than 50 per cent of the national dailies are owned by foreign companies. Among the leading Czech media only one daily (*Pravo*), one weekly magazine (*Respekt*), and the public service broadcasters Czech Television and Czech Radio are free from any affiliation to a foreign capital (Šmid 1999).[20] Thus Fabris (1995) argues that the "Westification" of East Central European media is almost complete, and there is a good chance that East-Central Europe will become a "supplemental engine for the Western European media industry." The processes of privatisation and "colonisation" of the East by the West could lead to "a stratified press in which the majority of the population will be effectively denied access to information about matters of public importance" (Sparks 1991, 20).

Although all media systems are continually becoming more international in scope and control, the influence flows from more to less developed parts of the world, thus making the latter more and more dependent and vulnerable. The East-Central-European region is certainly a "representative" case of such vulnerability. Two Western communication companies in particular — the Scandinavian Broadcasting System (SBS) and the Bermuda-based Central European Media Enterprises Ltd. (CME) — have taken advantage of the vulnerability of the newly formed democracies in the region and played the game of "political capitalism" — making political deals in order to gain economic advantage. In 1997, the CME holding company included a large number of radio and television companies — program producers and providers, and stations — in Germany (in the former GDR), Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania, Poland, and Ukraine. Two years later, SBS, the second dominant actor in the East-European broadcasting industry of the 1990s, took over the CME. The merger tends to monopolise the broadcasting market in East-Central Europe. The only remaining competitors are national public service or state-owned broadcasters; smaller national commercial stations, which heavily depend on imported programming, will be unable to compete with the new giant.

Ideologic Exclusivism

The end of totalitarian rule in East-Central Europe marked a new stage in the process of re-creating civic *identity*. By providing an instantaneous source of "referential points," the media, particularly television, often emerge at the forefront of the search for self-assertion, both individual and collective. Revolutionary political and economic changes of the late 1980s and early 1990s resulted in the dissolution of former legitimising identities and in the construction of new ones. This search for new identities is predominantly not based on individual and group points of identification which could replace the state-provided and institutionally embedded identities, but is again a clearly institutionalised process led by political parties, the State and the Catholic Church. In some countries, such as Poland, the Roman Catholic Church sought to get special status for its own radio and television stations to broadcast either purely religious programs or popular programs combined with some religious content (Jakubowicz 2000, 23).

The restructuring of identities is often based on the "collective rights" doctrine, largely expressed in ethnic and religious terms. New identities significantly depart

from the former ones based on the ideology of "socialist internationalism," but they are not really new. In fact, they are a sort of hybrid of past and more recent ideological "coalitions", based particularly on national or ethnic pride, religious fervour, historic place of origin, or economic ambitions. These identities are likely to be used to discriminate among people: speaking "the right" language, being part of the dominant ethnicity and religious denomination, may condition one's access to the "national" media and politics in general. As George Schöpflin (1995, 63) argues, the post-communist systems can be described in summary form as "democratic in form and nationalist in content."

In a number of countries like Hungary (1990-1994), Slovakia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia and Romania, the post-totalitarian media have used overt nationalistic discourse. In many republics of the former Yugoslavia, the strong nationalist trend has completely overtaken all concerns about democracy and humanity, leaving little, if any, space for dissenting opinions. In its 1996 report, the International Commission on the Balkans (Aspen Institute 1996, 152) concluded that the ability of individual republican regimes to manipulate public opinion has made the war "thinkable" in the first place. Similarly, the Romanian TV stations Antena 1 and Tele 7 abc have been criticised for assuming a nationalistic stance, and for their anti-Semitic reporting (Lovatt 1999).

It seems that it was almost inevitable that after the fall of communism the media assumed a highly nationalistic stance. This does not necessarily imply that unfavourable media contents concerning national minorities and other (non-dominant) ethnic groups directly provoke intolerant attitudes and hatred that would eventually result in collective violence, as it was the case in the former Yugoslavia and in a number of the former Soviet republics. As Josip Županov (1995) made clear in the case of former Yugoslavia, it was a particular *authoritarian value orientation* among the population, rather than intolerance, that actually made the war possible. Nevertheless, the media were indispensable for the political mobilisation of the masses by authoritarian nationalistic leaders. When the latter acquired the "consent" of the masses for their nationalistic plans, it was only a matter of time before war would break out.

