

RUDE AWAKENING SOCIAL AND MEDIA CHANGE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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Abstract

This article reviews the transformation in society and the media in the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Adopting a "path dependence approach," the different countries of the region are analysed and allocated to two general categories, depending upon the nature and extent of the changes that have taken place in society and the media. The first group of countries (called here "Type A") have advanced relatively far along the road to transformation. Examples would be Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, and Estonia. The second group (called here "Type B") retain much more of the old order. Examples would be Russia and some of the other republics that have issued from the collapse of the old Soviet Union. A range of theories of media change are reviewed, and their prognoses for the development of the media after the fall of communism are tested against the subsequent developments. It is argued that the media in both Type A and Type B countries remain highly politicised, particularly in the case of broadcasting, and with limited independence from the political elite. Journalism, too, remains paternal and didactic, partly as a result of the historical position of intellectuals in the region. While there are important differences between Type A and Type B countries, neither represents a stable and finished model of transformation. In neither case, are the media the passive victims of social forces. On the contrary, their shortcomings help to reproduce the limits of the overall transformation process.

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Introduction

Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe still has years and decades to go. The same could be said of scholarly analysis of social and media change in the region. In the debate on this process, there is no agreement on what direction post-communist countries are, or should be going in, on whether they are moving forward or backward, and finally on whether they are undergoing real or just superficial change. With the political evolution of Central and Eastern European countries, international integration, globalisation and technological change, the object of analysis is changing very rapidly. Scholarly consideration of social developments cannot be more mature and complete than the developments themselves – and they are far from completion. Nevertheless, the main patterns of the process and the interim results it has produced so far are becoming clearer.

1. First of all, we know enough about the early ideas of the “founding fathers” of the process and about the hopes which motivated them to initiate it, to be able to compare them with the results attained so far and to draw early conclusions from this comparison.

2. Second, we are discovering that many of the great expectations concerning post-communist reality in Central and Eastern European countries were based on an incomplete understanding of the logic of change and the circumstances affecting it. Hence the rude awakening of everyone who was not ready for what came after the downfall of the communist system, including many of the observers and students of the process.

3. Third, we know that given the enormous complexity and holistic nature of the process of transformation, analysis of particular dimensions of the process in isolation from others is not likely to further our knowledge of what is happening.

4. Fourth, we know that history matters – and matters a great deal – in the process of transformation. This argues in favour of incorporating the historical perspective in trying to understand the reasons for developments involved in the collapse of communism and everything that has happened since. The path dependence approach seems to be particularly well suited for this purpose.

5. Fifth, a curious paradox has become apparent: while the impetus for the abolition of communism was predominantly endogenous, that of transformation appears to be largely exogenous and imitative, with post-communist countries copying (with widely diverging degrees of true intention and success) institutional patterns from other European and North American countries.

6. And finally, we know that most post-communist countries have at least crossed the point of no return in their transformation (there is no going back to the old system).

The purpose of this paper is to take a look at just what has really happened in the process of media change in post-communist countries, and why it was such a rude awakening for everyone.

Towards Developing an Analytical Framework

Offe (1999, 192) regards post-communist transformation as “an unprecedented, special case of rapid social change.” In his view, one can expect to see a number of paths of transformation specific to each country, shaped by the last 500 years of the country’s history. In opting for the path-dependence approach, he takes the same

line as Ekiert (1999) who argues that “broadly perceived legacies of the past offer the most consistent explanation successful transitions, especially in their initial phase. I define these legacies to include not only the institutional and attitudinal features inherited from communism that are inimical to democracy but also some facilitating factors related to developments under communist rule.” This seems a promising avenue to explore.

We will apply “transition” here to mean the relatively brief period immediately preceding and following the collapse of the communist system. The key element here is non-continuity between one system and another. Without it there is no real transition. And, following widespread usage, we will adopt the term of “systemic social transformation” to describe what follows “transition.” In this concept, the term “systemic” refers to the fact that it is a holistic process.

We can try to compose a list of the different internal factors involved in the collapse of communism, and on this basis construct two hypothetical ideal-type cases of countries where circumstances favoured relatively smooth and successful transition (and ensuing transformation) – or created barriers to both. Probably no country will fit either of these cases fully, but an examination of the situation in each of them will reveal how they impacted on the process. This will also facilitate understanding the reasons why different countries have gone different ways, despite seeming similarities between them (see Table 1).

Table 1. Endogenous Factors Involved in the Fall of Communism

Type A countries: Factors creating conditions for relatively successful transition	Type B countries: Factors obstructing transition
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 of indigenous cultural tradition
Existence of an organised 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
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

In general terms, the more elements of Type A were in evidence in a particular country, the greater was the chance that:

1. Transition would lead to real change of the political and economic system (though, of course, what “real” change means is a matter of interpretation);
2. The new leadership replacing the old elite would originate from among the democratic opposition and would be reform-oriented;
3. The process of transformation would be oriented to developing democracy and promoting economic reform;
4. Any conflicts accompanying the process of change would not develop into hostilities or civil war.

