

Caught in the Middle: Central and Eastern European Journalism at a Crossroads

A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance

By Ellen Hume

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The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), a project of the National Endowment for Democracy, aims to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of media assistance programs by providing information, building networks, conducting research, and highlighting the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies around the world. An important aspect of CIMA's work is to research ways to attract additional U.S. private sector interest in and support for international media development.

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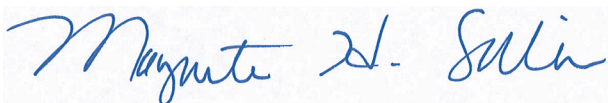
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Preface

The Center for International Media Assistance is pleased to publish *Caught in the Middle: Central and Eastern European Journalism at a Crossroads*, a thought-provoking paper that we hope will stimulate a lively and sustained discussion among media assistance practitioners. The purpose of this report is to examine the state of independent news media in Central and Eastern Europe 20 years after the collapse of communism and the beginning media development efforts by Western organizations in the region.

CIMA is grateful to Ellen Hume, a veteran journalist and an expert on international media development with experience in Central and Eastern Europe as well as other regions of the world, for her research and insights on this topic. Her paper lends itself to analysis and discussion. It represents the personal views of the author and should be of interest to a wide range of media assistance advocates. We invite you to read the report, think about the ideas, and share your thoughts by commenting on the report on CIMA's Web site (<http://cima.ned.org/publications>) or by e-mailing CIMA@ned.org with "Crossroads" in the subject line.



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Executive Summary

Journalists in Central and Eastern Europe are struggling to hold on to the gains they made in the first two decades after communism. Now the momentum is going the other way as more autocratic leaders find ways to manage or discredit the independent news media. Ethical journalists in this region face a triple threat: a backsliding against the 1990s democratic reforms, a global Internet-driven erosion of the media business model, and the continuing world economic crisis that is exposing the fragility of democratic institutions.

The media are pluralistic in Central and Eastern Europe, a major improvement from the lockstep pre-1989 propaganda of the Communist regimes. As a “technology of freedom,”¹ the Internet creates more opportunities for diverse, democratic, and horizontal flows of information. As long as websites enjoy a low threshold of investment and few regulations, they can be havens for free speech and accountability journalism.

But the region lags behind the more developed democracies in Internet use, even as it outpaces the countries of the former Soviet Union. Few websites publish original news content; most are aggregators or social network sites. Investigative journalists still need the megaphone of mainstream media organizations to give investigative stories audience and impact. The Internet’s positive force is still unrealized in Central and Eastern Europe, because of limited access, the economic disruption it is creating for accountability journalism, and now, at least in Hungary, new government regulation. In some places, it is more the province of the far-right racist factions than the mainstream reformers.

Particularly as journalism transitions to new digital, mobile, and Internet formats, Central and Eastern European countries need to experiment with new business and usage models and find strong advocates for independent media. Instead, the current economic, political and social momentum is pushing journalists toward sensationalized and partisan tabloid content that does little to earn respect for accountability journalism or engage citizens about important issues. Some nationalistic governments are seeking to co-opt media independence in all of its forms. Some of the best independent journalists are being driven to work for quixotic websites with little audience and no money.

Media ownership is a paramount issue in the region, especially in Romania, where five oligarchs hold sway, with little interest in good journalism, and in Latvia, where the one strong daily paper has been sold, after 20 good years, to a politically ambitious local businessman. A pattern has developed in the region: The international media investors such as Rupert Murdoch and Ronald Lauder, who developed the new marketplace for private media after communism fell, are selling out to local entrepreneurs who are interested in harvesting the political potential of these now-established media venues.

European Union (EU) accession prompted a flurry of press freedom laws that remain on the books in most of these countries but are not workable without constant vigilance and activism.

Organizations like the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, the Latvian Open Society Institute, and the Romanian Center for Independent Journalism are holding their fingers in the dike but are not getting much help from either EU or other Western media developers, who are triaging their aid, moving to the hot zones in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Africa.

Public broadcasters, buffeted by political pressure and tabloid competition from private channels, are in a downward spiral, with declining audiences and budgets. Some scholars question their survival, but others hope that digitizing their channels will breathe new life into public media.

On the bright side, each country studied has pluralistic media options, and continues to produce investigative journalists of fierce integrity and great skill. *Gazeta Wyborcza* in Poland remains a strong newspaper and website, with quality journalism and respect throughout the region, even if Polish public television has become a tabloid mess. The Czech Republic still has some effective news organizations and an independent public television news division. Unlike during Communist times, or the still frozen autocracies to the East, journalists in Central and Eastern Europe are able to stay alive and out of jail while uncovering information and publishing it to hold the powerful accountable, even if it is only on a niche website to an elite audience. Such Web-based news organizations, like Latvia's *Ir.lv*, the Czech Republic's *Aktuálně.cz*, and Hungary's, www.hirszerzo.hu and *oknyomozó.hu*, are worth watching.

Finally, it is clear that the media developers contributed a lot, and learned a lot, but moved away from Central and Eastern Europe too soon. They should consider new initiatives both regionally and nationally, to support:

- Investigative journalism projects with genuine public importance and ethical boundaries.
- Journalism associations that stress professionalism and counteract the political elites' dismissal of journalism's value.
- Media criticism publications that hold journalists, owners, and politicians accountable to the public.
- Media literacy training, as well as a larger curriculum that stresses the rights and obligations of citizens in a democracy.

Citizen journalism, mobile communications technology, and social networks carry much hope, and often journalists who are laid off or who leave in protest over political interference migrate to independent news websites. But like nearly everywhere else, their value in sustaining independent accountability journalism remains uncertain. Their future will depend not only on finding new forms of economic support, but on finding new political support from publics that believe in and are willing to stand up for independent watchdog media. Until these two factors strengthen, the best journalists in Central and Eastern Europe remain caught—"wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other struggling to be born."²

Methodology

How are the Central and Eastern Europe region's news media fulfilling their independent, watchdog functions today, 20 years after the fall of communism?

To answer this question, the author looked at the region as a whole and also more deeply at five of the post-Communist EU countries that received this early Western media development aid and investment: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, and Romania. The analysis is based on the most recently available statistics and research about each country and the region; media systems and political science theory; and interviews with journalists, scholars, political officials, and political analysts. It relies on a number of key sources, particularly Marius Dragomir's ongoing analyses in *Transitions Online*, the Open Society Foundations's 2009 country reports on the impact of the economic downturn on independent media³ and Karol Jakubowicz and Miklós Sükösd, Eds. *Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Change in a Global Perspective*.⁴

This analysis focuses on five factors: 1) the **structure** of the news media, including diversity, ownership, and funding, 2) the **legal and policy** environment, 3) the **professionalism** and ethics of journalism practice, 4) the **political culture** that is necessary to sustain independent news media doing accountability journalism, and 5) emerging **new Internet and digital venues** for independent journalism, as well as portable, networked technologies.

The trend line from 1989 to 2009 is not one smooth trajectory up or down for independent media development in this region. In some cases there were promising ventures in the first decade that were curtailed in the next decade by non-transparent new owners, economic disruptions and/or new political leadership that retreated from earlier democratic reforms. When one factor improves—as in the Romanian legislature's response to criminal libel laws—another retreats, as in Hungary's new concentration of media power in the center-right ruling party. The global economic crisis and the technology-fueled collapse of old media business models have had profound effects in the region.

Thus this report cannot measure the efficacy of specific media development efforts during the post-Communist era, which might have had a better impact but for those external factors. Instead, this study offers some history, a current snapshot of this constantly changing landscape, and analysis about why the news media are in their current state. It offers some observations about each country studied and about the region as a whole and suggestions about the development efforts and what it takes to sustain independent accountability media in post-Communist societies.⁵

Introduction

“Without development of strong independent media, efforts to promote democratization will fail.”⁶

After Soviet communism lost its grip on Central and Eastern Europe in 1989-91, societies there were caught up in changes that were “perhaps of unprecedented magnitude and complexity in modern world history,” concluded scholars Karol Jakubowicz and Miklós Sükösd in 2008. “At the beginning of the post-Communist transformation, most publics did not have much, or indeed any, experience of democracy,” they noted.⁷

Recognizing the importance of the media in bringing about democratic changes, intensive Western democracy aid poured in to help create independent media in the region. Americans mobilized some \$600 million worth of philanthropic support over the next decade through the U.S. State Department and universities and non-governmental organizations including the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Open Society Institute (OSI), International Center for Journalists (ICFJ)⁸, the Freedom Forum, Internews, and the Independent Journalism Foundation. The U.S. government created the International Media Fund, run by USIA official Marvin Stone, with money from the government’s South East European Development (SEED) program. Money and trainers—often professional U.S. reporters and editors—showed up in virtually every capital city to spread the gospel of independent, accountability journalism.⁹

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At the same time, international investors, especially Switzerland’s Ringier AG, Germany’s Axel Springer AG, Sweden’s Bonnier Magazine Group, and the United States’ Ronald Lauder and Rupert Murdoch, worked with local entrepreneurs to create the for-profit media market in the region. Sometimes they were spectacularly successful, as with Cox Newspapers’ investment in Agora Publishing in Poland.¹⁰ But other times their local media partners left them in the lurch, essentially taking over the local operations and refusing to share profits with their foreign partners—as happened, for example, with Lauder’s Central European Media Enterprises (CME) investment in TV Nova in the Czech Republic.¹¹ And in still other cases, the lucrative media licenses were simply taken over by politically connected individuals, in opaque transactions that made them richer and more powerful.

During this first decade of freedom, the requirement that newspapers be licensed was abolished throughout the region, and their ownership was both privatized and pluralized. State broadcasters were converted into “public service” media with funding from license fees or

government grants, and privately owned commercial broadcasting flooded the airwaves with unfiltered news and popular culture.

During the second decade of freedom, from 1999-2009, many Central and Eastern European countries were deemed to have “graduated” as Westernized market economies and democracies. The formerly Communist countries of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Slovakia joined the European Union, and the media development aid shifted elsewhere. Denmark’s highly regarded Baltic Media Center closed for lack of funding, as did U.S.-backed independent media centers in Prague and Bratislava. The herd of media missionaries turned east and south to the new development hot spots in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. IREX’s Media Sustainability Index for Europe and Eurasia 2010 did not even include these formerly Communist Central and Eastern European EU countries, except for Bulgaria and Romania.¹²

Findings

Scholars conclude that journalists have over these two decades helped create major democratic changes in the region.¹³ In each country, courageous and idealistic journalists continue to emerge, seeking creative ways to hold the powerful accountable. Investigative reporting websites such as Latvia’s *IR.lv* and Hungary’s *oknyomozó.hu* are sprouting up throughout the region, offering new venues for journalists trying to maintain their independence. The newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* in Poland, supported early on by Western loans and investors as well as a grant from the NED, remains a bright spot for independent investigative reporting.¹⁴ The Romanian parliament has held firm against efforts by the courts to impose onerous criminal libel laws to stifle the free press. Czech public television has worked to fend off political interference, thanks to vocal support from Czech citizens.

The pluralism of media outlets in the region is “the finest result of post-Communist media freedoms, and their ultimate sustainer,” concluded Miklós Haraszti in the spring of 2010, as he was leaving after six years as official representative on freedom of the media for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Overall, the media in all five countries highlighted in this report are basically pluralistic, offering a variety of media options and diverse content to the public, Haraszti said.¹⁵

Official censorship is rare¹⁶ and violence against journalists is not a serious problem in these countries, unlike in Russia, the former Soviet states, or some of the nearby Balkan countries. EU membership helped strengthen independent media policies, freedom of information, and

Country	Population (2010 est.) ¹	GDP per capita (2009 est.) ²	Literacy Rate ³	Freedom House Score ⁴	Freedom House World Ranking	RSF Score ⁵	RSF World Ranking
Czech Republic	10,201,707	\$24,900	99%	18 (Free)	25	5.00	24
Hungary	9,992,339	\$18,800	99.4%	21 (Free)	35	5.50	25
Latvia	2,217,969	\$14,400	99.7%	22 (Free)	40	3.00	13
Poland	38,463,689	\$17,900	99.8%	24 (Free)	51	9.50	37
Romania	21,959,278	\$11,500	97.3%	44 (Partly Free)	94	12.50	50

1) Information provided by CIA’s World Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>.

2) Information provided by CIA’s World Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>.

3) Information provided by CIA’s World Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>.

4) Freedom of the Press Index 2008. Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=442&year=2008>.

5) Press Freedom Index 2009, Reporters Without Borders, <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2009,1001.html>.

free speech laws in each country. The Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights consistently overrules imprisonment for press offenses, regarding it as a disproportionate sanction that damages free discussion in a society.¹⁷

Before the global financial crash of 2008, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Latvia had developed “diverse markets of sturdy media with strong self-regulation” and, in the case of the Czech Republic, “no apparent political influences,” according to an Open Society Institute report. While the media sector in Romania was still “patchy,” the OSI team concluded that accountability journalism was present in all of the other four countries. They added the caution that in Latvia, it “mostly relied on one strong, independent media outlet.”¹⁸

Peter Bajomi-Lazar of Oxford University concluded in a forthcoming book that EU member countries from Central and Eastern Europe will not return to the old-school political propaganda and intimidation tactics of old, which are still common in the former Soviet countries to the east: “Rather than oppressing independent media outlets, political elites attempt to manipulate them. In particular, they seek to influence journalists’ perception of newsworthiness by planning political communication and action in such a way that their public occurrences fit news criteria ... rather than suppressing critical voices and outlets, political elites attempt to enhance their own positive coverage.”¹⁹

Disappointments

Even before the economic crash, aspects of this media landscape were disappointing to many who invested so much to build democratic institutions here. On Freedom House's press freedom map, one sees the colors change from 2000 to today as if a glacier of media repression were creeping into Central Europe from the Russian east. In June 2009, Mark Thompson of OSI stressed concern about the quality of production and re-politicization of media.²⁰

The independent press rises or falls within a nation's larger cultural, legal, and economic environment. It seems that the economic crisis that began in 2008 exposed the fragility of democratic institutions and added to existing political backlash against the 1990 democratic reforms. The last decade's global erosion of the business model for journalism, caused by digital and Internet-enabled new media, is the final part of a triple threat against journalists in this region.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, independent media "were repeatedly challenged in all countries of the region. From Poland to Albania and from the Czech Republic to Russia, practically all of the new political elites exerted pressure on the media in an attempt to propagate their policies and to suppress critical voices," wrote Peter Bajomi-Lazar in 2008. "Now a wide range of sources describe, unanimously, a deficit of media freedom in the countries of the region."²¹

Thus it would be incorrect to conclude that the independent media here are struggling *only* because the world economic crisis has created a more challenging political and economic environment. While policy-makers worked before accession to conform with EU media policy rules, there was also an undercurrent of public disenchantment and political retrenchment. This was broader than simply the press sector. Events in the second decade of freedom reflected this see-saw between freedom and control over the media, in several countries:

- In Poland, a coalition of conservative and right-wing parties was elected in 2005 with policies that raised international concern about the independence of such key democratic institutions as the judiciary and the media.²²
- In Slovakia, a coalition came to power in 2006, including an extreme right-wing, nationalist, and anti-minority group led by Ján Slota; prime minister Robert Fico labeled the attitude of the Slovak media toward the government as "the biggest problem of Slovak politics"²³ and attacked journalists as "rats" and "scorpions." Journalists had to live under a draconian "right of reply" law for four years, until a new government in 2010 promised to roll it back.²⁴

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- Hungary’s April 2010 elections swept the center-right Fidesz party of Viktor Orbán back into office with a two-thirds majority, enabling his supporters to rewrite the constitution. They started with a controversial new media law, including one-party control over the public media and media regulation.²⁵ Hungary’s far-right nationalist, anti-minority Jobbik party gained influence as well, winning seats in Parliament thanks in part to a grass-roots campaign mobilizing youth on mobile and Internet social networks.
- Also in the spring of 2010, the “strong, independent media outlet” OSI referred to in Latvia—the newspaper *Diena*, along with its website, *Diena.lv*—was sold to politically engaged new ownership, and its key journalists resigned in protest.
- Minorities continue to struggle for fair access and representation. For example, throughout the region, Roma are systematically excluded from public broadcasting, and two-thirds of news coverage is negative and stereotypical, according to a Romanian government study.²⁶

The scope and longevity of these problems remains uncertain. “There are many signs of tension and exhaustion (and also of maturation, progress and hope) as a result of multiple shocks or traumas that post-Communist societies suffered during the transformation,” concluded Jakubowicz and Sükösd. These included: the discovery that the removal of communism did not solve all their problems, but rather created new ones; that new leaders could fall prey to corruption and internecine battles; that capitalism had its weaknesses; and that European unification could be tedious and even humiliating, “instead of the joyful embrace of long-lost brothers,” Jakubowicz observed.²⁷

What the U.S. media developers hoped for was never defined with metric precision, but in general they promoted an independent media marketplace, supporting fact-based journalism that allowed journalists to expose wrongdoing by the powerful, while allowing a plurality of perspectives to be expressed. They sought protections for free speech, including accountability journalism that might hold political and business elites accountable. This watchdog neutrality—often called by the somewhat discredited term “objectivity”—was different from traditional European journalism, which often favored the grace of the argument over the alignment of verified facts and expected a media organization’s news to be partisan.