"Cross-fertilisation"

Cross-fertilisation refers to the kind of "innovation" caused by the opposition between attempts at the denationalisation of the media and the imitation of the traditional and modern Western (particularly Italian) party-political and media model: it blurs political, commercial and professional interests and dissolves the borders between the state, economy and civil society.[21] Since such an innovation emerged in Western Europe much earlier, it cannot be considered anything more than a pure imitation in Eastern Europe. Unlike denationalisation, that imitates the regulatory ideas of the former socialist system, "cross-fertilisation" reflects developments in Italy, particularly before the *partitocratic* political system crashed in 1992, but also more recent developments. Several characteristics of the old Italian media system, as described by Mancini (1991, 139), pertain to emerging post-communist systems: (1) The media are under state control, either directly, as in the case of public broadcasting, or indirectly through various forms of state-owned and/or economically supported press. (2) The degree of mass media partisanship is strong. Political parties are involved in editorial choices and the structure of the mass me-

dia. (3) Equally strong is the degree of integration of the media and political elites. For example, there is a strong professional mobility between the worlds of politics and journalism. (4) There is no consolidated and shared professional ethics among media professionals. In addition, post-socialist media are in a political environment similar to that in Italy of the 1980s (5) because of the instability of the political system, which represent a kind of "*coalitional complex*" consisting of a large number of parliamentary parties or single "great coalitions", essentially based on the division between pro- and anticommunist parties. (6) Like in the Italy of 1990s, new political parties established in the 1990s in the ECE countries are not organised in the way traditional mass parties were. New parties resemble the structure and strategy of business corporations. In terms of corporate philosophy, there is no difference between managing a political party, a business corporation, or a television station or newspaper company.

The possibility and consequences of an effective convergence of the three spheres is best exemplified by the Italian entrepreneur Silvio Berlusconi. Before the1990s, the leading Italian political parties allotted the three channels of RAI (the Italian public broadcasting company) to Christian Democrats, Socialists and Communists, while Parliament and the governing political parties encouraged Silvio Berlusconi to develop the "Berlusconi Empire."[22] The latter now includes the top three commercial television channels and three pay-TV channels along with a number of newspapers and magazines, all of which today strongly support and propagate his conservative party Forza Italia. When Berlusconi became Prime Minister, he successfully placed his confederates in RAI directorships. Before the national general election, the Italian parliament promulgated a law on the conflict of interests that prevents "captains of industry" such as *Cavaliere* Berlusconi from holding high political offices and declares the latter incompatible with the ownership of mass media — a law resembling the idea of lustration in the ECE countries.

This was a clear response to Berlusconi's strategy of "social marketing", which Amedeo Nigra defines in his book *L'uovo di Berlusconi* (The egg of Berlusconi) as a "general and universal method that can be applied in *any country and to any kind of economic system*. Left wing culture has now thought up a 'third way', a synthesis of free market economics and communism but here — already prepared — we have a 'fourth way': it is 'contractual socialism', that is a kind of socialism not prevailing by force of arms but through 'social marketing'" (Nigra 1999; emphasis added). Berlusconi's "historical mission" is, according to Nigra, to introduce business methods into political management to improve it. "The application of this principle will lead us to a real Copernican revolution, with huge benefits for the community because the enterprise method works like a vaccine. When inoculated in small quantities in a certain body, a transformation process occurs, making our body stronger. In the same way Fininvest succeeded in performing the same task as RAI, with neither fees nor privileges, the same can happen in all other fields ranging from health services to public transportation and administration services" (Nigra 1999). Berlusconi is believed to create a "new world", based on his "courage to break the wall of silence and say clearly that Italy was sick with communism", and planning for the future through "imitation of the American economic model."[23] Berlusconi's argument is straight and simple: "If the state and the politicians are not able to do good business, how can they successfully conduct all the financial

activities (worth hundreds of thousands of billions of liras) a good politician must perform?" Business is everywhere and everything! One cannot deny the efficacy of his methods: his party Forza Italia won the Italian parliamentary elections in 1994 only a few months after the party was founded!