In countries with many elements of Type B, the likelihood of any of these outcomes was much less.

Table 2. Schematic Representation of Transition and 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

Adapted from Ekiert 1999.

Another way of illustrating this path-dependence approach is portrayed in Table 2. Only fourteen of the 27 countries in the region appear in the first three columns. This indicates that the extent of democratic and economic reform and the level of human development (income, life expectancy, literacy, etc.) achieved are closely related. Ethnic homogeneity (or, rather, the absence of radical, ethnically inspired nationalism) seems to be an important factor in explaining the chances of successful democratisation. Of the ten states mentioned in the first column (essentially the most successful reformers in the region), eight belong to the ten most ethnically homogeneous countries.

We may complement this with Ziółkowski’s (1999, 62) attempt to identify, on the Polish example, the main impetus for change in the institutional complexes of society and in patterns of mass behaviour (see Table 3). This means that since 1989 main top-down changes concerned the economy, the political system, culture and the media. At the same time, spontaneous change of behaviour patterns concerned individuals’ roles as workers and citizens to a lesser extent than their roles as consumers and participant in popular culture. Here, change has introduced patterns characteristic of modernity and post-modernity (post-materialist values, etc.), advancing faster than changes in other areas, including institutional complexes and cultural change required to give them full meaning and ability to operate properly. If this is true also of other Type A countries, then we can begin to appreciate the complexity of the process of transformation.

Table 3. Democratic and Economic Reform, and Ethnic Homogeneity

Democratic Reform Score (1997)	Human Development Index Value (1997)	Economic Reform Score (1996)	Ethnic Homogeneity Score (1996)
1. Czech Republic	1. Slovenia	1. Czech Republic	1. Poland
2. Hungary	2. Czech Republic	2. Estonia	2. Albania
3. Poland	3. Slovakia	3. Hungary	3. Czech Republic
4. Slovenia	4. Hungary	4. Poland	4. Slovenia
5. Estonia	5. Poland	5. Slovakia	5. Hungary
6. Latvia	6. Belarus	6. Lithuania	6. Romania
7. Lithuania	7. Russian Federation	7. Latvia	7. Bulgaria
8. Bulgaria	8. Bulgaria	8. Croatia	8. Russian Federation
9. Moldova	9. Estonia	9. Albania	9. Slovakia
10. Slovakia	10. Croatia	10. Russian Federation	10. Lithuania

Source: Dauderstädt and Gerrits 2000.

We may agree with Rizman (2001) who says that from a merely formal point of view, many countries in transition have more or less succeeded in imitating advanced democracies of the West through regular elections, democratic constitutions, workable parliaments and cabinets, multiparty systems, a visible separation of powers, and the like. However, while in Type A countries Linz and Stepan's (1996) prerequisites of democratic consolidation have largely been satisfied, in Type B countries the mechanisms and procedures of formal democracy are still abused or subverted to perpetuate the political and economic elite's hold on the levers of power. Still, even in Type A countries, the relations between what Linz and Stepan call the "five arenas of consolidated democracy," (i.e. civil society, political society, rule of law, state apparatus and economic society) are far from what they should be in a mature democracy.

In the first post-transition period, political society (i.e. the emerging political parties) quite naturally gains a dominant role, as perhaps the only social actors capable of creating some sort of order out of the chaos of transformation. However, this imbalance between political and civil society has important consequences, especially if the state is weak ("soft"), as is often the case in post-communist countries. This is even more pronounced in Type B countries, which are likely to have autocratic (or in extreme cases despotic and semi-feudal) system, political capitalism and nationalism. The main actors are unreformed post-communists, nationalist leaders, "oligarchs" who control the economy, and organised crime. There is a "grey area" of corruption, crime and "shadow" economy. Many of these countries have been plagued by wars or armed conflicts for political or nationalist causes.

Though to some extent this can be found also in Type A countries, a major feature of Type B countries is their inadequate separation of powers, and hence disregard for the rule of law, with the administration and allied "oligarchs" capable of controlling or bringing their influence to bear on State authorities including the judicial system, much of the economy, and the media. The post-communist state is a weak one. It comprises inadequate legal frameworks for the operation of the market economy and cannot adequately replace the old externalised compliance to coercion with internalised recognition of the rule of law, all the more so that norms and values are highly volatile.

Weak civil society and underdeveloped tradition of autonomous action, combined with excessive faith in, and dependence on, the state, produce etatism and “political inflation,” with the state pushed to intervene into all areas of social life. Genuine civil societies cannot develop in the absence of both a middle class and a developed market economy. As a result, in some cases, in some countries, the system may resemble a semi-authoritarian system by consent. At the same time, what used to be a relatively united mass movement for change begins to reintegrate over group values and interests, leading slowly to the development of a party system, representing those interests – more so in Type A than in Type B countries. In the former, public opinion and the media are playing an increasing role as a countervailing force, sometimes capable of bringing enough pressure to bear on the government to affect its performance.