Estonian journalism professor Epp Lauk concluded that the expectations that post-Communist countries would follow the Anglo-American journalism paradigm “have not come true” for several reasons: In the United States, the law of freedom of the press, developed over 200 years, has been respected by power elites and the public. Post-Communist development has lasted only two decades, and the Western “liberal” model of fact-based, impartial journalism competes with other styles of journalism—both old and new—for the public’s attention. These countries are “in permanent flux, simultaneously fighting legacies of the past and searching for successful ways of building up the states based on the rule of law, as well as civil societies.”²⁸

Czech and Polish journalists emphasized that even the outpouring of international media development assistance could not make up for the inexperience of the young journalists rising quickly to replace the old apparatchiks. These 20-something reporters and editors lacked a mentor generation to help them navigate their new powers and responsibilities as a free press. Furthermore, there has been little self-regulation or discussion of journalism quality in Central and Eastern Europe, Lauk found. Foreign investment helped create technological and economic progress, but it “did not significantly support the development of journalism professionalism” and instead contributed to homogenization and commercialization. She speculated that in the future, altruistic journalism developers might have to take “very different directions” to accommodate the different cultures of the countries they are trying to help. Digitization may provide the unifying influence for journalists that the Anglo-American model failed to be, she suggested, not because of global standards about journalism and technology, but because of the Internet’s ubiquity and speed.²⁹

The Media Marketplace

Some journalists were discouraged to find that they were simply exchanging one merciless master—the state—for another, the private owner. The international journalism standard, whether the story is honest, accurate, and fair,³⁰ has been particularly hard to achieve when media bosses simply want to turn a profit or gain political power. While the political realm is “no longer restricting the free flow of information in Central and Eastern Europe,” political bias is endemic, and market concentration is a growing problem. This is creating “negative effects on the freedom and diversity of information in the public sphere,” Croatian scholars Zrinjka Peruško and Helena Popović concluded.³¹

Today ownership is an issue virtually everywhere; it is particularly extreme in Romania, whose predominant media owners include local businessmen openly connected to criminal activities.³² While the private media industries in Western European countries developed indigenously over decades, foreign investors now dominate the post-Communist media markets in Central and Eastern Europe.³³ Throughout the region, the business-driven tabloid trend seems relentlessly to be dragging down journalism quality and with it, the public credibility needed to fend off political attacks. The increased competition spawned by the new technologies has led some traditional news purveyors to “go tabloid”—increasing coverage of celebrity gossip, bizarre crime, and sex scandals to try to retain their mass audience. This coverage is popular but it crowds out serious, less titillating stories that describe government workings and lay out a range of public choices.

Throughout the region, the business-driven tabloid trend seems relentlessly to be dragging down journalism quality and with it, the public credibility needed to fend off political attacks.

Whether foreign or domestic, the owners seem to care more about finding what’s popular, rather than informing citizens fairly about what is important. “Dailies are in terrible shape. They are openly partisan in their reporting,” said Jiří Pehe, head of the New York University campus in Prague, of the newspapers in the Czech Republic, the country cited as perhaps the best success story in the region for its surprisingly independent public television.³⁴ “It is getting worse. There is no real public space. The media should be prominent in this, but the [print] media have been colonized by special interests,” Pehe said.³⁸

Indeed, scholar Colin Sparks observed that while media trainers attempted to create newspapers like the *New York Times* and broadcasters like the BBC, what emerged mostly were newspapers that were highly partisan, and broadcasters remained more aligned with the state than the people. There was significant continuity in personnel between the old regime and the new, and the shift to a market economy was a “highly political process.” Political connections were necessary to

win broadcast licenses and obtain newly privatized property that once belonged to the state. The media changed “from being one locus of power to being one of the stakes of power. The political revolutions were not necessarily social revolutions. In many cases, members of the old elite—the nomenklatura—retained their power.”³⁶

American and European media investors did not necessarily have the needs of democracy in mind when they moved into the broadcast spectrum to pick up their new private TV and radio licenses. Their snazzy content often beat out the boring, old-fashioned offerings from the quasi state-financed public service broadcasters. For example, Ronald Lauder’s creation of a new private TV Nova broadcaster in the Czech Republic was a commercial success, sweeping to the top of the ratings. But Czechs joked that the news was so sensational that you had to put a towel under the TV set to mop up the blood.

When a U.S. ambassador in Central Europe wanted to speak out at one point against the media in his host country, he was persuaded not to because he actually would be criticizing their American owners. “To them it wasn’t a country, it was a market,” concluded Ivan Krastev, chairman of the Center for Liberal Strategies in Sofia, Bulgaria.³⁷

While U.S. media developers focused almost entirely on the private sector, their European counterparts tried to support the quasi-privatized public broadcasters. Now, as both sectors struggle, the two donor groups are beginning to recognize the virtues of a more converged public-private sector model, according to a U.S. government media aid official.³⁸

Media analysts are concerned that with the exception of the Czech Republic, Central and Eastern European public broadcasters may be doomed to extinction. The economic crisis has governments slashing budgets for public broadcasters, as they try to compete with tabloid-oriented buccaneers in an oversaturated media market.³⁹ Slovak STV almost had to declare bankruptcy in early 2009, and Hungarian MTV had to withdraw from the 2009 Eurovision song contest because of financial difficulties. Its 2010 budget is down by more than 50 percent.⁴⁰

The region’s news media tend to “destroy the public space they opened up, by trivializing and personalizing,” concluded Angelika Wyka of Frankfurt University.⁴¹ The privately owned media describe Czech society as “a series of horrors” in which “nothing ever gets solved. We don’t even have the remnants of the old public sphere,” Pehe said.⁴² Radio stations remain more independent in most of these countries because they take a low percentage of the advertising dollars, Krastev noted. In Hungary, however, the most popular commercial radio stations have been subject to shady ownership deals associated with political loyalties.⁴³

“News media here are subject to the same problems as in the US, except they are more vulnerable,” concluded Sándor Orbán, executive director of the South East European Network for Professionalization of Media, an 18-member coalition, including media organizations from the EU states of Bulgaria, Slovenia, Hungary, and Romania. He said that early efforts to set up an appropriate legal framework for independent media in this region paid off, but reporting standards today remain “weak and deteriorating further.”⁴⁴

Orbán (no relation to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who is the sponsor of Hungary’s new media regulations) cites five disturbing trends:

- *Decline in journalistic standards.* This is getting worse due to the economic crisis in media generally, with the downsizing of news staffs and tabloidization of content. “This situation hinders investigative reporting in countries where corruption and the lack of transparency of the functioning of public institutions are key problems.”
- *Over-politicization of media.* News media in the region are rarely impartial, but rather are divided along political lines, often without the transparency of partisan media of Western Europe. “Facts and opinion are not separated, many media organizations have double standards, exercise self-censorship and favor specific parties of interest groups.” Public service broadcasters “are weak throughout the region, and thus are seldom capable of providing in-depth and unbiased information indispensable for citizens to make informed decisions.”⁴⁵
- *Economic pressure on media.* Non-transparent ownership and concentration into monopolies are increasing problems in the region. “Behind-the-scene deals determine the distribution/redistribution of television and radio frequencies, and faithful news organizations are often being sponsored through state-owned banks, government controlled foundations, and the advertisements of state companies.” In addition, the market size in these countries is limited, the audiences are fragmented, and the purchasing power of media consumers is relatively low, which make media companies financially vulnerable. “As a consequence, news outlets would seldom cover the wrongdoings of their advertisers or the media owner’s main business partners.”
- *Deteriorating labor relations in media.* A large number of journalists in post-Communist countries work “without proper contracts” as self-employed free-lancers, and there is a lack of solidarity or union protection within the profession. The 2008 financial crisis “severely hit the media, especially the struggling print publications” and has led to quantity rather than quality, journalism.
- *Inappropriate portrayal and underrepresentation of minorities.* Despite some improvements in the coverage of diversity issues in the mainstream media in some of these countries, “the stereotypical portrayal of minorities (ethnic, religious, sexual, gender) still dominates reporting, and these groups are underrepresented in the newsrooms, especially at the decision-making level.”⁴⁶

Citizen journalism and mobile, social networks carry much hope here, and often journalists who are laid off or who leave in protest over political interference migrate to independent news websites. But like everywhere else, their value in sustaining independent accountability journalism remains uncertain. Their future will depend not only on finding new forms of economic support, but on finding new political support from publics that believe in and are willing to stand up for independent watchdog media. Until these two factors strengthen, the best

journalists—especially in Central and Eastern Europe—seem caught, wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other struggling to be born.⁴⁷

“Journalists are neither trusted by the public nor liked by the government, so they fall between the cracks,” concluded media analyst Judith Vidal-Hall.⁴⁸

In 2003, as many of these countries prepared to join the European Union, scholars Miklós Sükösd and Peter Bajomi-Lazar identified what they called “major problem areas” for the media sector, including:

- Slow technological change
- Weak news competition
- Crisis of public service (formerly government) broadcasting
- Persisting political pressure on the media
- Weak professional performance of journalists
- Problematic access to the media for minorities
- Hate and nationalist speech
- Inadequate media markets⁴⁹

These problems remain today. They are compounded by the severe economic crisis that started in 2008 and crushed many media companies. The crisis continues to depress media advertising, which dropped 21 percent in 2009 and was expected at the beginning of the year to grow by only 2 percent in 2010. The worst off is expected to be the Romanian ad market, which suffered a 40 percent drop in 2009 and might drop 15 percent more in 2010.⁵⁰

Looking ahead in 2010, Haraszti and others are worried. “It is such a fragile business, media freedom. It is in grave danger, because the ideological war is over,” Haraszti said, thinking of both his native Hungary and the region as a whole. “The nice thing about the Cold War was those who wanted freedom had a progressive agenda. Repression was coming from the heart of the system. It was Orwellian. But today everything is wishy-washy. Capitalism is in, but ethic of journalism is not in with it.”⁵¹

Public Culture: The Communist Hangover

The samizdat press of the underground during Communism did lead directly to the creation of some post-Communist news media, including the most prominent success story in the region, *Gazeta Wyborcza* in Poland. *Gazeta*, the heart of what has become the large Agora media conglomerate, proved itself to be an independent watchdog, with editor Adam Michnik tipping his hat in the 1995 election to a candidate other than his old ally, the legendary anti-Communist Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa, and even daring to criticize the Polish Pope.⁵²

In Latvia, participation by Latvian-American journalist Pauls Raudseps and supportive ownership by the Swedish Bonnier family was part of the reason why *Diena* reflected the values of the *New York Times* and the BBC. After their celebrated newspaper changed hands to more political owners in 2009, he and other colleagues quit and created a weekly magazine and website to carry on this accountability news.

In other countries, the news media are still understood largely to be the organs of the political powers that be, rather than an independent watchdog sector. A Hungarian prize-winning reporter was chastised by political allies for turning investigative journalism skills on them, instead of focusing just on the opposition party. Yet voter reaction against corruption and lack of transparency was a major factor in Hungary's April 2010 elections.

Valuing the independent media as a social good took a back seat to establishing media as businesses or gaining control of media as political tools.

One-party democracies in post-Communist Europe know how to do three things, Jiří Pehe argues in a forthcoming book, *Democracy Without Democrats*: “criminalize the opposition, take over the media, and stay in power forever.” The Czechs “hit bottom” on their transition to democracy at the time of the twentieth anniversary of the Velvet Revolution in 2009, he said. “We are somewhere in the middle of this long trip.”⁵³

In former Communist countries, the ideals of “democracy” were more easily translated after 1989 into markets and consumerism than into civic rights and responsibilities. Valuing the independent media as a *social good* took a back seat to establishing media as *businesses* (the American model) or gaining control of media as *political tools* (the traditional Communist model).

The Communist societies where Western television was available before 1989 anticipated a prosperity that didn't materialize over the next 20 years, to the disappointment of many citizens.⁵⁴ Krastev, the Bulgarian political scientist, noted that in Central and Eastern Europe, the elites did well after communism fell, but the mainstream society was left to fend for itself.⁵⁵

Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini's influential 2004 analysis offered four criteria for analyzing media systems:

1. The development of media markets, particularly of a mass circulation press.
2. The extent to which the media system reflects the major political divisions in society.
3. The development of journalistic professionalism.
4. The degree and type of state intervention in the media.⁵⁶

With regard to criteria 1, 3, and 4, the Central and Eastern European countries in this study have faltered, to varying degrees, in sustainability of their media markets, the development of a journalistic profession, and fending off state political intervention. The chief success is criterion 2. The media systems typically do reflect the major political divisions in society (what Haraszti calls pluralism.) But this is not particularly satisfying, since they generally do not support a nonpartisan public space to discuss these differences or mediate facts. Thus few journalists are holding the powerful accountable without fear or favor. In this capacity, the Hallin-Mancini standards seem less than adequate for describing the actual goal of independent, accountability news media.⁵⁷

The fact that the Communists' state-controlled approach wasn't sustainable is easy to forget in hard economic times, and the memories of communism have been overshadowed by the obvious corruption and incompetence of some post-Communist governments. The continuing global economic crisis fuels public support for nationalism, often accompanied by more state-centered economic and political systems. In such a political environment, it has been easy for governments to treat the media as their rightful tools for establishing national pride and public order.