The case of Berlusconi is perhaps the most extreme, but certainly not the only evidence that political involvement and partiality of the media can stem not only from state control, but also from private commercial interests — and even with much more harmful consequences. The media landscape in East-Central Europe is much less differentiated and pluralistic than in Italy, and the commercial — particularly broadcast — sector is far less developed, which is related both to the transitional nature of the ruling political coalitions and to the general economic crisis. Nevertheless, the Italian model of a rapid and largely unregulated development of private television exemplified by Berlusconi may serve both as a blueprint and as a warning — not only because of its strict *commercial* orientation, which — as in other Western countries — challenged the traditional quality orientation of public television, but also because of its final *de facto politicisation*.

Large parts of the media systems in the ECE countries were simultaneously privatised and put under a direct or indirect control by the leading political parties. "No limits for foreign ownership, no prohibition of cross-ownership, no idea how and whether to regulate the media — that was the framework that made the Czech Republic a testing ground for deregulated media" (Šmid 1999, 3). The story of TV Nova in the Czech Republic probably best exemplifies this tendency. A group of Czech intellectuals, including Vladimir Zelezny, established in 1993 the company "Central Europe Television for the 21st Century" (CET-21) and won a license to broadcast TV programs on a national channel. The license was then transferred to the broadcasting company TV Nova, in which CME, a U.S. company, had an initial 66 per cent share, the Czech bank Česka Sporitlena 22 per cent, and CET-21 12 per cent. TV Nova began broadcasting in February 1994 with an immense success. CME used the same strategy in five other ECE countries, but with a mixed success. While most foreign investors such as Berlusconi, Hersant, Kirch withdrew from the Czech market because of "non-standard entrepreneurial environment, absence of legal guarantees, corrupt business practices etc." (Šmid 1999), CME developed an expertise in "special features of local capitalism, namely making political deals in order to gain economic advantage. It played the game of 'political capitalism' very well" (Sparks (1999, 42). In 1999, however, the "political entrepreneur Zelezny", as Sparks names him, replaced the foreign-owned CNTS as TV Nova's program supplier with his own new company and left CME empty handed. In other words, "he planned to turn the CME model against its parent and cut it off from its broadcasting outlet" (Sparks 1999, 43).

Big and foreign media owners in Poland substantially influence media policies in Poland. In addition to preventing the regulation of media concentration, they are seeking to exploit conflicts between the government and public service broadcasting organisations in order to marginalize public television and prevent it from entering new fields, such as digital television and the creation of thematic channels (Jakubowicz 2000, 24).

Contracts between public service media and private media companies established by the employees or members of the managing boards of public media rep-

resent another form of "crossbreeding" between politics and economy, characteristic of the post-communist media systems. Elemer Hankiss, the then President of MTV, revealed in 1991 that one third of the external companies contracted by MTV were owned by the employees of the state television station. Their activities in these external firms coincided exactly with the activities they performed within MTV in what they declared as their full-time jobs (Kosztolanyi 1999). In Slovenia, journalists accused some members of the Council of the Radio-Television Slovenia of supporting the director general despite his obvious mismanagement because of their close business relationships with him. A few years ago the same Council was criticised primarily as having been much too dependent on the dominant political parties although it was supposed to represent the institutions of civil society, such as cultural, educational and scientific institutions.

Journalists' lack of ethical standards and dignity also contributes to the process of "cross-fertilisation". As Strohlein (2000) argues in the case of journalists in the Czech Republic, "political influence goes well beyond the spin tricks commonly seen in the UK or US; it is not subtle spin so much as bribery, crude threat and deliberate political pressure. Some journalists and commentators are simply corrupt, being little more than hired pens for the politicians who pay them." In early summer 1999, Prime Minister Miloš Zeman openly accused journalists of corruption.