In both groups of countries, an important feature is the impeded development of the market due to excessive *etatisation* and political intervention into the operation of market forces, as well as to personalised and politicised patterns of activity which give rise to various forms of corruption, state subsidies, bureaucratic obstruction etc. On top of this, many post-communist countries have not finished privatisation. The coexistence of different forms of ownership produces different interest groups and work ethics. At the same time, the renaissance of property means that social and political action is directed to the protection of that property, to ensuring the transfer of resources into capital, and to preventing the depreciation of existing property. This turns such matters as foreign direct investments, protection of domestic businessmen and capital, sale of land to foreigners etc. into highly charged political and emotional issues.

Table 4: Some Aspects of Institutional and Cultural Change

Institutional complexes	Top-down institutional change	Mass behaviour
Economy - labour, production	Massive	Partial
Economy - consumption	Massive	Massive
Politics	Massive	Partial
Social stratification	Significant	Significant
Family	Insignificant	Insignificant
Religion	Insignificant	Limited
Educational institutions	Limited	Limited
Culture, the media	Massive	Massive

Source: Ziółkowski 1999, 62.

In terms of the institutional and cultural approach to transformation, it could be said in most general terms that the difference between Type A and Type B countries is as follows:

- In the process of imitative transformation, Type A countries have been able to transplant or develop institutional frameworks and are waiting as corresponding cultural change begins to produce the sets of values and behaviour patterns which ensure the proper functioning of those institutions; meanwhile, departures from the principles of democracy and market economy take the form of the use of those institutions and mechanisms provided by them to pursue objectives contrary to their true purpose;

- In Type B countries it has not even been possible to create the appropriate institutional frameworks. Instead, some hybrid forms have developed. They combine some outward features of the requisite institutions of democracy and market economy with mechanisms of quite different nature.

Models of Media Change

A number of models of a new media system were developed before and during the period of transition. We will review them below and seek to explain – in the light of the foregoing – whether or not they were pursued, and with what effect.

Direct Communicative Democracy/Change of Social Power Relations

The original search for a new model of the media system was undertaken, much as in the case of the search for a systemic alternative, by the intellectual and cultural opposition to the system, fascinated with Western concepts of “access,” “participation” and “social management” of the media. That was a sign of continuity with dissident thinking, though in Poland, for example, the entire Solidarity movement endorsed it. 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. A change of social power relations, involving the realisation of a radical programme of empowerment of civil society, was to be accompanied by communicative empowerment. These represent what Sparks (1998, 79) has called the “total transformation” school of thought about the events of 1989, which viewed them as a social revolution and assumed fundamental discontinuity between the past and the present.

In other words, it was not to be just a “substitution of one set of mass communication subjects for another,” without its radical reform – as Manaev (1996, 27) has called it – but “complete replacement of the mass communication model (taking place in the context of full replacement of the overall social system model).”

These ideas sought to implement the democratic participant press theory and create a media system based on the values of equality/justice and solidarity (McQuail 1992, 66-67), with a facilitative and dialectical/critical role for journalists (Nordenstreng 1997). In the communist countries with the largest dissident groups and longest tradition of developing systemic alternatives, the new model of social communication, involving the principles described above, was part of a vision of the post-communist order which in addition comprised the following elements:

1. The radical democracy project, encompassing the civil society as the main organising principle of participatory democracy;
2. Democratic and market-oriented socialism (Chołaj 1998, 265), with a strong emphasis on worker rights and direct involvement in economic ownership and management. It was to be mixed economy, with a dominant public sector, based on the concept of worker self-management and socialisation of enterprises (see S. Jakubowicz 1989, for an extensive overview of Solidarity debates and policy positions on the question of workers’ self-management in 1980-1981). It involved employee stock ownership plans; free development of all forms of property; and development of market relations and competition.

All three elements of this vision were rejected almost immediately after transition. A number of reasons account for this:

1. A change of heart or strategy by old dissidents as they faced the job of running the country, resulting in the choice of quite a different strategy and goals of post-communist transformation than was once planned;
2. Replacement of old dissidents from the cultural elite by politicians and leaders with a different agenda;
3. The need to achieve a political contract with the old communist elite in the process of a negotiated, “pacted” transition;
4. Impact of the market and generally capitalist social relations on society and the media;
5. Dominant international trends and foreign advice as well as criteria for granting financial assistance (e.g. the “Washington consensus”; see Martin 2000) and requirements for entry into international organisations (such as the Copenhagen criteria and *acquis communautaire*, applied by the European Union, see Vachudova 2000).

What this has meant in real terms is that the drive for radical, participatory democracy has given way to efforts to create classical representative democracy of a procedural, Schumpeterian nature in Type A countries, and a hybrid system involving the outward trappings of democracy and continued authoritarianism in Type B countries. “Democratic and market-oriented socialism” has been replaced, as in Poland, by monetarist neo-liberalism. And the model of social communication actually applied combines the Western European model with the hegemony/guardianship model (see below).

The general population viewed the abandonment of the original vision with a degree of indifference. It was more interested in economic reform and identified “democracy” with prosperity and stability, rather than political democracy. If it opposes the direction transformation is taking, it is because it is being deprived of the benefits of the socialist welfare state, rather than of the opportunity to be active citizens in a participatory democracy or active communicators.