Another reason independent accountability media have had trouble getting established here is that under communism, government-directed institutions supplanted any authentic civil society, with forced communal activities. Political scientist Marc Morjé Howard argued that developing real civic institutions here is harder than creating such institutions in a society in which these functions were simply absent. "The new democratic institutions are neither rooted in, nor actively supported by, the larger population," he found.⁵⁸

The public in the post-Communist region has low expectations for civic engagement and actually wants to be freed of communal duties, Howard said. Thus they don't value some of the most important features of civil society: the role of grass-roots volunteers (the Communists forced "volunteerism" for the "good of the people"), civic leaders (they were in league with the government or, if they were dissidents, they were the first to be targeted for persecution), political compromise and cooperation among political foes (collusion between the opposing parties, to simply divide up the spoils, is an unhappy feature of post-Communist Central Europe).

Media Development Lessons Learned

The media themselves contributed to the weakness of the independent watchdog role in two important ways, one involving structure and the other involving journalism ethics and public culture:

1. Media organs (newspapers, television, and radio stations) were themselves among the first institutions to be transferred from state ownership to politically-connected or money-minded private owners without an independent journalism mission.
2. Owners, editors, and journalists failed to distinguish their watchdog work from partisanship and tabloid entertainment. With a few notable exceptions like *Gazeta Wyborcza* in Poland, they failed to create a new, independent media identity. Civic and media literacy were not added to the educational curriculum. Thus they did not win the loyalty of the public as a social good, but were seen—often correctly so—as the tools of the new oligarchs and political power elites. Sometimes the new owners were simply the old Communist powers in new capitalist suits. “What we are facing in Poland is the same as Hungary and other places,” said journalist Igor Janke. “Those people who had money in Poland, many of them had roots in the former [Communist] regime. At the very beginning, they had a much easier start than all the others. They had a huge influence in the banking system in the beginning of the 90s ... That’s the price we had to pay for getting out of communism in a peaceful way.” The election of Lech Kaczynski and the Law and Justice party was partly in response to this corruption, Janke said.⁵⁹

Media developers worked on many aspects of these problems, advancing commercial independent media policy and legislation, where many successes can be found. They worked with journalists to give them professional training, with mixed success since too often they failed to accommodate or overcome local cultures and realities, and through no fault of their own, failed to get owner and manager buy-in.

Simply training journalists—without winning the hearts and minds of their managers, owners, political leaders, and mass publics—was never going to be enough. Too often the training was “preaching to the choir.” The choir masters—media owners and political leaders—did not share the same tune.

In a related problem, media developers often tried to sell a U.S. “liberal” model of journalism—based on impartiality and facts—that went against the European traditions of commentary and partisanship, and which is increasingly disregarded even in the United States today. The U.S. emphasis on objectivity was not well-received in Poland, for example, because according to Jakubowicz, many journalists “still think that it is their duty to take sides in the many divisions within Polish society and promote the cause they support.” Romanian journalists being trained by Westerners also considered themselves an elite, whose essence was to convey not just facts, but their own opinions.⁶⁰

Media developers often did not know enough about their target communities and tended to underestimate the professional pride of their local colleagues in some countries. The Czech Republic had a lively free press between the two world wars. In Poland, there was a rich tradition of opposition journalism that continued throughout the Communist years, but “Western journalists decided to be good to us, assuming that we are people coming from the bush and it is necessary to enlighten us,” complained Polish journalist Wojciech Maziarski.⁶¹

The Baltic countries of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania came closest to embracing the Western model, since they had a journalism vacuum after communism fell. Non-Communist models of journalism found elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe did not survive World War II and the Cold War in the Baltics. “All the journalists perished and the profession of journalism ceased to exist” until new people were employed by the Soviets to create a new form of propaganda media for the state.⁶² In Estonia, the end of Soviet hegemony in the 1990s coincided with the arrival of a new generation of journalists, who were open to a different model, including the Western inverted pyramid style of writing taught by a University of Tartu (Estonia) teacher who had spent a half a year in the United States in the editorial office of *Newsweek*.⁶³

But the “liberal” (impartial, fact-based) journalism model promoted by media trainers was often undermined by owners and managers, including those from the same Western countries, scholar Epp Lauk found. Seeing a potential market of 450 million consumers in Central and Eastern Europe, Western European and Scandinavian media corporations moved in, controlling 85 percent of the media markets in the region by 2007. “There are also strong indications that aggressive commercial policies are being pursued at the expense of journalistic standards,” Lauk said, recalling Marius Dragomir’s story about a Czech media manager who said his Swiss boss’s creed was: “I don’t care what you write; give them sex, gore, scandal, whatever, but bring me profit.”⁶⁴

Media developers who came to help build the business side of the media sector faced a sustainability dilemma: Many markets were too small. Funders were “playing God” by deciding which of the too many new media efforts they would finance and which would be allowed to die, since the newly capitalist countries’ advertising sectors could not support them all. The marketplace never adequately replaced the government’s sponsorship for most media operations. Sometimes the media outlet they helped simply turned around and sold itself to a big foreign media chain.⁶⁵

The journalism trainers’ premise that quality news would provide a strong market position has failed to come true. The public in many of these countries—and in the Western countries as well—

Funders were “playing God” by deciding which of the too many new media efforts they would finance and which would be allowed to die, since the newly capitalist countries’ advertising sectors could not support them all.

was rarely, if ever, exposed to media literacy or civics education that described what role they needed to play as citizens in supporting an ethical, independent, watchdog media. Indeed, those who cared about the independence of journalism did not anticipate how much work it would take to establish this as part of the political culture of their country.

Longtime media trainer Persephone Miel of Internews said that the biggest oversight of media development was the failure to build lasting media institutions that would be powerful against attacks. After communism lost its grip, “people did speak freely but didn’t see it as something that would be under threat again, so they didn’t put energy into institutions. They didn’t teach that you had to form strong associations to fight back—unions. And we never reached the mass audience with that message either.”⁶⁶

“Regionally it is a downward slope in Eastern Europe. People are realizing we left too quickly,” said a U.S. official engaged with media development.⁶⁷ These countries were left floundering with corrupt ownership transfers, underdeveloped markets, and hangovers from Communist culture and practice. “The economic development was so fast everyone assumed that the media and civil liberties would be ok,” concluded another veteran U.S.-based media developer. “Democratic governance money seems to go away as soon as the economy is going OK.”⁶⁸

Media development donors now tend to be “opportunistic and go for the day’s sexy topic,” said director Ioana Avadani of the Romanian Center for Independent Journalism. Training journalists to cover Roma or environmental issues is better than nothing, but it is less effective than a more comprehensive approach, she said. “Media development cannot happen without an enabling environment and . . . good professionals. Therefore, a holistic approach would better serve the interest of the free media than a fragmented one.”⁶⁹

“How are liberal democratic institutions to be created when their systemic make-up is dependent on the cultures that do not allow them to function in a democratic, liberal way?” asked Peter Gross of the University of Tennessee in his analysis of Romanian media.⁷⁰

Elisa Tinsley, director of the Knight International Journalism Fellowships, told the story of how in 2009, two newspaper journalists from Poland asked for a Knight fellow to be sent from the United States to teach Poles skills in independent reporting and media management. Tinsley explained that ICFJ wouldn’t be sending a fellow to Poland because “you graduated, you don’t need us.” The Polish journalists “laughed heartily,” she said.⁷¹

EU Accession

“The prospect of joining the European Union provided motivation for reform in former Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The impact of the European Court of Human Rights case law on legal reform in Council of Europe member countries is also widely recognized,” concluded CIMA’s 2007 report on the legal enabling environment for independent media.⁷²

While the media in these European post-Communist countries experienced more intense political pressure than in most advanced Western democracies (except perhaps Italy), they succeeded far better in establishing an independent media sphere than did the conflict-torn former Yugoslavian and former Soviet states. EU requirements clearly played a role in this.⁷³

However, the picture is far from ideal, and in recent years, there has been some retrenchment against press freedom throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

Legal regimes have allowed private media to emerge, but journalists are still subject to criminal and civil penalties if they embarrass politicians by exposing corruption or with other investigative reporting in the countries studied for this report. For example, well-respected veteran journalists Jan Urban in the Czech Republic and Eva Vajda in Hungary have each been sued and harassed for work they have done exposing corruption. Both have left mainstream media employers in search of greater press freedom at Internet sites.

The United States’ constitutional protections for a free press are much envied by the journalists of Europe and are a far cry from the regulated environments they must work under even in developed democracies like Great Britain, Italy, and France. The European Union subscribes to some journalism protections, but has little enforcement capacity once a country has joined the club.

In the early 2000s, the EU was able to persuade new Central and Eastern European incoming countries to instigate various laws and rules as a condition of acceptance. Afterwards, OSCE press freedom official Miklós Haraszti’s efforts to persuade leaders not to sign new punitive press laws worked in Poland, but not in the Czech Republic or Slovakia. Enforcement mechanisms were weaker than local pressure to politicize or punish the press.

“They said, ‘Have you seen the German law? The French law? They all have [criminal libel] laws on the books.’ But I said, ‘They don’t use them ... they find ways not to use them,’” Haraszti recalled. The balancing of the public interest of press freedom with personal interests is “difficult

The European Union subscribes to some journalism protections, but has little enforcement capacity once a country has joined the club.

for them to understand” in Central and Eastern Europe. “In Central Europe both civil and criminal libel laws are used. When you win criminal libel, you get big damages in civil court. The burden of proof is reversed,” he concluded.⁷⁴

When the Czech Republic was working in 2000 for acceptance into the EU, American and EU legal specialists warned that a pending media law proposed in the Czech Parliament would tarnish their standing. The law was publicly debated, and Czech journalists published blank pages in the newspapers to show the chilling effect of such a law on the content of the news. But after the Czech Republic became a member of the EU, Czech President Václav Klaus actively promoted and ultimately signed in 2009 a restrictive media law that forbade press disclosures of police wiretaps and allowed criminal penalties for libel.⁷⁵

Observers are worried about the growing criminalization of journalism mistakes in Central and Eastern Europe. Poland, long cited as a success story, has used criminal libel laws against journalists more than the other four countries in this study.⁷⁶ Slovakia, which also joined the EU in 2004, later enacted the region’s most draconian “right of reply” media law, until a new government was seated in 2010 and rolled it back. EU accession was a mixed blessing for journalists in some countries, such as Romania, which worked to comply with EU laws but felt U.S. support dry up when they were admitted.

“The fact that we are an EU country doesn’t mean we have access to all the EU programs. They are not supporting specific media programs ... the civic participation, this is not necessarily part of the European interest,” concluded Ioana Avadani of the Romanian Center for Independent Journalism. She said she liked U.S. grants because of their flexibility; EU applications require a 12- to 18-month lead time and contracts to deliver what is specified in the grant, regardless of changing circumstances, she said.⁷⁷

To be sure, a few media development ventures remain. The German Deutsche Welle Akademie’s East4South exchange program partners journalists from new EU states with African journalists. The Centers for Independent Journalism in Budapest and Bucharest, as well as the South East European Network for Professionalization of Media, depend on the Open Society Foundations to fund projects on Roma media training, journalism ethics, and free speech policies.

“The EU doesn’t really care. There are no directives. There’s more from the Council of Europe. But they have some old members, like Italy, with major problems, and they don’t do anything about it,” said one regional media assistance veteran. “The Poynter Institute is probably something we should be. Journalists say ‘We don’t know where to look for these skills,’” added Iona Moricz, current director of the Center for Independent Journalism in Budapest.⁷⁸

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Particularly as journalism continues the transition to new digital and mobile formats, Central and Eastern European countries need to experiment with new business models, and find strong advocates for independent media. But the economic momentum is pushing the journalists instead toward tabloid content that does little to engage citizens about important issues, and the political pressure is growing for partisanship and government controls.

In 2010, when controversial new media laws were proposed as part of sweeping constitutional changes in Hungary after the landslide election of Viktor Orbán's center-right Fidesz party, there was little response from the already politicized national media, or the public. Haraszi's successor, Dunja Mijatovic; bloggers; and press freedom organizations raised alarms, but within the country, professional journalists were slow to react.⁷⁹

The Hungarian situation is troubling because it sends a signal to other countries that have not yet embraced press freedom. "If a relatively successful new democracy like Hungary, which is a NATO and EU member, can do this, then the Central Asian and Caucasus republics can say 'Why can't we do it?' It has a kind of domino effect," said Sándor Orbán, of the South East European Network for Professionalization of Media.⁸⁰

Under EU rules, public service broadcasting is supposed to be financed and managed independently of the political parties. This has happened in Germany and in the Czech Republic but not in the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The future of the public broadcasters is in doubt in most of the region.

So while laws in Central and Eastern Europe have been improved thanks to EU accession, the realities of living by those laws are very different. Journalists do not form effective media associations to fight for press freedom. When Éva Simon of the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union tried to find some unity among journalists to fight criminal libel laws, "it was impossible to make them join," she found.⁸¹ In Poland, a 1995 media ethics charter drafted by a gathering of journalism associations was never implemented effectively. "There is no professional solidarity, even when the rights of a journalist are violated," concluded Polish media scholar Katarzyna Pokorna-Ignatowicz.⁸²

The Effect of the Internet

It is popular to say that the Internet caused the downfall of good journalism and, at the same time, the Internet will save it. It is interesting to test these two hypotheses in Central and Eastern Europe.

The global disruption of mainstream print and broadcast media by free Internet alternatives is of course challenging the media markets in Central and Eastern Europe as well, pushing them into more tabloid and partisan content. But the digital tidal wave has not yet overtaken the traditional newspapers, television, and radio here to the same extent as it has in the United States.

What is propping up the mainstream media is not any sustainable, smarter way of connecting with paying audiences for independent journalism, but rather, two factors: 1) more access to political subsidies for the largest broadcast media and newspapers, and 2) a slower audience shift than in the West to free Internet media, because of local cultural habits and less access to reliable, affordable, high-speed connections.⁸³ The first factor undermines the quality and independence of the media. The second factor is likely to fade over time, just as it has in the West.

Good journalism can be even better on the Internet, because it can include more identification of sources, links to original documents and related information, and a variety of opinions. It can mobilize crowdsourcing and citizen journalism. It can be more visually satisfying and user-friendly, with video, graphics, and data crunching. It can spread like fire and exert enormous influence beyond borders. However, it should adhere to ethical standards, despite temptations to pander and inflame: Is it fair, true, comprehensive, and factually verified, with any biases exposed honestly? It is difficult to see who is promoting these news ideals effectively anywhere these days, including the West. And the disruption of the old advertising and subscription business models continues, without the emergence of scalable alternatives for supporting accountability journalism. This is why experimentation is so important; projects like *NašeAdresa's* news cafes in the Czech Republic⁸⁴ may not have succeeded yet, but it is critical for the future of quality journalism that everyone to keeps trying.