Conclusions

In the effort to identify major tendencies in the transformation of media systems in East-Central Europe, the domination of imitation and a lack of innovations attract particular attention. Tarde's theory of imitation as a general law of development seems to offer a valid explanation of these (r)evolutionary changes because it transcends the division between dependency and diffusionist modernisation theories. The former claim that the process of modernisation in the world periphery of less developed countries is shaped (imitated) in such a way as to lead to their exploitation, and to the strengthening of the dominance of the most developed nations. The latter believe all societies (not only less developed ones) borrow or imitate elements of other political and economic systems and cultures. Tarde's theory does not specify *in advance* the nature of imitation, but is open to several forms of imitation, which in turn, are related to innovation and opposition. In this sense, both dependency and diffusionist theories may be considered just special forms of Tarde's general theory. Similarly, theories attempting specific explanations of the transition in the ECE countries, focusing either on continuity or discontinuity, actualise Tarde's ideas of accumulation and substitution as two specific innovative processes, which are always combined with imitation.

During the last ten years, the newly formed and/or democratised states in East-Central Europe mostly re-regulated their media systems, but with varying degrees of efficiency. In most countries in the region, the general success of the efforts to establish a truly democratic system is still limited. The substantial changes in media legislation mainly concerned structural and contents regulation, but have they largely failed. *Structural regulation* — media ownership, organisation, financing, management, control, procedures for licensing, rules for access — remains ineffective, since legal violations are often not prosecuted either for political reasons and/or for a general lack of personnel and technical means to enforce the respective

laws. *Content regulation* (what content is permitted or required, and how should it be selected and presented in programming, including quotas) did not contribute to a higher quality of programming. The media product is certainly less politicised than under the communist regime, but it is becoming increasingly commercialised, following the tendencies of "tabloidisation" in the West.

There is no doubt that the former centralised socialist economy based on state ownership was both *economically inefficient* and *inimical to democracy*. But it would be also mistaken to believe that free markets and private property are the only (or, at least, the best) alternative in *both* respects. The question of an alternative to *laissez-faire* is particularly important for such vital activities in civil society as education, science, culture, and communication. Although an advocacy of any form of socialised markets and social ownership is regarded highly suspiciously in the period of the proclaimed *laissez-faire* doctrine in ECE, it should be acknowledged that the imposition of narrow commercial criteria threatens the integrity of civil society and hands the initiative to greedy commercial interests.

Yet there may be some serious doubts as to whether the *imitative nature* of the changes in the media sphere stimulates democratic transformations of societies, or is rather an obstacle to the development of more democratic systems in the region. Imitation, if reciprocal and based on accumulation, i.e. *active imitation*, may well lead to real changes and innovations. However, the type of imitation practised in the ECE countries is basically negative and passive: it is unilateral (only from West to East), and based on substitution (revocation of all old institutions and criteria). Uncritical imitation of the democratic institutions developed in older democracies may be a risky business. A critical view is needed to prevent the ECE countries from becoming a kind of "experimental zone" for uncontrolled privatisation (also due to deficiencies of newly generated legal systems), which are still held back by doctrines of the social responsibility doctrine of the media in the West. Western-type capitalism should not be simply imitated through substitution also because of immense *cultural differences*.

Clearly, the market place, alone or in combination with political (party) pluralism, does not guarantee equality in freedom, since market forces can both expand and reduce the democratic potentials of the media. The market is essentially a terrain for different policies and coalitions — based on different ideologies — but media systems are established, maintained and eventually abolished by political decisions. Since media development requires an economic underpinning, a rich diversity of media can only exist in a prosperous economy, which is impossible to separate from the market-based system of advanced post-industrial societies. While the absence of a market economy makes the media politically dependent, the opposite does not hold true: a market economy cannot guarantee political autonomous media. The developments in the ECE countries led to the establishment of a kind of "political capitalism" and created a system of "paternalist commercialism" in the media. Essentially this means that no clear differentiation between the state and the market, and between political parties and civil society, exists. The state often acts both as a political and economic actor.

It was unavoidable that states that rigidly controlled their economies could not have tolerated the kind of political competition that independent media would represent. Yet, as the state is now also the safeguard of civil society, it ought to perform its duties and establish a regulatory framework for the media to serve

democracy. If the line between the political, economic, and public spheres is blurred, as is often the case in the ECE countries, a radical departure from non-democratic practices of former regimes is not feasible. In fact, institutions of civil society and public opinion are still effectively marginalised, and the access to the media is either still severely limited to political élites — in some countries even only to those of the ruling coalitions — or commercially based. In some countries, the Church took over the role of the dominant partner of the state once reserved for the communist party, thus substantially contributing to the non-transparency of the line between the state and civil society, which may cause a level of distrust among the citizens similar to their distrust in the media.