Other reasons why the direct communicative democracy model was abandoned include the fact that it was based on the “fallacy of the universal need to (mass)-communicate” and the “fallacy of the mistaken historical period”¹ which had already been shown to be just that during Western attempts to democratise mass communication in the 1960s and 1970s (Jakubowicz 1993).

Moreover, it would have required massive direct State interventionism into the media system, extensive regulation and large-scale funding to realise the value of justice/equality so as to give everyone a realistic prospect of access to the media, participation in managing them, and ensuring fair representation of all groups in society in, and full pluralism of, media content. None of that was, or still is, possible in post-communist countries. A weak state would have neither the capability, nor the credibility, nor the funds to achieve these goals. Where there is extensive State interventionism into the media, as in Type B countries, it serves the perpetuation of the hegemony/guardianship model, rather than democratisation of the media. At best, such interventionism in Type A countries produces politicisation of the media, and not their democratisation.

“Beyond the Western European Model”

Proponents of this model, based on the concept of an open and plural media system, realised – in the light of the immediate post-1989 situation (see the section on “Media of Hegemony / Guardianship and ‘Co-operative’ Journalism” below) –

that the idea of direct participant communicative democracy would not get backing from the new governments. Still, they sought to add as many of its features as possible to the evolving standard "Western European model" discussed below (of course, there is no one Western European model, but that is how it was perceived in Central and Eastern Europe).

The main features of this open and plural system were defined (Jakubowicz 1990) as follows:

- Freedom of speech and of the press (publication and distribution open to individuals or groups without licence or permit);
- No compulsion to publish anything; no censorship;
- Anti-monopoly laws in mass communications;
- Institutional autonomy of the media (including no external financial control, or financing with no strings attached) ;
- Media functions: expression of full range of opinion in society, watchdog function, admissibility of promoting change of (or within) the existing social order;
- Expanded definition of public service and obligations of the media (incorporating practical forms of public access, participation and internal pluralism of public service media; fairness, equal time, right of reply; standards of quality, objectivity and impartiality, protection of national and cultural identity, etc.); public institutions and funds for the exercise of the right to communicate (with policies in this regard to be open to challenge and public review).

This system was to be composed of three main groups: a financially secure system of public service broadcasting, socially-motivated privately or collectively owned media speaking for, on behalf of, or to various groups, parties, organisations, movements, minorities, territorial groups and communities (the so called "civic sector"); a commercial media (both print and broadcast). This blueprint for the media order sought to combine elements of representative and direct communicative democracy, social responsibility and democratic-participant media theories, and the communication values of freedom and justice/equality. This model did not fare much better than the direct communicative democracy model. While lip service has been paid here or there to some of these ideas, especially in Type A countries, in reality their observance has been minimal (Jakubowicz 1996).

"Western European Media Model"

Seeking to sum up other ideas emerging in that early period, Šmid (1999) has said that as far as the print media were concerned, it was understood that introduction of press freedom (negative regulation, de-regulation) would launch free exchange of ideas and the emergence of unfettered media capable of reflecting the democratic plurality of opinions.

As far as the electronic media were concerned, the model called for:

1. De-regulation and re-regulation of the old media system (abolition of monopoly and censorship and opening up the system to free enterprise in order to create a balanced dual system of broadcasting); therefore, it was necessary to:
 - 1.1. Adopt new broadcasting legislation abolishing the monopoly of the former state broadcasters;
 - 1.2. Define a regulatory body and its place in the political system;
 - 1.3. Define the space designated to private commercial broadcasters in the mixed public/private system.

2. Transformation of the old state broadcasting agencies into independent public service broadcasters, for this purpose it was necessary:
 - 2.1. Adopt new laws that enable the creation of independent public corporations, public broadcasters;
 - 2.2. Secure reliable financing for public broadcasters, independent from a state budget;
 - 2.3. Guarantee efficient public control of the public broadcasters without interference and manipulation driven by party politics and vested interests.

Here we have mainly to do with the social responsibility press theory, a guardianship/stewardship role for the media, an administrative paradigm, and service and surveillance functions for journalists. This view comes closest to the avowed goal of media change in Type A countries.

Media Autonomisation/Wholesale Privatisation

The situation evolving in CIS countries after the fall of communism in his country prompted the development of yet another model, based on the conviction that autonomisation of the media could not be achieved by any other means than their wholesale privatisation “[Political] power [is] the most conservative factor of mass communication since; just like before, it perceives the society (the public) as an object in need of various influences, and mass media as an instrument for exerting such influence” (Manaev 1966, 38). On this basis, it was believed that only free enterprise and genuine privatisation could be a real mechanism of media autonomisation. Sparks (1998) has reformulated this as the “materialist” project for media change.