<i>Internet Usage</i> ¹					
Country	Population (2010 est.)	Internet Users	Penetration (Percent of Population)	User Growth (2000-2010)	Percent of Users in Europe
Czech Republic	10,201,707	6,680,800	65.55	568.1%	1.4%
Hungary	9,992,339	6,176,400	61.8%	763.8%	1.3%
Latvia	2,217,969	1,503,400	67.8%	902.3%	0.3%
Poland	38,463,689	22,450,600	58.4%	701.8%	4.7%
Romania	21,959,278	7,786,700	35.5%	873.3%	1.6%

1) Information provided by the Internet World Stats, (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/>), September 6, 2010.

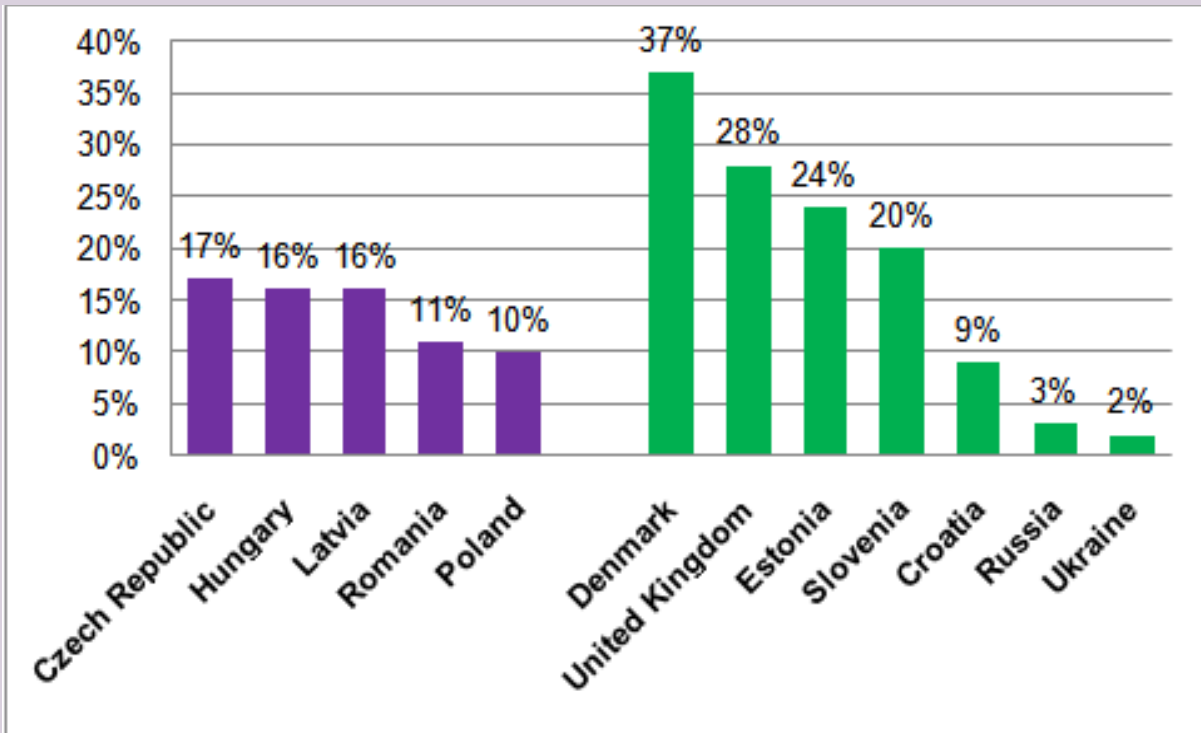
Given the international economic meltdown, it is hard to tell how much capacity these countries have at the moment for investment in the new digital media. During the transitional period from communism, the speed with which media companies were proliferating meant they could not accumulate any capital for experimentation, Gordana Jankovic, OSF’s network media program director, observed.⁸⁵

Only about 15 percent of the population in Eastern Europe has a broadband Internet connection, and only five countries in the region—the Baltic States, the Czech Republic and Slovenia—have more than 50 percent Internet penetration. In some countries of the region, broadband connections are fewer than 10 per every 100 inhabitants, compared to the EU average of 22.5 percent.⁸⁶

New media technologies offer free platforms for the not yet empowered, with both good and bad impacts on these fragile democracies. A recent study of online preferences across Eastern Europe had bad news for professional journalists: Yahoo-like portals including *Seznam.cz* in the Czech Republic and *dir.bg* in Bulgaria dominate, and only one or two established media outlets are among the most popular websites in each country studied.⁸⁷

Despite the delayed impact in the region, nevertheless, “the Internet is seen as providing growing alternatives to state-controlled media,” according to a U.S. media development official. In Eastern and Central Europe the net impact of the Internet is more democratic than under authoritarian regimes, which can create limited versions of the Internet and block access to the wider media

Broadband Penetration in 2008—Compared¹



1) Charts are based on data from *Do you CEE? Interactive Overview of Central and Eastern Europe Markets 2009*, IAB and Gemius Report.

world. “Technology will race ahead, but the real bottleneck and challenge is the content that goes in,” he cautioned.⁸⁸

Indeed, in Hungary, it is the far-right, nationalist Jobbik party, which is openly anti-Semitic and anti-Roma, that has used the new media tools most effectively to mobilize youth. When officials sought to censor their content under Hungarian hate speech laws, Jobbik simply moved its website’s servers to the United States.⁸⁹

The Internet is the hottest media policy battlefield now, and is the best source of true pluralism (of ideas, sources, perspectives) but also of hate speech and xenophobia. The Internet’s freedom may be in a grace period. In 2009, Harazsti described a “counter-reformation” led by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin as its chief philosopher, infecting the larger region.⁹⁰ Some countries “both East and West of Vienna” are attempting to regulate the Internet and put it under national

Funders who want to develop digital media in the region are making a mistake by writing requests for proposals that are too prescriptive about how to use the technologies.

governance, Harazsti noted a year later. “We are not simply talking about filtering and blocking sites, but the fact that Internet services providers are not pluralistically owned—and they need to be. We are seeing laws applied to the Internet in a way that is political, selective and arbitrary.”⁹¹

Internet entrepreneur Esther Dyson shared a sense that younger Central and Eastern Europeans using the Internet and mobile social networks are not adequately aware of their vulnerability to political interference. “They’re taking it too much for granted. ‘Freedom’ can be ‘freedom from paying attention to government.’ Young people think

freedom-fighting guys and all this press freedom law stuff is irrelevant ...They think, ‘It can’t happen here; I’ve got my Facebook account.’”⁹²

Jiří Pehe in Prague also worried that young journalists who “think they are gods” don’t understand that being opposed to something is not enough for creating a better society. “Things are too easy on the Internet. You can appear to be active by merely pushing a button,” he said.⁹³

The region’s sustained growth in Internet use “heralds rosy days for the online market in Eastern Europe,” concluded Marius Dragomir in 2009. “It’s still difficult what it will mean for online journalism. What is clear is that the next five or so years will be a crucial period for the online media to win readers. This means investment. Without it, in several years, the Internet in most of the region might turn into a news-free Web.”⁹⁴

Funders who want to develop digital media in the region are making a mistake by writing requests for proposals that are too prescriptive about how to use the technologies. “The smart money is technologically neutral. It is not about buying tools, but focusing on innovations, on people using tools, on accountability for citizens and social media, figuring out how do you verify the crowdsource stuff,” noted one media developer.⁹⁵

Recommendations

Supporting independent, accountability journalism in the region should include:

- ▶ Innovative pilot projects for Internet and mobile phone applications that uphold journalism quality standards and seek new models for connecting with users or that innovate modes of sustainable funding for best quality news. The Knight Foundation's news challenge is one attempt to do this.
- ▶ Promoting independent journalism standards and critiquing unethical practice through associations and media criticism like that done at the *Transitions* organization in Prague and *politika.lv* in Riga. Awards such as the Hungarian version of the Pulitzer prize⁹⁶ can support courageous journalists who are otherwise marginalized. More of this should be done on the local and regional levels.
- ▶ Collecting the best journalists and paying them to produce investigative journalism both within and across borders. They can be published on good Web portal sites with heavy video, in order to build popularity for this high-quality content. Some funders are doing this now, but they tend to approve only narrowly focused projects about the trend of the day, be it minority rights, health, and environmental news.
- ▶ Supporting a post-Communist media advocacy network to work on press freedom and policy, working regionally, rather than just nationally or internationally.
- ▶ Promoting public education and media literacy: In every country, the public needs to appreciate independent media, hold media accountable to standards, engage in civic journalism projects, and be mobilized to support news media in times of crisis.
- ▶ Working on cultural and political elites. Too much training has been focused on journalists rather than media managers, owners, educators, and cultural elites. Teaching journalists independent values and skills is doomed if managers and politicians don't allow them to practice them. Conferences, awards, and the international spotlight may offer some carrots and sticks to these elites.

Country Profiles

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic's media story is one of the most successful in the region, thanks in part to its unique, original tradition of free speech and journalism, dating back to the First Democratic Republic (1918-1938), when more than eight influential newspapers circulated daily.

“The heritage of the Czechs between the two wars is very strong. At that time, Czechoslovakia was the eighth most developed country in the world, with a model political system of Western-style democracy,” noted Tomáš Vrba, a former samizdat journalist who went on after 1989 to be head of the board of CTK, the public Czech news agency similar to the Associated Press. “In Poland or Hungary they had never experienced a real liberal democracy.”⁹⁷

When the Velvet Revolution brought Václav Havel to power in 1989, restrictions on media were lifted, and Prague became a favorite destination for Western media trainers. This is where James L. Greenfield of the *New York Times* editorial board and Donald M. Wilson, vice president of *Time, Inc.*, set up their first Center for Independent Journalism in 1991, one of four ultimately sponsored by their Independent Journalism Foundation. Although the Center closed in 2001, some specialized remaining journalism support for the entire Central and Eastern European region continues in Prague at the Transitions nonprofit organization, founded in 1999 as a news magazine (*Transitions Online*) and journalism training center.

International business investors also swarmed to the Czech Republic in the 1990s. Former U.S. Ambassador to Austria Ronald Lauder created Central European Media Enterprises (CME) to build television networks in the formerly Communist region, including TV Nova, which became the first private channel in the Czech Republic in 1994. Nova swept to the number one spot, which it retains today, with such features as a naked weather lady. (It was illegal to remove your clothing on TV, but no one said it was illegal to start with nothing on.) In a classic story of the wild '90s in the Central and Eastern Europe media frontier, CME's Czech manager, Vladimír Železný tried to run away with the company, locking out his American investors with the aid of the Czech broadcasting regulation council. In 2003 Lauder and his colleagues won a \$355 million court settlement that had to be paid by the Czech government, and CME owns TV Nova today.⁹⁸

Structure, the Global Financial Crisis and Public Culture

Jiří Pehe, a former journalist and advisor to Havel who now heads the New York University campus in Prague, agreed with Vrba that the history of Czech democracy before World War II has made a big difference in the Czech Republic. He noted that the Czechs also have a predominantly urban country, unlike Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia, and this allows them to have a better-educated and “linguistically equipped” population, and much foreign investment. “Only 5 percent of Czechs are active in agriculture. The whole economy is run by foreign countries,” he said.⁹⁹

When the Czech media were privatized from 1993-1994 following the “velvet divorce” from Slovakia, no restrictions were placed on buying media stocks. This facilitated the access of international media groups to the Czech market and the rapid adaptation to foreign business standards. The biggest problem in the Czech media is the downmarket tabloid response to competitive pressures from the Internet and the impact of the ongoing global economic recession. The overall decline in advertising revenue in all types of media in 2009 was about 25-30 percent, as foreign advertisers pulled back due to the financial crisis.¹⁰⁰

Print media

In the first quarter of 2009, 20 print media outlets went out of business because of the global financial crisis, including the free daily, *24 hodin*, owned by the Swiss company, Ringier. Paid circulation at *Mlada Fronta Dnes*, the top newspaper, dropped by about 20 percent for the year.¹⁰¹ Media houses weakened their journalistic quality by slashing editorial costs, including firing journalists, and giving discounts to advertisers.¹⁰²

Today, three of the four newspapers with the largest circulation belong to international media corporations, but no one company has a monopoly over the press. Ringier entered the Czech market in 1991, launching the popular tabloid *Blesk* in 1992, followed by the *Sport* paper and weekly *Reflex*. Next to *Blesk*, the most popular daily is *Mlada Fronta Dnes*, a former Communist youth paper now leaning to the right and owned by Mafra, a Czech subsidiary of the German publisher Rheinisch-Bergische Verlagsgesellschaft mbH.

Mafra also owns another old Czech title, *Lidove noviny*, which was first published in 1893 as a respected intellectual sheet, banned in 1952, then revived as a samizdat publication in 1988. In the early days after 1989, was the object of much hope and Western training.¹⁰³

“There is nothing in the Czech Republic that has the quality of the two big Polish papers, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*. But the good news is there are still three general news dailies in Prague. It is a healthy news environment. Online advertising is growing. There still is a custom of reading newspapers here,” said Ky Krauthamer, senior editor of the internationally-funded regional nonprofit magazine, *Transitions Online*. He said 500,000 daily newspaper copies are sold in Prague, which has 1.21 million inhabitants. But he thinks the journalists could do better work. “The Czech Republic has a corps of professional journalists now,” he said. “It’s bland; they don’t take risks. There is very little investigative reporting. When there is, it’s usually based on rumor and little follow-through. There is rarely a trial based on a story.”¹⁰⁴

The biggest problem in the Czech media is the downmarket tabloid response to competitive pressures from the Internet and the impact of the ongoing global economic recession.

Television, the Internet and Radio

Central European Media Enterprises (CME) which owns stations in seven Eastern European countries, has regarded Czech TV Nova, the longtime top ranked TV network, as a key profit center. But thanks to the sharp economic downturn, in the first quarter of 2009, TV Nova lost \$44.4 million compared with a net profit of \$14.5 million during the same quarter of 2008.¹⁰⁵

While TV Nova news was always sensationalized, and other private channels and Czech newspapers are now increasingly so, Czech public television has been the envy of the region. It is relatively free from government political interference and occasionally is able to do important investigative stories. The structure of Czech public television is similar to others in the region: A committee appointed by people from the political parties appoints the head of Czech TV. It is funded by television license fees and advertising. The difference here is not legal but cultural. During the first 10 years after communism, the public stood by the independence of the news on Czech TV.

This was tested in December 2000, after journalists rejected the political appointment of Jiri Hodac¹⁰⁶ as director-general of the Czech television, fearing that its independence would be compromised. Hodac immediately fired 20 journalists and made changes to the top management. Backed by former dissidents, several thousand journalists rallied in Prague¹⁰⁷, Brno and Ostrava and gathered support for their cause among artists, actors, politicians, and more than 120,000 citizens, who signed a petition against losing the independence of the Česká televize. It was the Czech Republic's largest street protest since the 1989 anti-Communist revolution, ending in February 2001, after the resignation of Hodac and the appointment new leadership for Czech state television.