Public opinion polls show that people in the ECE countries perceive what much objective evidence in fact confirms: the institutions of political democracy are not functioning very well. The data from polls, conducted in eight ECE countries in the period between March 1998 and March 2000, reveal disturbing levels of civic distrust in the institutions of the state, economy, and civil society. The mistrust of political institutions in the ECE countries is almost *twice as high* as the mistrust in the EU countries: national parliaments are mistrusted by 79.4 % of citizens in the ECE and 41 % in the EU, and national governments by 78.4 % in the ECE and 43 % in the EU.[24 *] Despite all the controversies discussed in this article, the ECE mass media score slightly better than the representatives of the legislative power (political parties and parliament) and governments do, but are much less trusted than the most repressive part of the executive power — the army and police. However, the varying level of trust in the media in different ECE countries does not correspond directly to the degree of media autonomy and professionalisation, public access, and regulatory order: there is no evidence to support, for example, the extremely favourable attitudes toward the media in Bulgaria. Obviously, even tendencies and strategies common to different ECE countries may be perceived differently by citizens in different countries for idiosyncratic reasons — which is not surprising since even God is not equally trusted in different countries, although he is generally the most trustworthy "institution" outranked only by citizens' *self-reliance*.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, democratic changes in the ECE countries were expected to bring a higher degree of political participation and freedom, and the media were believed to contribute significantly to that process. To achieve these goals, the political and legal system has to give legitimacy and credibility to these processes by setting up a clear separation between specific powers (legislative, executive, judicial), forms of control (political vs. cultural), and between the state and civil society. By securing the conditions for social agents to act on the basis of stable expectations, and excluding immoderate risks, fears and frustrations, the legal and political system can "produce" trust among citizens. Trust, then, is not just a neutral instrument for the reduction of social complexity, but also a fundamental condition for democracy to work. A high level of distrust in political institutions as well as the mass media, which is evident among the citizens in the ECE countries, connotes a wider collective perception of high risks and potential conflicts in newly democratised societies. As I have indicated throughout this article, the lack of a trustworthy, stable political system permeates all ECE countries. The lack of trust in internal institutions and powers is not only likely to limit the level of democratic participation, but also to strengthen further those imitative tendencies that will eventually result in mistrust of transplanted institutions.

Notes:

1. By dividing the Third World into two parts, Galtung and Vincent (1992) added the Fourth World consisting of the countries in East and Southeast Asia, economically led by Japan, and culturally by PR China.

2. The term "progress" is used to denote the processes of social changes that occur not just at the level of political and social orientation, but—as the consequence of purposive, concentrated efforts—in fundamental elements of the power structure, particularly in the development of a political public sphere and political pluralism. See Habermas 1990.

3. Despite long lasting discussions of the draft of a new press law in Poland, the draft was rejected in Sejm in 1999 so that the old press law of 1984 is still binding.

4. Essentially, modernisation theories which are based on the assumption of fundamental differences between "traditional" and "modern societies" (e.g., Daniel Lerner's *The Passing of Traditional Society*) resume Tönnies' theory of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (Tönnies, 1887/1991). However, while Tönnies considered the two terms exclusively normal concepts (pure abstractions), which could never exist in practice as exclusive entities, modernisation theories look at empirical differences and suggest a rather simple, one-way transition from traditional to modern society.

5. As it will become obvious, diffusion or dissemination of innovation is nothing but Tarde's "imitation."

6. These theories are best represented by Herbert Schiller's seminal work on "American imperialism" (1969/1992).

7. According to Tarde, innovation or, as he also names it, adaptation and consequently human progress (i.e. the change of social conditions) result from oppositions; while at the same time "we se harmonious things which, by multiplying, come into conflict with one another" (1902/1969, 144).

8. Other types of feedforward, according to Masuda, are controlled feedforward (active and positive process in which the subject of action exercises control over the environment), balanced feedforward (the external environment and the subject of action exercise mutual control), and synergistic feedforward (the subject of action and the environment cooperate to reach common objectives).