This model viewed wholesale privatisation a precondition for the media to be able to serve participatory communication and an instrument of creating civil society. However, this view is not necessarily shared by all students of media change. Becker (1995, 298), for example, has warned against the impact of the market on the media, pointing out that according to Habermas “the public sphere in capitalist society has long since become an instrument of power in the hands of political interest groups which have no democratic legitimacy.” Accordingly, this model must be seen as at least potentially contradictory, but it has nevertheless 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. This, then, was in reality to be a media order to be based on the libertarian press theory, pursuing the communicative value of freedom.

It has not been applied anywhere in Central and Eastern Europe. In Type B countries, this has been precluded by State policy to hold on to media ownership (especially in broadcasting) for as long as possible, while at the same time developing hybrid State-private forms of ownership, also in the ostensibly privatised print media sector. In Type A countries, creation of public service broadcasting (for all its shortcomings) has been another factor preventing the implementation of this model.

Media of Hegemony/Guardianship and “Co-operative” Journalism

All the above models were being discussed or developed further in the immediate post-transition period in the knowledge that meanwhile quite a different set of concepts was being advanced. Kovats (1994) notes that two “incompatible paradigms of the social functions of the media,” expressive of the views of two major political parties, clashed early on in Hungary:

1. The paradigm of service to national values, reconstruction and reinforcement of national identity, preservation of traditional values, support for the national culture. That paradigm assumed continued State control over the media, required to ensure pursuit of these goals;
2. The liberal paradigm favouring the complete independence and autonomy of the media and therefore complete withdrawal of the State from the media.

Brečka (1993, 7-8) states with startling honesty: "For a long time the Slovak government did not have any support from the press [so all the more] the government sought to win control over the electronic media." He adds that in post-communist countries "the function of the media as a fundamental element of the democratic system or as a counter-power or watchdog of democracy" is "less important." 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 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 politicised 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. As a result, they sought to delay transforming existing monopolistic government-controlled broadcasting systems into autonomous public service systems, and even more so did they resist 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, and have the right to use, radio and television to promote the process of reform, although more often than not this took the form of manipulation for propaganda and political purposes.² In Type B countries, this has extended to all media, with print media also subject to various forms of persecution and control.

This, then, was a plan for a media order based, in different proportions, on social responsibility, paternal, development communication and authoritarian press theories, serving the pursuit of the value of "order" imposed from above, performing the functions of hegemony or guardianship. Depending on whether this was a Type A or Type B country, the methods applied to retain influence over, or outright control of, the media differed widely. In both types of countries, the expectation of many politicians and public figures was that journalism would be "co-operative," i.e. guided by a sense of responsibility for the enormously important process of transformation and assist the government as the leader of the process, rather than exercise an impartial and critical watchdog role. That assistance was seen as including constant and friendly coverage of what the new leadership was doing.

Media legislation, the development (or otherwise) of public service broadcasting, and journalistic norms applied in practice provide three vantage points from which to study the process of choosing one of the above models for particular post-communist countries.

Assessing the Results of Media Change So Far

Two sentences are indicative of what the results of this assessment are likely to be. On the one hand, Sükösd (2000, 163) makes the point that in Hungary "even the media war was conducted legally in the sense that constitutional and legal

interpretations were invoked to legitimise the actions of the antagonists.” On the other, Russian human rights activist Aleksei Simonov (2001) describes the situation in that country as one in which “the law [is] under pressure from lawlessness.” That may be the most characteristic difference between Type A and Type B countries in terms of the institutional and cultural approach to transformation.

Below, we will examine how the four models identified above have fared in Type A and Type B countries. We will follow this with a general look the process we have identified (Jakubowicz, forthcoming) as indispensable for qualitative change of the media system in the process of post-communist transformation: de-monopolisation, autonomisation, decentralisation and democratisation of the media, and professionalisation of journalists

The Four Models

As noted above, the model of direct communicative democracy/change of social power relations never became the goal of media policy in either group of countries. In Type A countries, change of social power relations abolished the totalitarian/authoritarian system, but did not involve introduction of direct democracy or empowerment of civil society. Instability of rapid change and politicisation of all spheres of life, assisted additionally by the political culture of post-communism, favoured control of the media by political elites. In 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 (let alone direct communicative democracy), turning them into the voice either of the state, or of political or vested interests.

In the “beyond the Western European” model, all the elements of participatory communication were vitiated by the same factors. In Type A countries legal and formal guarantees of media independence are largely in place, but “media wars” have continued. Public media are subject to politicisation and commercialisation. Nascent civic media, where they have been created, are misconstrued and probably doomed to failure.³ This is all the more true in Type B countries.

Wholesale media privatisation never became goal of media policy in either group of countries. In Type A countries, existing private media are usually capable of sustaining themselves on the market, though the political involvement or partisanship of many private media shows that the hope that private ownership leads to political independence was unfounded. In Type B countries this project never had a chance due to lack of political culture required for acceptance of media independence and continued state control of the media, resulting in continuation of state broadcasting and emergence of hybrid forms of media ownership, directly or indirectly involving the state in ownership of ostensibly private media outlets (Manaev 1995). Other factors in Type B countries are an underdeveloped economy and advertising market preventing the financial success and independence of those private media which rely solely on sales and the market for all of their financing; inadequate separation of powers; political capitalism; demoralisation of journalists by poverty, ubiquitous corruption, political and other control of the media and often the need to sell their services to the highest bidder (Pankin 1999; Koltsova 2001).