Unfortunately ten years later, in the summer of 2010, financial cutbacks and a personnel reshuffle have prompted observers like Marius Dragomir of the Open Society Foundations to worry that Czech public television may finally join its public television cousins in Hungary, Romania, and

Czech Republic's Main Media Outlets		
	Public Operators	Private Operators
Print		Mlada Fronta Dnes Lidove Noviny Pravo Blesk The Prague Post
Television	Czech TV (CT1 and CT2) CT 24	TV Nova Prima TV
Radio	Czech Radio Radio Prague	Frekvence 1 Radio Impuls Evropa 2
News Agency	CTK	

Bulgaria as vulnerable to political interference that will hurt its credibility and ratings. “Just shortly after the May parliamentary elections, significant changes are taking place at Czech TV—many of them politically dictated,” Dragomir wrote for *Transitions Online* on July 26, 2010.¹⁰⁸

Radio is very popular in the Czech Republic, reaching 85 percent of the population each week. Private radio stations dominate. Czech public radio is funded by a radio license fee and offers educational programs, news, and music. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty moved its headquarters from Munich to Prague in 1995.

Journalism Professionalism and Ethics

Advertising and news are generally kept separate. Avoiding the heavy handedness by advertisers or political sponsors that is present in other countries of the region, the big problem is instead a rise in tabloid sensationalism.

The sad state of Czech journalism ethics was captured in 2008 when journalists from the country’s most popular television station and newspaper, TV Nova and *Mlada Fronta Dnes*, got together to pose as private detectives in a political entrapment scheme cooked up by Jan Morava, a member of parliament who tried to embarrass his parliamentary colleague Vlastimil Tlustý by having the reporters peddle to Tlustý some fake “blackmail” photos, staged with Morava in a hot tub with a naked woman. Morava lost his job, but apparently the journalists did not. Tlustý was targeted the next year by another *Mlada Fronta Dnes* report of what it said were police wiretaps showing him regularly meeting in the 2000s with an organized crime boss who was later gunned down.¹⁰⁹

The upshot: on March 30, 2009, the Parliament’s Act on Misdemeanors and the Act on Protection of Personal Data—the infamous Czech “muzzle law” against the media—came into effect, prohibiting the publication of any names circulated in court cases or the publication of police wiretaps, including cases concerning politicians.¹¹⁰ “To see this kind of politics in the Czech Republic is ‘scary,’ wrote Katerina Safarikova, who covered the scandals for *Transitions Online*. “What is even scarier is the role of the media in all this.”¹¹¹

To be sure, there are impressive journalistic enterprises with tenacious, effective, and candid reporting. Much of it is published online—at *Aktuálně.cz*, *Transitions Online*, and *Respekt*.

The magazine *Respekt*—the influential “jewel of Czech publishing” according to Tomáš Vrba—thrived for years under the liberal sponsorship of one of the country’s richest men, aristocrat Karel Schwarzenberg, a liberal member of the Czech Senate and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Respekt* has published controversial investigations, including one that outed former Communist officials who were able to slide into powerful business and political circles after 1989. *Respekt*’s editor was beaten in 2004 by two men as he left the office, although it was not clear who was behind the attack. Since 2006, Zdenek Bakala, another influential billionaire with coal and other energy interests, has owned a majority interest in the magazine and has attempted to make it more mainstream and thus lose less money.¹¹²

While *Transitions Online* is a respected source throughout Central and Eastern Europe that covers media and politics issues and makes money on specialized journalism training, it doesn't have the resources to do original investigative reporting, Krauthamer said.

Some of the country's most courageous and experienced journalists, such as Jan Urban and Sabina Slonkova, write for a website, *aktualne.cz*, owned by Centrum Holdings, a company owned by Warburg Pincus, an American private equity firm.¹¹³ It is the Czech Republic's only exclusively online Web portal that creates its own journalism content, according to an OSI report by Newton Associates.¹¹⁴ Urban said that after lawsuits and other harassments other publishers were reluctant to carry his stories about business and government corruption.

Legal Framework and EU Accession

The Czech Parliament was poised to enact a punitive right-of-reply law in 1999 but turned back after pressure from EU advisors preparing the country for membership, and from U.S. press freedom advocates. Czech journalists published blank pages in the newspapers to show the chilling effect of such a law on reporting the news. The Czech constitution now guarantees freedom of the media, and national media legislation was generally harmonized in 2004 with the European Union directives.

There are still no limitations on foreign ownership in the print or broadcast sector, and the Press Act does not regulate the content of the media. The Broadcasting Act, passed in 2001, regulates audiovisual broadcasting and defines the role of the Council for Radio and Television, the national regulatory authority. The 13 members of the council are nominated by the House of Deputies and appointed by the Prime Minister for six years. They cannot be re-elected after two consecutive terms.

After EU accession in 2004, Czech President Václav Klaus, the more conservative successor to the former dissident Václav Havel, actively promoted and signed in 2009 the restrictive "muzzle law" that also allowed criminal penalties for libel, over the objections of OSCE press freedom official Miklós Haraszti.

Digital and Other New Media Formats

In a time when the new digital and Internet-enabled media are disrupting the journalism business model of advertising and circulation, there are experiments with new-old formats in the Czech Republic. The local *Nase Adresa* internet cafes were set up to create a new kind of newsroom plus coffee shop—reminiscent of the earliest days of journalism in English pubs¹¹⁵—to publish hyperlocal news in four Czech cities. As reporters and editors worked next to the coffee tables to put out a weekly newspaper and interactive website, the public was encouraged to come in, surf the web, have a drink and provide 50 percent of the news content. The project closed at the end of August 2010 after a year, but there is talk of reviving it. It was underwritten by PPF group, an Amsterdam-based business owned by Czech billionaire Petr Kellner.¹¹⁶ They had hoped to generate revenue not just from advertising, but from the cafes themselves, along with some funds from PPF's other ventures.

In April 2010, Sourcefabric, a nonprofit that provides media organizations with open source multilingual software, tools, and technical support for their publishing, was launched. It evolved from the Center for Advanced Media in Prague, an earlier media technology effort funded in 1999 by the Media Development Loan Fund.¹¹⁷

As of June 2010 there were 6,680,800 Internet users in the Czech Republic, a penetration rate of 65.5 percent, but less than a third (2.02 million) were broadband subscribers.¹¹⁸

Hungary

When Viktor Orbán’s center-right government, was elected with a two-thirds super-majority in April 2010, few were surprised that the new prime minister’s first move was to go after the media. After Orbán had failed in an earlier bid to win re-election following his first term as prime minister, from 1998-2002, he had blamed the media.¹¹⁹ Ever since, he zeroed in on creating a positive media landscape for his leadership—with political allies buying up or influencing important media properties, and then, by the end of 2010, enacting a new “media constitution” that stirred an international furor.

The media law was so draconian that *Washington Post* editorials said it represented “a phenomenon not seen in Central Europe since the collapse of Communist rule” and compared Hungary to Russia and Belarus.¹²⁰ The new government succeeded in establishing strong one-party control over public and private media, with terms that indeed were unusual for a democratic European Union country.¹²¹

The Fidesz party’s electoral success gave it essentially unchecked governmental authority to rewrite the country’s constitution. The ambitious new government consolidated its power over the media, nationalized private pensions, and immediately cut back the constitutional court’s powers after the court unanimously rejected one of the new government’s revenue proposals. Its sweeping changes in the nation’s legal checks and balances was particularly controversial as Hungary took over the presidency of the European Union for six months starting January 1, 2011.¹²²

The media law required commercial Internet, broadcast and print media content providers to register with the authorities for the right to publish or broadcast in Hungary. Broadcast journalists were mandated to provide “balanced” news coverage, and some were required to cover “important events” as determined by the Fidesz-controlled media authorities. Because many of the new rules were vaguely worded proscriptions against “violating privacy,” or insulting “human dignity” or “public morality,” the law seemed likely to chill free speech and solidify Fidesz control over the media. The law included foreign media targeting Hungarian audiences.¹²³

Because many of the new rules were vaguely worded ... the law seemed likely to chill free speech and solidify Fidesz control over the media.

When the last part of the media law passed December 21, 2010, a frenzy of criticism erupted in the West, as European Union, U.S. and other media critics pushed their governments to speak out, particularly because Hungary was preparing to take over the presidency of the EU just a few days later. Hungarian writer Gyorgy Konrad complained in *Berliner Zeitung* that Hungary's political situation reminded him of Germany in 1933, when the Nazi party gained power with a majority in the elections, and said the Fidesz cabinet was now trying to invalidate what Hungary achieved with its 1989 freedom of the press goals.¹²⁴

Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg said the Hungarian law violated the EU's basic democratic principles, and Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn urged the European Commission to take quick action against Hungary. "The plans clearly violate the spirit and the letter of EU treaties," he said, adding: "It raises the question whether such a country is worthy of leading the EU." The law is "a direct danger for democracy," Asselborn said, because "the state will control opinion." He put Hungary in the same category as Belarus. "Until now [Belarusian President Alexander] Lukashenko was considered to be the last dictator in Europe. When the law takes effect, that won't be the case any more."¹²⁵

EU officials launched a misdemeanor inquiry against Hungary for not honoring EU media regulations.

The German conservative daily *Die Welt* wrote on December 23 that the Hungarian media bill is "the shame of a democratic state, and a sign that Hungarian politics, even 20 years after the fall of the Wall, have failed to set a moderate balance." The same day, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle telephoned Hungarian Foreign Minister Janos Martonyi, asking his government to amend its media bill.¹²⁶

But that night, Viktor Órban went on Hungarian television to defend the media law, saying that amending the measure "wouldn't enter our heads" and would show a lack of self-confidence. He argued that other European countries and the United States do the same things to protect human dignity and children, but he also argued that more damaging content is presented on Hungarian screens and newspapers than in these other countries. Another reason for the media act, he said, was the bankrupt position of state-run media. "The previous building has collapsed, both financially and structurally."

He said Hungary will observe EU norms, and dismissed concerns by European leaders including Chancellor Angela Merkel, whose spokesman had urged Hungary to honor EU values, since as EU president, Hungary will bear responsibility for the EU's image. Noting that "the poor German chancellor" had become mixed up in the media law issue, Orban said: "The poor thing did not say a thing."¹²⁷

EU officials launched a misdemeanor inquiry against Hungary for not honoring EU media regulations. Neelie Kroes, European Commissioner for media affairs, wrote to Deputy Prime Minister Tibor Navracsics to express concerns about the media bill and ask for a full text, to analyze whether it did, in fact, violate EU regulations.¹²⁸

A coalition of 1989 dissident heroes, including former Czech President Václav Havel and former Hungarian President Arpad Goncz, gathered signatures urging the EU to take action against Hungary, charging that “what the European Union meant to prevent, and what many thought to be impossible, has now materialized: a full-fledged illiberal democracy inside its own borders—in Hungary, an EU member state since 2004.

“Just 20 years after communism collapsed, Hungary’s government, though elected democratically, is misusing its legislative majority to methodically dismantle democracy’s checks and balances, to remove constitutional constraints, and to subordinate to the will of the ruling party all branches of power, independent institutions, and the media,” the dissidents said.¹²⁹

“If the EU deems it necessary that the media law be altered, then we shall accept it,” Orbán said on January 7, adding, however, that the disputed law will not be changed until other European countries do the same to their relevant legislation.¹³⁰ Hungarian officials continued to stress that the law was designed to protect minorities and children.

The first part of the media proposal—to centralize authority over all the media by combining regulatory agencies under one government-appointed leader and four regulators, all with a nine-year renewable terms—was passed quickly in July, without any hearings. The government then appointed Fidesz party loyalists to all five slots in the media council.¹³¹

“Converged authority has been set up in several countries. Ofcom in the UK is a good example of how effectively converged and independent authority in the communication industry can work,” noted Éva Simon of the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU). But the partisan structure and lengthy terms are not consistent with the checks and balances of a democracy, she said. “Our problem is the independence from government, and the new legislative steps deepen this problem.”¹³²

The second and third parts of the media law, passed in November and December, regulated content and established the fines and government decree powers, all of which went into effect the same day Hungary took over the presidency of the European Union, January 1, 2011. As the final package passed Parliament in the early morning on December 21, some non-Fidesz members of Parliament put orange tape over their mouths in protest, held up signs saying: “Hungarian freedom of the press—it lived twenty-one years,” and also held up a muzzle. Hundreds of students, who organized through Facebook, showed up in a nearby park to demonstrate against the measure.¹³³

To be sure, Hungarian media were highly politicized under the previous media law.¹³⁴ But this had not normally meant “winner take all,” which is how the Fidesz party reorganized the nation’s media regulations in 2010. Hungary’s new media regulatory chief, Annamária Szalai, a former Fidesz MP and previous member of the national television and radio broadcasting authority (ORTT, in its Hungarian initials) defended the changes, saying they would actually depoliticize the media, save money and enhance its quality.¹³⁵ While those comments had little credibility, the need for a new law was generally acknowledged. “Writing new media legislation was long

overdue, not only because of obvious failures in the previous one, but because the media landscape has shifted technologically a lot since 1996,” said Balázs Bodó, who directs a master’s program in cultural industry at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics.¹³⁶

European and international press freedom advocates lobbied the government over the summer and fall of 2010, trying to persuade the government to modify the proposals. “The media package is cause for very serious concern,” wrote Dunja Mijatovic, the Representative on Freedom of the Media for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in a September 7, 2010, letter to Hungarian Foreign Minister Martonyi. “If left unchanged, it would seriously restrict media pluralism, curb the independence of the press, abolish the autonomy of public-service media and impose a chilling effect on freedom of expression and public debate, all essential for democracy.”¹³⁷

At first, the Hungarian media remained surprisingly silent when the new government unveiled its sweeping “media constitution” in June.

“In a normal country, the next day, the newspapers’ first page would be blank,” noted Máté Dániel Szabó, a Hungarian constitutional lawyer and policy analyst for the liberal Eotvos Karoly think tank. “We saw almost nothing. The reason is maybe that most of the media firms are owned by people who are deeply involved with political power.”¹³⁸ Whatever the reason, many were reluctant to antagonize the popular new Fidesz government. After the second part of the media law passed in November, several newspapers and websites finally did post blank front pages,¹³⁹ and public demonstrations followed as the final bill passed in December. Two public radio staff members were suspended from their morning program jobs after hosting a minute of silence to protest the bill.¹⁴⁰

The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) raised serious concerns about the package’s vaguely-defined provisions that the regulators could use against the news media if they were seen to be defaming religion or ethnicity, impeding crime investigations, or harming national security or public order.¹⁴¹ Writers can be penalized even for offending the “majority” of the country. The fines go up to as much as \$957,000 for a “major” news organization. Editors can also be fined personally, up to \$9,500.¹⁴²

“The latest move by Hungary’s Parliament is another negative benchmark in the downward slide of Hungary’s press freedom environment,” concluded Anthony Mills, press freedom manager at the International Press Institute, as a second part of the media package passed on November 2.¹⁴³

“The political and economic pressure is growing. The situation for journalists looks worse now than 10 years ago.”