9. This process can also be conceptualised with Tehranian's terms of "dissociation" and "assimilation," dissociation denoting the reaction against the institutions of the former system, and assimilation the acceptation of external models of developments ("Westernization")—in contrast to "selective participation," which was, according to Tehranian, typical of some East European countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, in the 1980s (Tehranian 1990, 187-189).

10. Of course, this is not a new idea. Bryce reports about Hamilton's remark in his letter to Montesquieu that "a government must be fitted to a nation as much as a coat to the individual; and consequently that what may be good at Philadelphia may be bad at Paris and ridiculous at Petersburg" (1888/1995, 1542n).

11. Poland was among the last of the former Warsaw Pact countries to confront the issue of investigating public officials for collaboration with the country's communist-era secret service, enacting its lustration law in 1997. In January 2000, a group of about thirty Polish journalists and public officials have signed an appeal to the Parliament asking that the lustration law be extended to journalists, publishers and editors of large private media. The appeal resulted from a controversy over lustration between the leading daily newspapers *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Zycie*. *Zycie* argued that lustration would be good for public opinion and journalism in general, while *Gazeta Wyborcza* contended that lustration would only be used arbitrarily as a weapon against critical journalists.

12. We may speak of "tendencies" as long as changes are not brought about by purposive actions of specific groups, whereas "strategies" are based on such actions.

13. The Recommendation R (94)13 (Measures to promote media transparency, 1995) of the Council of Europe defines three categories of information on media operation that should be made public: (1) information concerning the persons or bodies participating in the structure which operates the service, and the nature and extent of the respective participation of these persons or bodies in the structure concerned; (2) information on the nature and interests held by these individuals and organisations in other media and other economic activities; and (3) information on other persons or bodies likely to exercise significant influence on the programming policy of a service by the provision of certain kinds of resources—the nature of which should be clearly specified in the licensing procedures—to the service or the persons or bodies involved in the latter's operations. Retrieved from the World Wide Web http://www.humanrights.coe.int/media/.

14. Retrieved March 2001 from the World Wide Web http://cm.coe.int/ta/rec/2000/2000r23.htm.

15. 1996 Radio and Television Act, Art. 7(8), Art. 52 (1).

16. Retrieved March 2001 from the World Wide Web http://www.ijnet.org/News/CEENIS.

17. This newspaper, *Slovenec*, never achieved a profitable turnout and went bankrupt in 1995.

18. Fenyö was shot dead in broad daylight in Budapest in 1998.

19. Retrieved March 2001 from the World Wide Web http://www.ijnet.org/News/CEENIS.

20. The second private national TV channel Prima TV is owned by the Czech IPB bank, which is controlled by a foreign partner Nomura.

21. I used to name this imitative tendency/tendencies after Italy as "Italianization" (Splichal, 1994), but naming it after a nation is not the best resolution because it *wrongly* insinuates that (1) it is peculiar to a nation (state) and (2) that the whole system is imitated rather than its specific characteristics. On the contrary, some of these characteristics are present in most capitalist systems, and not all of them are imitated in the ECE countries.

22. When Berlusconi entered politics with his own party, he was the dominant force in Italian television, with three national networks under the umbrella of his Fininvest holding company, which also controls some 150 other businesses from construction to soccer. Berlusconi formed Fininvest in 1975, after having established himself as a developer of residential villages. He entered the television business in 1980, when he launched Italy's first commercial network, then went on to become the owner of an array of other enterprises, including the largest department-store chain in the country and a publishing company that produced newspapers and more than thirty magazines. Fininvest is also involved in film production, having provided nearly half the investment in Italy's film industry.

23. The whole Italian political system after the second world war actually effectively designed to keep communists—who fought, together with the Allies, against Fascists and Nazies and liberated Italy—out of office. They did not enter the government except for a short period immediately after the wae, so Nigra's and Berlusconi's "sickness with communism" is purely an ideological construct. Retrieved March 2001 from the World Wide Web http://www.newworldofberlusconi.com/main.htm.

24. The data for the EU are taken from the September 1996 *Continuous tracking survey of European opinion.* Retrieved from the World Wide Web http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg10/epo/eo/eo9/tables9/tab11.html.

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