The media model characteristic of the present stage of transformation is a combination of the Western European model and that of media of hegemony/guardianship and “co-operative” journalism. 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 former, while Type B countries retain more of the latter model. Though originally political leaderships in both countries displayed similar instincts as regards continued control of, or influence on the media, the differences have resulted from the fact that in Type A countries:

- The Western legal and institutional framework have been transplanted more fully and effectively;
- The legal framework and courts protect media independence and generally the rule of law is more firmly based (Type B countries may have laws declaring media freedom, but then use a variety of formal and informal means to persecute or cow independent media, ranging from tax inspections, to selective power cuts, to murder of journalists);
- Development of advertising market makes successful media financially, and generally, independent, due also to much greater involvement of foreign capital and media (though they may not shy away from deals with local politicians to further their commercial objectives, their media generally keep clear in their content of direct involvement in political controversies; cf. Sparks 1999) there is much stronger resistance from media and public opinion to government control of the media; public support for the media's watchdog role encourages an evolution in this direction.

If we take Russia as an example of Type B countries, Ivan Zassoursky (2001; cf. McNair 2000; Mickiewicz 2000) has pointed out that in 2000 the country had an instrumental media model (as opposed to the "Fourth Estate" independent media model of 1991-1995), with journalists playing no role of importance on television (though their role was somewhat stronger in the press and the Internet), and faced little prospect of real independence in a centralised political system, based on law enforcement agencies and army, with a very weak opposition. Zassoursky mentions Gusinsky's Media-Most empire, the alternative press and an emerging Internet counterculture as "opposition" to the prevailing media model, but since then Media-Most has, of course, been prevented from playing that role. To supplement this picture, we might draw on the *Freedom of Speech Audit* (2000), carried out by a number of NGOs, and led by the Union of Journalists of Russia, which has identified the simultaneous and concurrent existence of a number of "media models." The conclusion of the Audit is that not a single region yet enjoys favourable conditions for the development of true freedom of mass information. It may nonetheless be considered a positive sign that 32 regions (e.g. Murmansk Region, Altai Territory), containing over one third of the Russian population, were found to be in a process of transition to the market model which provides the closest approximation to press freedom. However, the tension generated between government and the media, together with the relative openness of the market model, means that the most dramatic instances of media repression (violence, intimidation, and arbitrary closure of media outlets) are often reported from regions of this type.

Judging by the Glasnost Defence Foundation report on "media performance-related violations in Russian Federation in 1999" (Yefremeva and Ratinov n.d.), the extent of the authorities' formal and informal control over every aspect of the media's operation in most of Russia's regions comes very close to the features of the centralised command system under the communist system.

The Five Processes

We mentioned above that de-monopolisation, autonomisation, decentralisation and democratisation of the media, and professionalisation of journalists are required as a minimum for qualitative change in the media system, compared to the communist period. According to Splichal (2000; 2001), the processes which are actually taking place are as follows: (1) renationalisation, (2) italianisation or “cross-fertilisation,” (3) denationalisation and privatisation, (4) commercialisation, (5) inter- and transnationalisation, and (6) ideological exclusivism.

Splichal describes them as “imitative tendencies” and clusters them into two broader groups: those imitating external environment, primarily Western Europe and the USA (2-5), and those imitating the past (1 and 6). This concept of imitation, as used by Splichal, merits closer attention. Should it be understood as deliberate *copying* of existing or past arrangements (as is indeed the case when EU candidate countries harmonise 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? This is a question of crucial importance, because the answer would offer a key to understanding post-communist transformation. 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 realised. Perhaps this is what Elena Vartanova (2001) means when she says that Russian media are not Soviet: “one cannot deny that many similarities between the Russian media and stable foreign media markets have appeared. Today, the present Russian newspaper system resembles much more that of the USA or Germany than the Soviet one.”

Šmid (1999) points 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 privatisation, as well as inadequate development of market economy (see above) deprived many media of an economic base and left them at the mercy of whoever was 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 demonopolisation which may be the primary process in Type B countries), also globalisation, commercialisation and commodification of the media (see e.g. Gulyas 1998). Market mechanisms are also affecting Central and Eastern European media in much the same way as in Western Europe and elsewhere.

De-monopolisation. Demonopolisation is, of course, a fact – a fundamental change, compared to the communist period. While in different countries demonopolisation is not full (e.g. national state broadcasters may have no private

competitors operating at the same level), the old dependence on one source of information is gone. Of course, this does not mean that market-driven re-monopolisation, or oligopolisation of the media is not happening. Few Central and Eastern European (or indeed West European) countries are well protected (in legal terms) against media concentration, and with globalisation and technological change this is practically impossible to achieve.