— Award-winning investigative reporter

Népszabadság, the biggest-circulation Hungarian news daily, the HCLU and other critics planned to challenge several provisions in the constitutional court, but the court already was struggling with an attempt by the Orbán government to reduce its own powers and independence.¹⁴⁴

The combination of the continuing economic crisis, the Internet’s disruption of traditional business models for journalism, and now this legal and political pressure from an overwhelmingly popular ruling party, have made it increasingly difficult to do professional accountability journalism in Hungary. An award-winning investigative reporter concluded, “The political and economic pressure is growing. The situation for journalists looks worse now than 10 years ago.”¹⁴⁵

Much of Hungary’s media is foreign-owned, although ownership does not have to be disclosed and often is not. Until recently, success stories in post-communist private media investment were the two popular national commercial radio stations, *Slager*, owned by the U.S. media group Emmis, and *Danubius*, owned by the Vienna-based investment fund Accession Mezzanine, with a 30 percent stake held by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

For 12 years these two FM stations had built lucrative businesses with their dominance of the national audience, combining pop, rock, and other music, with talk. But on October 28, 2009 their licenses were not renewed, as had been expected, because of a deal between two members of the ORTT board nominated by the MSZP Socialists then in power, and two nominated by the rising center-right Fidesz, which was about to win in a national landslide.

These four regulators had secretly divided the spoils: they shifted the *Slager* license to FM1, a media group close to the outgoing left-socialist government, and *Danubius* (Class FM) to Advenio, a company closely associated with Fidesz party ally Tamas Fellegi, owner of the right-leaning Lanchid Radio.¹⁴⁶

Laszlo Majtenyi, the nonpartisan chairman of ORTT and the fifth member of its board, resigned in protest after the radio license transfer, calling the vote a “scandal,” and “unprofessional and illegal.” Refusing to sign the contracts, he concluded: “Despite their unrealistic business plans and technical flaws, the fact that Advenio and FM1 won reflects well the current state of democracy in Hungary.”¹⁴⁷ A court later found that the transfers were improper, but it did nothing to restore them to the original owners.

And one of the four ORTT regulators who voted to change the licenses—Szalai—shortly afterward became Hungary’s new media czar, leading the passage and implementation of the new Hungarian media law.¹⁴⁸

“It’s like Shakespeare,” concluded one Hungarian journalist, looking at the twists and turns of media ownership and law in Hungary.¹⁴⁹

Public Culture and Journalism Ethics

When Hungarian patriots issued their 12 demands against their Austrian Hapsburg rulers in 1848, the first was for freedom of the press. In 1956, when they resisted the Soviets, they took over Hungarian national radio, recognizing the importance of its role in informing the public. “How can a country ignore such a powerful tradition in its own history?” asked Peter Molnar, a lead drafter of the first post-communist media law in 1995.¹⁵⁰

The peaceful transition from the communists to the pro-democracy dissidents in 1989 looked like an advantage at the time, but 20 years later, it looks as if not enough changed. Some liberal intellectuals—just like the communists before them—expected favorable coverage from the media once they took power. “I realized, they don’t have anything to do with any democratic tradition,” said one journalist who met resistance when trying to report objectively on political friends.¹⁵¹

The Socialist (MSZP) government was continually exposed as being both inept and corrupt, and by 2010 the public had had enough.¹⁵² They elected Fidesz to come put the house in order. “People say Fidesz is like a military barracks, and the MSZP are like a bordello,” joked one media analyst.¹⁵³

Molnar, a liberal member of the first post-communist Hungarian Parliament for eight years, agreed that cultural factors might have stunted some necessary changes after 1989. Hungary’s “goulash communism” meant less turnover in people and policies, compared to countries like the Czech Republic, where the hardline communist authority was harsh up until the end. “More people collaborated with the dictatorship” because communism was “softer” in Hungary, he said.¹⁵⁴ Hungarians had the “best” of the Soviet systems, with free health care and free education. The government was the source of free benefits. Today even most of the civil society organizations expect their grants to come from the government, one activist noted.¹⁵⁵

Hungarians criticize journalists as being increasingly superficial, unprepared, and spread too thin. By obsessing with domestic political scandals and tabloid news, they have lost their ability to “help people to find orientation in this changing world,” said one trade union activist. A businessman agreed: “The coverage of the economic crisis revealed how inward-looking, provincial, shallow and unprepared our media was.”¹⁵⁶

Most journalism standards are low in Hungary, agreed the HCLU’s Simon, who has done journalism ethics and law training. In addition to this and the lack of independence, she said, “the problem is that people are not paid enough. They don’t get financed for investigative journalism. It’s common to copy and paste news releases. The influence of the new media is pressure to have something new every five minutes.”¹⁵⁷

One 2007 study found a striking political shift to the right among Hungarian journalists compared to a decade before. The survey of 1,000 media workers found twice as many “right-wing” supporters among the journalists between age 30 and 40, and three times as many “right-

wing” supporters among the newcomers, compared to 1997. Most Hungarian journalists were younger than 30, half of them were women, and 43 percent of them said they were subject to political pressure, the survey found.¹⁵⁸

Print

Dozens of daily newspapers and thousands of other print publications are circulated today in Hungary.¹⁵⁹ A Swedish owned free daily paper, the *Metropol*, is the most popular paper (296,000 copies distributed).¹⁶⁰ The Swiss Ringier Company owns the most popular tabloid, *Blikk* (204,000 daily circulation), and the most popular broadsheet, *Népszabadság* (Peoples’ Liberty, 76,000), which is liberal-left in orientation. The other national daily newspaper is the center-right *Magyar Nemzet* (Hungarian Nation, 50,000). When Ringier sold a smaller national political paper, *Magyar Hírlap* (Hungarian Journal, 19,000), to Hungarian entrepreneurs in 2005, it turned politically to the right and today strongly supports Fidesz. Another small political daily, *Népszava* (People’s Voice, 15,000) is strongly on the political left.

Germany’s Axel Springer owns half of the 19 local county papers. Hungary also has two well-regarded weekly magazines devoted to business, the German-owned *Heti Világgazdaság* (Weekly World Economy) known as *HVG* (69,300) and *Figyelo*. There are numerous political magazines on the right and left, some owned by such politically connected Hungarian companies as infocenter.hu and Advenio.

Hungary’s Main Media Outlets		
	Public Operators	Private Operators
Print		Metropol Blikk Nepszabadsag Magyar Hirlap Magyar Nemzet Nepszava Heti Vilaggazdasag The Budapest Sun The Budapest Times
Television	Magyar Televizio (MTV) Duna TV	TV2 RTL Klub ATV Hir TV (News TV)
Radio	Hungarian Radio (Kossuth, Petofi, Bartok)	InfoRadio Danubius Radio Slager Radio Klub Radio Juventus Radio
News Agency	MTI	Havarria Press

Television

In Hungary today, one can turn on a television set and see the famous old U.S. programs *Dallas* and *Miami Vice* dubbed into Hungarian, along with more current *House*, and other programs, HBO and MGM movies, and even Pat Robertson's *700 Club* shows with Hungarian subtitles. In 1997, private television arrived and with it, infotainment programming. The two big private and terrestrial broadcasters are TV2 (SBS Broadcasting Europe) and RTL Klub, the most watched TV channel in Hungary.¹⁶¹

Private channels have far outpaced Hungarian Public Television (MTV), which consists of Magyar Televízió, with two channels, and Duna TV, a satellite channel that also targets Hungarian minorities living abroad. There also are three public radio stations, which have become more popular and financially successful in the past few years, and the MTI national news agency.

Like other Central and Eastern European public broadcasters, Magyar Televízió (MTV) has struggled with serious financial problems over the past decade, and its viewership has declined to less than 10 percent of the television audience.¹⁶² In 1999, MTV sold its prominent headquarters (the former building of the Hungarian stock exchange), but rented the deteriorating building back. In 2009, it moved to another facility under a very expensive 40-year lease that cannot be broken for at least 20 years. These real estate deals are now under criminal investigation.¹⁶³ Hungarian viewers find MTV is neither well produced nor entertaining.¹⁶⁴

The recent media law tightened government control over staff and management of the public broadcasters and national news agency, and delayed the digitization of public broadcasting, pushing it back to 2015 for budgetary reasons.¹⁶⁵

The Internet

Even before the financial crisis, Hungary lagged in using the Internet. A survey of 29 countries by Universal McCann in 2008 found Hungary with the fewest bloggers (7.8 percent).¹⁶⁶

As in other Central and Eastern European countries, journalists who have been unable to do investigative work in the mainstream media are going online, even though there is little money for their work there, nor does it generate much public impact. However, under the new Hungarian media law, potentially every website has to be registered in advance with the government (see footnote 123 for the criteria for websites and blogs that must register). There also are severe sanctions possible for violations of the law, including shutting down the website or paying fines up to \$75,000.

Under the new Hungarian media law, potentially every website has to be registered in advance with the government. There also are severe sanctions possible for violations of the law.

Hungary's highest quality, least politically skewed news reports can be found on its two most popular news portals, *index.hu*, a blog and news site, and *origo.hu*, which is owned by Magyar Telekom. These sites get up to 800,000 daily visitors.¹⁶⁷ “*Index* and *origo* is where my generation is sitting,” concluded one 40-year-old journalist. “If you aren’t reading articles on the Internet and interested in what is going on on the Internet, you are out of everything,” added Marietta Le, a media student at Budapest’s Elte University who also blogs for the U.S-based *Global Voices*.¹⁶⁸ Another respected news website is *hvg.hu*.

In Hungary, social networks on the Internet have been used more effectively by the far right than by either the leftist MSZP or the center-right Fidesz parties.¹⁶⁹ The rightwing Jobbik party is attracting youthful supporters by using social networks and rock music concerts to convey its message of Hungarian nationalism, portraying Hungarians as victims of outside influences, particularly targeting Jews, Roma, and the Treaty of Trianon (which ended World War I and cut off two-thirds of Hungary’s part of the Austro-Hungarian empire.) Jobbik won almost 17 percent of the vote and several parliamentary seats in the April election.¹⁷⁰ The extreme rightwing website *Kurucinfo* defies attempts to stop its anti-minority messages, and operates as a popular news source, using servers in the United States.¹⁷¹ Between August 12 and 18, 2010, *Kurucinfo* had 653,544 visits.¹⁷²

Impact of the Financial Crisis

The serious print press has taken the biggest financial hit since the global meltdown in 2008. As the banking, automobile, and real estate sectors plummeted in Hungary, the national dailies lost 16 percent of their advertising and about 30 percent of their revenue in the first nine months of 2009. *Népszabadság*, the most important daily, lost 15 percent of its circulation. The political and business weeklies were hit even harder, losing 19 percent of their advertising and about 50 percent of their revenues. *HVG*, the business weekly, lost 10 percent of its buyers.¹⁷³ An Open Society Foundations report on Hungary found this “astounding,” noting that “apparently, in a recession, advertisers no longer distinguish between general and higher-status readers with more purchasing power, whereas some years ago, this very distinction was the comparative advantage of the business and economic press.”¹⁷⁴

Public service and private national electronic media lost 10-15 percent of their advertising revenue, and audience numbers declined in the first part of 2009. The continuing slide of Hungarian public television accelerated with the downturn.

Parts of the Internet sector survived much better, but even there, the recession had a big impact. *Index.hu*’s revenues were growing considerably until the financial crisis, taking readers from the print press. Now, “the dynamism of Internet expansion, mainly in terms of revenue, may have slowed down if not reversed,” due to the drop-off in advertising.¹⁷⁵

Support for Independent Journalism

There are about 30 journalism education programs in Hungary, many in small private schools that are teaching abstract theory or public relations.

The Center for Independent Journalism (CIJ) is the most prominent source of traditional Western journalism training. The HCLU, CIJ, and the Soma Center for Investigative Journalism have joined forces on some investigative projects. The CIJ also has put an emphasis on diversity reporting and for more than 10 years has been training Roma journalists to prepare them for careers in the mainstream news media.

The Budapest CIJ opened in 1995 after a journalism school run by the University of Maryland closed because of financial problems.¹⁷⁶ Back in the mid-1990s, Budapest was so overrun with journalism trainers that “we had three apartments in Budapest just for the American fellows,” former director Sándor Orbán said. Support from the U.S.-based Independent Journalism Foundation, which launched the CIJ, dwindled after 2003. Today the HCLU, CIJ and other nonprofits are supported largely by the Open Society Foundations.¹⁷⁷

Media development support is still needed in Hungary, especially in five areas:

- Advocacy for policies that enable the political independence of both public and private media.
- Investigative journalism projects, both within existing media entities and in freestanding new ventures, particularly on the Internet.
- Journalism associations that stress accountability and ethics. The Hungarian Association of Internet Content Providers is a step forward in this area.
- Media criticism that holds the journalists accountable and promotes high quality content. *Antagon.blog.hu* is one such site, but more support is needed.
- Media literacy training and promotion throughout the society, including an emphasis on the benefits of independent, professional journalism.

The HCLU also has played a leading role in supporting Hungarian journalists. For example, they help Hungarian journalists use their national freedom of information law to break important stories, such as a 2010 scandal in which state money was financing a motor racecourse and tournament. To get the official documents, the HCLU had to mobilize a thousand letters to the prime minister asking for access to the pivotal feasibility study about the project. As a result, parts of the study were posted publicly on the Internet, including expert assessments that the project was “risky, uneconomic, and unlawful.” This stopped the project. The HCLU said the case showed how important it was to conduct strategic litigation in freedom of information cases and to mobilize the public to achieve anti-corruption goals.¹⁷⁸

Latvia

Latvia was uniquely positioned to create a new kind of journalism when communism fell in 1990.¹⁷⁹ Non-Communist models of journalism found elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe

did not survive World War II and the Cold War in the Baltics. “All the journalists perished and the profession of journalism ceased to exist” until new people were employed by the Soviets to create a new form of propaganda media for the state. When communism fell in 1990, the old generation of Soviet journalists was retiring, and a new generation was just coming on the scene.¹⁸⁰

This created a fertile ground for people like Latvian-American Pauls Raudseps, a Harvard graduate who was studying history at Indiana University graduate school when Soviet communism started to crumble. Raudseps, “equipped with his own sense of what journalism should be and after consulting resources in the Indiana University journalism library and at least one journalism professor,” left his studies to head for Latvia, where he ran a seminar on Western-style reporting in November 1990. Two weeks later, he was publishing the first edition of a new newspaper, *Diena*. “In the seminar, *Diena* style was created,” said historian Janis Chakars.¹⁸¹

Latvia, a relatively small country with 2.2 million people, became a star in the democratic reform landscape, with *Diena* leading the post-Communist experiment in quality journalism. Then came the financial collapse of 2008, and its luck ran out. This country experienced an economic catastrophe, with deeply damaging impacts on the independent news media.