Autonomisation. Autonomisation, or – as Alexander (1981, *passim*) calls it – “differentiation” of the media (whereby they become “structurally free of directly inhibiting economic, political, solidary, and cultural entanglements,” and are no longer “adjuncts to parties, classes, regions, and religious groups”) is far from complete, and will never be complete. There are, it has to be admitted today, two reasons for this. One is the special feature of the post-communist period. The other is the fact that complete and clinical media autonomy is an extremely rare phenomenon, and was never going to be attainable.

Formal guarantees of media independence have of course been created. Despite many and serious reservations concerning various aspects of media legislation, Type A countries have, on the whole, developed a regulatory system which, though it may be incomplete, roughly corresponds to standards set in the European Convention on Human Rights, while at the same time preserving very little of the original dissident dream of direct participant communicative democracy. This applies especially to EU-candidate countries. In Type B countries, the quality of legislation in terms of media autonomy and a democratic media system is much more patchy and incomplete.

However, safeguards of media independence are often weakened by inadequate respect for the law and the strong impact of political and economic actors on the media. First, there is what Splichal (2001) calls “re-nationalisation” of public service media, i.e. forms of direct State involvement in, and influence on, their operation. As a result, public service broadcasting is so far generally seen as failing to deliver on its promise of independence, political impartiality, of serving as a mainstay of the public sphere, and of delivering diverse and pluralistic content of high quality (see also Ociepka 2000; 2001; Seres 2001).

Another process to be considered in this context is what Splichal (1994) used to call “Italianisation of the media,” and what he now (Splichal 2001) calls “cross-fertilisation,” a process 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, which blurs political, commercial and professional interests and dissolves the borders between the state, economy and civil society. This, together with the inadequate development of civil society as a countervailing force, has led to the development of a media system traditionally associated with Italy, in which (1) the media are under strong state control; (2) the degree of media partisanship is strong; (3) there is a strong degree of integration of media and political elites; and (4) there is no consolidated and shared professional ethic among media practitioners (see *Money, Power and Standards* 1999).

Privatisation and commercialisation also affect media and journalistic autonomy, subordinating media performance to market requirements (see Koltsova 2001 for an analysis of this on the Russian example). Central and Eastern Europe has devel-

oped a kind of “paternalist commercialism” (Splichal 2000, 16), with the State often acting as both a political and economic actor.

New political elites 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 (Trionfi 2001). In many cases, relatively “liberal” provisions of early laws were later revised, or revisions were attempted, to introduce a greater measure of political control.

Decentralisation. Given the monocentric nature of the previous media system, its decentralisation is a major process of change. This was achieved, especially in the first period after transition. Today, two processes may be observed. In some countries, as in Russia, there is an attempt to re-centralise media control and to “re-nationalise” them (e.g. by forcing them to re-register including State organs among their founders, and squeezing out, or closing those that refuse to do that). Elsewhere, market mechanisms are promoting media concentration, with local and regional media becoming part of chains, finding their role and capacity to cover the news reduced to just the local level, with other editorial functions concentrated at the regional or national level.

Democratisation. At one level, democratisation of the media is promoted by their demonopolisation and decentralisation. At another, it is oriented to making the media themselves, their ownership, management and content, more democratic and socially representatives. We are concerned here with the latter meaning of the term. In only 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 organisations and to ensure pluralism of content. Everywhere else, most of the main decisions are left firmly in the hands of power centres. 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. These broadcasters must still in most cases be seen as a direct extension of the government of the day, designed to perform the old function of its “transmission belt” to the masses. Hence arises the frequent practice of calling them “parliamentary” rather than public broadcasters.

Financial assistance for the media exists, but only in Type B countries, where it is practised for two reasons: lack of a market economy prevents the development of advertising capable of sustaining the media, and governments wish to have this instrument to exert control over the media. Media funding dedicated to remedying market failure and promoting pluralism of the media is rare.

Professionalisation of journalists. Professionalisation of broadcasters and journalists in general has been seen as an important element of the process of media

change, both in the sense of raising journalistic skills and of “collective professionalisation,” whereby a profession develops a service ideal and becomes an autonomous group serving the public and not the authorities or some ideology (see Školkay 1998; 2001, for a review of some of the concepts of professionalisation of journalists). Journalists, it was assumed, must redefine themselves from propaganda tools to providers of competently collected and written information and non-partisan, impartial interpreters of social reality.

Just as press theories, so too normative concepts of journalistic performance operate at two levels: the ideal and the real, and one may have little in common with the other. These concepts are strongly influenced by the traditions, experience of, and goals pursued by, Central and Eastern European journalists. In practice, whatever lip service is paid to the ideal, in practice the view of journalism as politics conducted by other means dies hard:

Common in Europe is the concept of the active or participant journalist, the journalist who sees himself as someone who wants to influence politics and audiences according to his political beliefs. This sense is even stronger in Eastern Europe, where journalists are closer to artists and writers, and many poets and writers contribute regularly to daily publications. Together with the journalists, they feel a sort of messianic vocation. They want to become a mouthpiece for the people.⁴

That, let us add, is a reflection of the traditional role of the intelligentsia in Central and Eastern European countries. This results in a type of journalism that is conviction-driven. By subordinating their work to promoting social and political change, journalists must necessarily opt for a partisan, advocacy-oriented and campaigning style of writing, bordering at times on propaganda. The same has been found to be the case in many other countries: Romania (Coman 1994, 35), Lithuania (Lukošiunas and Bartaševičius 1993, 261), Poland (Żakowski 1996), etc. Media and journalists are most likely to be mere mouthpieces of whoever owns or controls particular media outlets, speaking for their political or corporate masters (see e.g. Dunn n.d.; Pankin 1998, McCormack 1999; McNair 2000).

Accordingly, real normative concepts of journalism combined a didactic journalistic norm, leadership and guardianship/stewardship roles vis-à-vis the audience, a special form of the social responsibility paradigm, a critical/dialectical role in society, assigning to the audience mostly the roles of “pupils,” citizens, partisans and followers.

Where there are only “latent” markets, which generate little advertising, as in the entire former Soviet Union, the journalists often receive, in addition to their meagre salaries, kickbacks from whoever is willing to pay for their services (Pankin 1998; 1999; Koltsova 2001). Of course, corrupt practices affecting journalistic news coverage and comment are by no means limited to former CIS countries alone (see for example Hiebert 1999). Nevertheless, as shown by the situation in a number of countries, the situation may be beginning to change. Poland has seen a welcome development of investigative journalism, capable of exerting great impact on the behaviour of the government and of politicians. In Estonia, a generational change among journalists has contributed to wider adoption of the standards of impartiality and professionalism (Lauk 2000). Czech television journalists have fought a largely successful battle for “depoliticisation” of Czech public television.

Conclusion: Part of the Problem

Tensions surrounding media change in Central and Eastern Europe stem primarily from two sources: the difference between the idealised alternative normative model of media democratisation developed by the dissidents in the 1980s and in the first flush of euphoria following the collapse of the communist system in the early 1990s and the reality which set in afterwards; the difference between public expectations of the media and the actual patterns of their performance, resulting from both legal and institutional models (especially as relates to state or public broadcast media) developed on the basis of regulation and media and journalistic performance. The gap between theory and practice has turned the media into one of the many yet unsolved problems of transition, indeed “a part of the problem, not part of the solution” (Mondak, forthcoming).

If the media are indeed “part of the problem” in Central and Eastern Europe, this is mainly because there is no real agreement between the political class, the media and the general public concerning some aspects of media definitions, and as a consequence concerning normative media theory and the media regulatory regime. Public opinion measures media performance using both the idealised image once created by the dissidents, and the over-optimistic images of media performance independence and non-partisanship, as well as of journalistic objectivity and high professional standards in mature democracies coming from the West. Curran and Park (2000, 14) explain 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” – which does not seem to be much removed from what happens, though perhaps by other means, in Central and Eastern Europe (see also other chapters in this book, including especially the one by Mancini, 2000, for a comparison of those images with reality). And because of the resulting confusion, the real patterns of media operation fail to satisfy just about everyone.

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 “Western model” was expected to bring an answer to the ills of the communist media model, then the problem was with the naiveté of those who held this view, and not with the Western media whose inner logic and true nature they failed to understand.

Differences between Type A and Type B countries in the media field are of degree, rather than kind. Though patterns of media performance vary considerably, there is no qualitative difference in approach to the media between the former the two types of countries, except that in the former “media wars” are fought largely within the rule of law and the newly-created/transplanted institutions, while in Type B countries – regardless of all laws and institutions.

Notes:

1. In an earlier paper, I described the "fallacy of the mistaken historical period" as based on the assumption "that attitudes to communication and communication needs characteristic of times of strife and dissent are also prevalent at other times – and proceeding from there to build concepts of, and strategies supposed to lead to, democratisation of social communication. These are less supported by needs and desires actually felt by most people in this respect than might be assumed by a supporter of the cause" (Jakubowicz 1993, 43).
2. Hankiss (1994, 293-294) makes an important point which helps explain the grim determination with which the "media wars" have been fought in Central and Eastern Europe: "Present day events and developments are questions of life and death for each individual, family, group and class in these societies; it is being decided in these months and years who will be the winners and who will be the losers in the next decades; who will profit from, and who will lose by the transition to a new social and economic model; whose children will be poor and whose will be rich; who will belong to the propertied classes and who will be the have-nots. Too much is at stake." The same can be said of the political class: early on in the life of the new political system, they had everything to gain or lose in terms of their role in the country's life. A great deal was at stake.
3. In 2001, the Polish Parliament adopted an amendment to the Broadcasting Act, introducing the concept of a "social" (civic) broadcaster, defined as one "whose programming promotes education and proper upbringing, engages in charity, respects the Christian system of values on the basis of the universal ethical principles, and is dedicated to strengthening national identity." Such broadcasters may not carry advertising or sponsored programming.
4. Janos Horvath, "The East European Journalist," cited in Gross 1996, 111; for a similar comment, see Vdovin 1995, 11; see also Jakubowicz 1992; 1997a.

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