Economics and Ownership: The *Diena* Story

Latvia’s economy suffered more spectacularly than most other countries in late 2008, as its GDP dropped from a rate of double-digit growth in 2008 to minus 19 percent in 2009. The drop in

Latvia’s Main Media Outlets		
	Public Operators	Private Operators
Print		Diena Neatkarīga Rita Avīze (NRA) Dienas Bizness Telegraf Latvijas Avīze Chas Biznes and Baltija Vesti Segodnya Vakara Avīze Vakara Zinas
Television	Latvian Television (LTV), LTV1, LTV7	Latvian Independent Television (LNT) TV3 Latvia TV5
Radio	Latvian Radio (4 channels) Radio NABA (university radio)	Radio SWH Star FM Radio Skonto
News Agency	LETA BNS (Baltic News Service)	Delfi (bilingual news portal)

advertising revenues was crippling: Across all media it dropped by 42 percent in one year, including 54 percent in newspapers, and even 25 percent in Internet sites, compared with 2008.¹⁸²

Latvians experienced wage cuts of up to 30 percent, unemployment of 20 percent, and cutbacks in hours for those still holding onto jobs. This led to newspapers “ceasing to be essential goods” according to Olga Proskurova, editor-in-chief of the News Media Group.¹⁸³ When the Latvian government imposed new taxes as part of its agreement for an IMF loan in December 2008, it started by raising the VAT on newspapers from 5 percent to 21 percent. Daily newspapers published identical cover pages with the words “Press 2009” with a black cross. The tax ultimately was set at 10 percent.¹⁸⁴

“There are virtually no profit-making newspapers in Latvia today,” said Arvils Aseradens, deputy chairman of the Latvian Press Publishers Association, in December 2009. *Diena* estimated that retail sales had dropped by half. Commercial television and radio advertising also dropped nearly 40 percent in 2009, and public television’s budget, already depleted, was cut by 25 percent more.¹⁸⁵

“There are virtually no profit-making newspapers in Latvia today,”

— Arvils Aseradens, deputy chairman of the Latvian Press Publishers Association

This spelled disaster in particular for *Diena*, by then the gem of Latvia’s quality media. It was “the best newspaper in the Baltic states,” according to Edward Lucas of the *Economist*;¹⁸⁶ William Safire of the *New York Times* once called it “the most adamantly independent major new daily among the nations of post-Soviet Europe.”¹⁸⁷

Diena was blessed, from the beginning, with an unusually benevolent owner in the Swedish Bonnier group, which allowed it to separate fact from opinion and invest in quality independent news reporting. There were the usual stresses from tabloid competition. In 2005, both *Diena* and competitor *Neatkarīga Rita Avīze* changed their formats to offer more soft news.

But no one anticipated what was to come in July 2009. The Bonnier group suddenly announced the sale of *Diena* and its businesses, including a printing house, several regional newspapers, a newspaper distribution company and a magazine division. The new ownership was murky. At first it appeared that British interests were buying it. Many months later it became clear that the paper was essentially in the hands of Latvian businessman Viestres Kozails, a former partner and good friend of the vice-mayor of Riga, the Latvian capital. They are involved in the nationalist center-right Par Labu Latviju (For Good Latvia) party. “So there are no doubts anymore that the paper is under political influence,” concluded Gunta Sloga, who directs the Open Society Institute’s programs in Latvia.¹⁸⁸ Kozails said his party preference would not affect the newspaper.¹⁸⁹

Even before Kozails’ ownership became clear, Raudsepts and *Diena*’s most important staff decided their independence was compromised. The editor in chief, other editors, and

investigative reporters—about 20 people out of staff of 70—walked out on October 9, 2009. “It was the result of a conflict over the soul of the newspaper and its commitment to openness and transparency,” Raudseps said.¹⁹⁰ The former editors and staff have since founded a website, *ir.lv*, which does not have the institutional heft of *Diena* but which is influential with the cognoscenti.

Before the October 2010 Parliamentary elections, the center-right Par Labu Latviju party built up its media muscle in television as well.¹⁹¹ Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp. Europe, which bought the leading private TV station, LNT, and 70 percent of TV5 in 2007, sold LNT in March 2010 back to its former owner, Andrejs Ēķis, another co-founder of Par Labu Latviju party. Like Murdoch’s Fox TV in the USA, LNT has high production values that attract public interest and it unabashedly skews the news to support the politics of the owners.¹⁹²

Latvian public television, which is funded by state grants and advertising, was already weak in the face of political influence. An anonymous letter from a public television reporter recently said that its supposedly independent news department was being ordered to promote Ainars Slesers, the same Riga vice-mayor, from the Par Labu Latviju party, whose former business partner controls *Diena*.¹⁹³

Russian language media

Latvian media are divided between the Latvian language newspapers, television and radio, and the Russian media, which since the end of communism consider themselves the “opposition” media to the government.¹⁹⁴ Although the official language is Latvian, Russian is still understood by most Latvians, and a large minority of the population is native Russian-speaking.

The Russian language media in Latvia were in a particularly bad spot when the recession hit.

“We survived this, but it was like after a war. It was kind of a reconstruction program to rebuild those smoldering ruins to make it run again,” said Aleksandr Krasnitsky, editor of the Russian language daily *Telegraf*, whose advertising dropped 70 percent in 2009. When he became editor in November 2009 and had to engage in much downsizing and cost cutting, it was probably the worst point of the crisis, he said. In the two months of May and June of 2010 they brought in as much as six months’ revenue in the previous year. But then it started leveling off again and was flat in August, he said. Will there be a double-dip recession? “I like to think I am successful. Whether it is true or not, we see when we start in several weeks a subscription campaign.”¹⁹⁵

In early December, 2010, Krasnitsky was fired after an article he published angered Riga’s mayor, and two of his co-editors quit in protest. Like *Diena*, *Telegraf*’s ownership changed and became unclear. Previously owned by a Latvian businessman, *Telegraf*’s ownership was traced by the *Economist* magazine to a controversial Russian businessman.¹⁹⁶

The tabloid trend is affecting the entire Latvian market, just as it is throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Latvia’s Russian language print media is especially vivid and opinionated by tradition. Some titles are sensationalist and ethnically biased. “The Russian press and notably

the newspaper *Chas* argued against Latvia's participation in NATO and educational reforms that would reduce instruction in the Russian language, even calling directly upon readers to join in protests," noted scholar Janis Chakars.¹⁹⁷ There also has been particular concern about anti-Latvian stereotypes in Russian soap operas, which have been an increasing presence on Latvian TV.

Because the Russians and other minority parties were not included in the national governments since the fall of communism, the Russian minority until recently had to satisfy itself with municipal posts, including the current mayor of the capital city, Riga. Although the Russian party came in second in the October 2010 elections, their traditional failure to be mainstreamed has been both good and bad for the Russian language media, because they have been freer to criticize the Latvian government than those who need to work with the governing powers.

On the other hand, they have had less influence than the Latvian language print and broadcast journalists, and faced triple competition for advertising dollars, not just from within their Russian language sector and with the Latvian media, but also with direct broadcasts and Internet sites from Russia. They haven't been competing with Russian newspapers however, because they are too costly to transport and thus are too expensive to be popular in Latvia.¹⁹⁸

Journalism Ethics

Aside from *Diena*, Latvian journalism has looked like much other news in the region: too much that is tabloid, ethnically provocative, and full of messages that are sponsored in one way or another.

There is little concern among many journalists when one juggles public relations and journalism duties at the same time, or switches back and forth. Inta Lase was a leading journalist on the *De facto* public TV program, describing possible election irregularities surrounding Latvian President Valdis Zatlers in 2007. Suddenly she was appointed as the same president's press secretary. Eventually, she returned to journalism, covering energy and environmental issues for the TV program *Vides fakti*.¹⁹⁹

Legal Environment

Unlike most European countries, Latvia does not require transparency of media ownership. Laws ensure freedom of speech, but journalists can be sentenced for up to three years for criminal libel. Supporters of this libel law contend that it helps prevent racial hate speech, which can be a problem here with a population that includes Latvians (59 percent) Russians (28 percent) Ukrainians (7 percent) Belarusians (2 percent), Poles and others.

An advisor to the Latvian national government on legal and public sector reforms concluded that the situation for journalists has gone downhill since the early reforms of 1990. There is no independent regulator, little coherent media policy, and an outdated media law from 1994 that does not recognize the role of the Internet. A new law is being devised to coincide with European Union directives.

The Internet

In Latvia, like other countries in the region, the Internet is dominated by a local version of Facebook, which is called Draugiem, and three portals—Delfi, Tvnet and Apollo. While hard hit by shifts in the economy, Latvians are fortunate that their Internet penetration ranks third highest in Central and Eastern Europe, nearing 60 percent, behind only Estonia and the Czech Republic.²⁰⁰ Latvians have continuing opportunities to access quality news and commentary on the Internet. In April 2010 the group that left *Diena* began publishing a weekly magazine called *IR*, and a website, *Ir.lv*, that has the kind of investigative and accountability journalism they felt they could no longer do at the newspaper. Although it has an influential readership, “our website is still pretty much a niche product,” Raudseps said.²⁰¹ Another interesting site for news and commentary is *politika.lv*, which is sponsored by the Latvian Open Society Institute and other pro-democracy funders.

Bloggers are “in full bloom,” according to one media analyst. Unlike other Central and Eastern European countries, Latvia has more women (53 percent) on the Internet than men. It is a “rather elite medium,” dominated by “highly educated people with prestigious jobs and living in big cities,” a 2009 Gemius/IAM study found, concluding that “until now the Internet is not easily accessible for all socio-economic groups.” Lauris Lietavietis, an analyst for Delfi, concluded that after the economic situation has reached its lowest point, “a positive impact on the advertising industry will be seen and several brokers/networks will appear on the Latvian market, which is currently a niche which has not reached its full potential.”²⁰²

Poland, with over 38.5 million people, has the largest media market in Central and Eastern Europe.

Poland

Poland, with over 38.5 million people, has the largest media market in Central and Eastern Europe, the first important factor that helps explain its relatively vibrant journalism sector. The Polish media are fully commercialized, competing for advertising dollars. “The press market in Poland, despite possessing some specific features, does not differ essentially from that of the developed European countries,” concluded media scholar Tadeusz Kowalski.²⁰³

Among its prizes is *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the most respected newspaper in Central Europe, and the heart of the Agora media empire, which also has radio stations, magazines and a free daily paper. The first legal independent title in the Communist bloc, *Gazeta Wyborcza* grew directly out of the samizdat press and was launched on May 8, 1989. Lech Wałęsa asked former political prisoner and fellow Solidarity dissident Adam Michnik to start a paper, and he enlisted samizdat editor Helena Luczywo. They sold out 150,000 copies of their first issue, and three weeks later Solidarity won the elections and the Communists handed over the government.²⁰⁴ Michnik and Luczywo are still in place at *Gazeta Wyborcza* today, which helps buffer their newspaper from the media-politics squabbles of the region.

Poland's second great asset was having this lively samizdat journalism tradition to draw on. During communism, Poland had an "open, protracted and intense opposition to the regime,"²⁰⁵ with more than 1,500 underground publications. To the envy of its Communist neighbors, the Polish Catholic Church was allowed to publish newspapers legally since 1956. By the mid-1990s the Polish media were highly politicized, but *Gazeta* continued to maintain its news quality, remaining the leading print source, only slipping to number two in 2003 when the new Axel Springer tabloid *Fakt* took the top spot.²⁰⁶

When the Communists left power, Western trainers from Harvard's Nieman Foundation, the Poynter Institute, and elsewhere went to Warsaw to be part of the action. The World Press Freedom Committee was very active here in the late 1990s, providing material support for the independent Polish Journalists Association), training, and a Polish version of their *Handbook for Journalists of Central and Eastern Europe*.

The media that gradually emerged were "certainly plural, but they could not in any real sense be classified as 'independent,'" concluded scholar Colin Sparks.²⁰⁷ Both public and private media are usually aligned with political factions.²⁰⁸

The economic crisis that began in 2008 has led to layoffs and consolidations. The most serious problems for journalists are the tabloid trend in print and broadcast that also plagues U.S. news media, along with the Eastern European pattern of political interference and shrinking support for quality public broadcasting.

Since investigative journalism is time-consuming, it doesn't have the payoff that most news organizations are looking for today. "Investigative journalists have to work one or two months on one article, and you have to pay them. Even respected newspapers want journalists to give them something every day, because they have less money," said Igor Janke, who is both a blogger and a feature writer at the national daily newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*.²⁰⁹

Conservative President Lech Kaczynski, who died in a plane crash in 2010, treated the independent media with suspicion and hostility. When a reporter for the private TVN television asked challenging questions in an interview during the October 2008 Brussels EU summit, President Kaczynski reportedly launched into a public tirade, threatening to "deal" with her and saying that he would have her "crushed" by the "special forces."²¹⁰

Perhaps chastened by the complaints from Reporters Sans Frontieres and others, Kaczynski vetoed a restrictive new media law in 2009. OSCE press freedom official Miklós Haraszti counted this as a real turnaround, noting that Poland had been the only country in the European Union where journalists were actually sentenced to prison for defamation.²¹¹

After Kaczynski's death, an emergency election in July 2010 brought in a more liberal president, Bronislaw Komorowski of the Civic Platform party, who has a friendlier relationship with the press. Intellectuals, artists, and journalists are at work on a project to de-politicize the public media, but it is not clear how well this will succeed.²¹²

The lack of professionalism among some journalists remains a challenge. “The language of public debate in Poland is appalling,” concluded Andrzej Kaczynski, a freelance journalist, referring in particular to the electronic media. “Where does the debate lead when the first question the politician hears from the journalist is: ‘What’s your response to the fact that your opponent said of you that you are a brute, a fool and a pest?’”²¹³

Markets, Ethics and the Legal Environment

In 1995, Polish journalism associations and unions gathered to draft the Media Ethics Charter. It did not take hold. The lack of solidarity among professional journalists makes it “significantly difficult to solve the problem of media politicization,” said scholar Katarzyna Pokorna-Ignatowica. “The journalist milieu is deeply divided according to ideological, social and generational differences. There is not a single effective professional association battling for journalists’ rights, and existing professional institutions are disrespected.”²¹⁴

Print

Polish media are “prey to all the same sins you have in the West,” concluded Wanda Rapaczynski, who built the business side of Poland’s highly-successful Agora media empire from its modest start after the fall of communism. Agora publishes *Gazeta Wyborcza* and has

Poland’s Main Media Outlets		
	Public Operators	Private Operators
Print		Fakt Gazeta Wyborcza Dziennik Rzeczpospolita Super Express Gazeta Polska Polityka Wprost Newsweek Polska The Warsaw Voice Warsaw Business Journal New Poland Express
Television	Telewizja Polska (TVP) TV Polonia	TVN TVN24 Polsat Cyfra+
Radio	Polish Radio (5 channels) Polish Radio ExternalService	RMF FM Radio Zet Radio Maryja
News Agency	Polish News Agency (PAP)	

three regional weeklies, the *Metro* free daily newspaper, 14 national magazines, 29 local radio stations, and part of an advertising syndicate.

When credit was hard to find in the early days, *Gazeta* got a \$300,000 loan from the *New York Review of Books*, and in 1993 Cox Enterprises bought a substantial share of *Gazeta* for \$5 million, becoming its single most important owner and prime business consultant. Cox made a tidy profit when it sold its 12.5 percent stake 10 years later to Julius Baer Equity Fund; by then, Agora's market capitalization was \$2 billion.²¹⁵ Today *Gazeta*'s average paid circulation of 347,000 and 4.2 million readers reached in total every week in print. Its online portal, *Gazeta.pl*, the fourth-largest website in Poland, attracts 11.8 million users a month, or 66 percent of all 17.8 million Polish Internet users.²¹⁶

“Overall, the private news media in Poland have done a better job of not sacrificing journalistic talent to the vicissitudes of the economy,” said Rapaczynski, who for the past 20 years has been a central figure in Central and Eastern Europe's media landscape.²¹⁷

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— Wanda Rapaczynski,
former president of Agora SA

Germany's Axel Springer, one of the largest media corporations in Europe, jumped into the market in October 2003 with a splashy campaign to launch the tabloid *Fakt*, which took a page from the U.S. penny press and sold for just one zloty. Not surprisingly, it surpassed *Gazeta* as the leading daily newspaper in just two months. Springer also launched entertainment magazines and merged previous Polish papers to form *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, another tabloid that today has the third-largest newspaper circulation in Poland. The company's high

profile prompted a big debate not only about unfair pricing, but about whether the Germans were taking over the Polish media market and sharpening Polish-German antagonisms in the public.²¹⁸

Gazeta Wyborcza, which remains number two after *Fakt*, has some competition in the serious newspaper category from *Rzeczpospolita*, even though the latter paper fired almost half of its journalists and its journalism began leaning openly toward Kaczynski's conservative governing party after he was elected in 2006.

Michnik and *Gazeta* survived a messy situation in 2002 when a Polish filmmaker tried unsuccessfully to persuade Michnik to pay a bribe in exchange for a new broadcasting ownership law that would allow for a television license for Agora.²¹⁹ “*Gazeta Wyborcza* is such a success, they are quite untouchable,” concluded Miklós Haraszti. “This is good news for press freedom in Poland because they somehow dictate the bravery level of Polish journalism.”²²⁰

In 1999, historian Timothy Garton Ash wrote euphorically in the *New Yorker* about *Gazeta*'s business and cultural success as a newspaper—which early on defied even Walesa, breaking with Solidarity to back a different candidate. Garton Ash said he wondered how *Gazeta* would look after the next decade of freedom, in 2009. “The pressures of a Western consumerist, entertainment model of ‘normality’ may prove more difficult to resist than those of the Soviet-type Communist ‘normalization’ that Solidarity so roundly and unexpectedly defeated. Perhaps this is the last irony of freedom’s battle: the compulsory could be defied, but the voluntary may be irresistible.”²²¹

So far, *Gazeta* has been buffeted but not ruined by Western-style commercial excesses. But Polish public television clearly has, stirring controversy and questions about its survival.

Television

While there were no restrictions on print ownership after communism fell, the Broadcasting Act of 1992 allowed foreign investors to buy up only up to 33 percent shares in broadcasting companies. This was raised after EU accession in 2004 to unlimited shares by EU country owners, and up to 49 percent by non-EU owners. Whatever the reason, Poland has not become the playground for international broadcast investors that its neighbors have. Instead, Poland’s public television TVP remains the most popular in the country with a 50 percent audience share, probably because it fills the tabloid niche itself. Poland abandoned the BBC model of a public broadcasting license fee so its public television system has to earn money. About 70 percent of its income comes from advertising. TVP is the only broadcaster able to afford expensive films and classical programming and has no real competitors in that area.²²²

Broadcasting was, from the beginning, the province of the political leadership.

TVP is as politicized as it is commercial, treated by the political parties as a prize for the election winners. In 2009, its president was replaced four times.²²³ One of the presidents was Piotr Farfal, who once edited a neo-Nazi magazine known for its anti-Semitic, homophobic views, and whose far-right politics partially shaped TVP’s news coverage during his brief tenure.²²⁴

The digitalization of public broadcasters in 2013 could reduce the politicians’ control over public television and radio, some believe.²²⁵

Public Culture, the Economic Crisis and the Internet

Although there are hundreds if not thousands of news outlets in Poland, the range of perspectives remains surprisingly narrow, concluded scholar Beata Klimkiewicz. Perhaps because Poland’s population is relatively homogenous, she missed seeing more perspectives “to counter the prevailing understanding that there is only one version of what constitutes truth or reality and only one way to talk about it.”²²⁶

Like other countries in the region, there are few websites devoted to original content. Most are aggregators or social network sites. Polish news websites like *Gazeta.pl* offer some audiovisual

pizzazz, but largely the same content as the print newspapers. In contrast, Polish versions of Facebook and eBay have emerged to great success, and are growing rapidly. Since the end of 2007, the Polish social network Nasza-Klasa “has acquired a market share of almost 60 percent (58.5 in January 2009) and now it is the third biggest player on the Polish internet with over 9 million users. That is more than the whole population of Polish internet users in 2005,” according to a 2009 study.²²⁷

Five years ago, newspaper writer Igor Janke and his wife founded the internet blog portal, *Salon24.pl*, which aspires to be like the *Huffington Post* in the United States. “We are doing something completely different [from news.] We are not competitive to *Gazeta.pl*,” he said. Instead, they have opened up to bloggers who are writing their own views. “We have 12,000 authors. Citizen journalists.” Janke was wistful, however, in describing himself as having one foot in old media and one in the new blogosphere. “My heart is still in the old world which unfortunately is disappearing” he said. “Citizen journalists have different rules. Maybe sometimes they are much more clear, because it is obvious that bloggers are biased; they are not pretending to be completely objective.”²²⁸

Gazeta Wyborcza has taken advantage of citizen reporting to enhance its news.

During May, 2010, floods in Poland, crowdsourcing and blogs significantly improved *Gazeta’s* coverage. Pawel Andrzejczuk, a 29-year-old small businessman, gathered on his blog over 3,000 news items including photos and videos provided by more than 300 contributors.²²⁹ *Gazeta’s* blogging platform (Blox.pl) is the biggest in Poland, hosting more than 184,000 individual blogs. “Pawel’s blog on the flood in Wroclaw is one of them. When water broke embankments of that city, it became the best-read blog on the platform ... We’ve even been sharing some revenues. Pawel’s blog is a member of our online advertising network (AdTaily.com). This network helps to turn visitors of blogs and niche sites into advertisers and provides funding to independent voices in the society. It has attracted over 13,000 amateur and professional online publishers, so far,” wrote *Gazeta Wyborcza* staffer Grzegorz Piechota.²³⁰

Poland was not as affected as some other countries in the region by the financial crisis. Nevertheless, revenues from advertising fell by 20 percent in the print media and companies cut back. Agora, for example, had to lay off 400 of its 3,600 employees. The daily *Polska Times* closed nine of its 18 regional editions. Advertising on the Internet increased by 7 percent in 2009 from 2008.²³¹

Romania

At first glance, Romania’s media landscape looks vibrant, with a plurality of choices, a healthy level of foreign investment, and media legislation in line with European Union requirements. However, the reality of Romania’s news media is that it is dominated by five conglomerates run by competing media owners, at least two of which have criminal connections,²³² and their journalists have to toe the owners’ line. The government controls and meddles in public broadcasting, and the quality of journalism is sinking instead of rising.

The media's independence, ethics, and legal environment "have had a rollercoaster ride since December 1989, when they and the society they are supposed to serve were freed from communism," summarized Peter Gross, a Romanian media expert at the University of Tennessee. "They showed promise one day, only to regress the next day ... their short history in a period of tentative, timid democratization defies easy conclusions or facile classifications and typecasting."²³³

Press freedom was a contentious issue between Romania and the EU as it negotiated its rocky but ultimately successful accession in 2007. At first the country tried to "Potemkinize" the EU standards, but then newly elected President Traian Basescu in 2004 began some tentative steps toward policies that would support an independent media sector.²³⁴ However by 2008, the media continued to become even more concentrated in the hands of the five major players. They controlled 45 percent of the television market and 90 percent of national newspaper circulation. Public television controls 22 percent.²³⁵

In seeking re-election in December 2009 President Basescu promised the independent Media Monitoring Agency that he would support legislation against the concentration of media ownership.

The result was what media analyst Marius Dragomir called "a full-scale media cannonade" against Basescu; election monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe chastised television stations for covering the elections in a "partisan and unbalanced manner," along with their sister newspapers. Basescu won the election by a thin margin. However, Dragomir cautioned against concluding that Basescu will actually clean up the media market. "Far from being an angel, he, too, wooed the overt support of some smaller TV stations."²³⁶ IREX calls Basescu's relationship with the media "bizarre," noting that he both attacks and uses them.²³⁷

Before the 2009 election, a survey by the Romanian Center for Independent Journalism (CIJ) found 80 percent of public support for Romanian journalists. After the election, it dropped to 60 percent. Basescu "signaled to the population that it was okay not to respect journalists," said CIJ director Ioana Avadani.²³⁸

On the other hand, "the same hostility is visible among journalists, since many of them took sides in the electoral battle. The minority of journalists who supported Basescu accused the rest of selling their souls for their owners' money," concluded the IREX Media Sustainability Index report for 2010.

The reality of Romania's news media is that it is dominated by five conglomerates run by competing media owners, at least two of which have criminal connections, and their journalists have to toe the owners' line.

Romania is the only country in this study whose media sector is troubled enough to be monitored by IREX's MSI. Its 2009 MSI report concluded that EU accession made little difference in the nation's media freedom and that there was no normalization in sight. There were small decreases in press freedom, plurality of news sources, business management and supporting institutions from the previous year, with only a marginal improvement in professional journalism. These decreases were paradoxical, the MSI noted, because of Romania's apparent assets: It joined the EU and enjoyed seven years of economic growth before the 2008 economic crisis. The key problems are a lack of ethics, "unreliable and abusive" ownership, and tabloidization, the MSI report concluded.²³⁹

By 2010, the score had dropped from 2.57 to 2.30 on a scale of zero (no freedom) to 4. The economic crisis hit Romanian journalists hard, popping the salary bubble of 2006-2008. The collapse put pressure on journalists to lower their standards, and those who were laid off were those "having personality, character, with something to say," concluded blogger Petrisor Obae, who contributed to the MSI report.²⁴⁰

The economic crisis hit Romanian journalists hard. The collapse put pressure on journalists to lower their standards.

Structure and Ownership

The five groups that control Romania's media are²⁴¹:

Sarbu/CME. Adrian Sarbu, the owner of the print company Publimedia, joined with Ronald Lauder's Central European Media Enterprises (CME) to launch in 1995 PRO TV, Romania's most popular station, later joined by four more stations, a national newspaper, a business daily, several magazines and radio stations, MTV Romania, a sports web portal and the leading press agency, Mediafax. Sarbu's network of local newspapers was largely dismantled in 2009 due to the crisis.²⁴²

Ringier. With Sarbu/CME, this is the largest commercial media group. The Swiss conglomerate has a "massive" print business with some 15 print titles, including the number two newspaper, *Libertatea*; two magazines, and the leading TV guide. It also has a small part of the TV market with a 25 percent share in Kanal D.

Vioculescu/Intact. Dan Vioculescu created the Intact Media Group, which is the most important purely Romanian media conglomerate. A former collaborator with the Romanian Communist secret police, Vioculescu and his family now control three TV stations including Antenna 1, Romania's second most successful commercial TV station; three news, sports and business weeklies, Radio ZU, some other print titles, and GSP.ro, the *Gazeta Sporturilor* site, a very successful internet portal. Vioculescu, who serves in the Romanian parliament, said that the Romanian papers are politically partisan, and that the "theory of independent media is a chimera."²⁴³ He led a group that sought unsuccessfully to impeach President Basescu in 2007, using his media empire toward that end.

Patriciu/Adevarul Holding. Dinu Patriciu, Romania’s richest man, with \$2.8 billion from oil businesses, owns more than 30 percent of the print market, including the best-selling newspaper, *Click* (206,000 daily copies in September 2009), the leading quality paper, *Adevarul* (105,000 copies), books, DVDs, and real estate. Described as “a highly controversial businessman” and former politician in the MSI index, Patriciu was involved in the oil industry and was prosecuted for stock exchange manipulation.²⁴⁴

Vantu/Realitatea-Catavencu. After being implicated in one of the biggest scandals of the post-Communist era when his investment fund FNI collapsed in 1999, Sorin Vantu had to divest his media assets. But it was only his business manager who had to go to jail after they bilked 200,000 investors in a Ponzi scheme. In 2004 Vantu started building a new media empire with the acquisition of Realitatea TV, now the third in the TV market. He also has a satirical weekly *Academia Catavencu*; some economic publications; a business TV station; a radio station; a press agency; and Romania’s top news website, *Realitatea.net*.²⁴⁵

“Without any understanding of, or care for, social responsibility, they wield their media outlets like broadswords in the interest of politics and profit,” Gross concluded.²⁴⁶ These owners’ political ambitions, combined with the severe impact of the global financial crisis and politicians accustomed to using the public broadcast media as a political prize, have wreaked havoc with the independence and quality of journalism here.

Legal Environment

Romania’s legal environment offers some of the brighter spots in an otherwise troubled media landscape. The problem is that the practice does not fulfill the promise of these laws. The print media are not regulated by a specific law. The audio/visual sector is typical of Central and Eastern Europe in that it is regulated by the government-controlled National Council of Broadcasting (CNA in its Romanian initials) which is politically biased, plays favorites among the media, and is ineffective in enforcing regulations.

Romanian public media—including six TV stations, six radio stations, two websites, and the public news agency AgerPres—is financed through license fees and advertising, which should allow it some independence from government interference. In reality, the Parliament has full control over the administrative board and president.²⁴⁷

In August 2006 Romania, aspiring to EU membership, actually leapt ahead of many other European countries by eliminating libel and slander from the penal code. But the Constitutional Court, which included some old regime Communists, reversed the decision in 2007, only days after Romania joined the EU, arguing that “repealing insult and calumny create a legislative vacuum in the protection of human values.”²⁴⁸ The Romanian Parliament “bravely went back to the issue” to adjust the civil and criminal laws together, abolishing criminal liability in 2009, noted Miklós Haraszti, then the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s press freedom official. He and civil society organizations including the Romanian CIJ lobbied hard with Romanian officials and in 2010, Romania offered this “breakthrough in decriminalization” for the region.²⁴⁹

Romania passed a Freedom of Information act in 2001, and improved it five years later by adding state-owned firms and national companies.

Romania has no law regulating the Internet, but in August 2010 there were attempts by Social Democrat Senator Olguta Vasilescu to create a law that would enable the CNA (National Council of Broadcasting) to monitor the Internet in order to detect and punish profanity, threats or any other obscene content posted by users.²⁵⁰ The law is currently being developed but is unlikely to pass. Bloggers argue that attempts to limit the freedom of speech on the Internet would take Romania considerably backward in its democratization process.²⁵¹

Public Culture and Journalism Ethics

Romania has less of the democratic or samizdat traditions that helped inspire some journalism standards in the Czech and Polish media. “There is no social value associated to freedom of speech, neither politically nor socially,” said CIJ’s respected director, Ioana Avadani, who is part of the panel evaluating Romania’s media landscape for the MSI. “The culture is the most important thing,” added Patrick Butler, vice president for programs at the International Committee for Journalists. “They never had a free press. They never understood what it gives them.”²⁵²

Romania’s Main Media Outlets		
	Public Operators	Private Operators
Print		Libertatea Click Cancan Gazeta Sporturilor Adevarul Jurnalul National Evenimentul Zilei Curentul Capital Nine O’Clock
Television	TVR and TVR2	Pro TV Antena 1 Realitatea TV Prima TV Acasa TV
Radio	Radio Romania Radio Romania International	Europa FM Kiss FM Pro FM Radio 21
News Agency	Agerpres	Mediafax NewsIn

There are negative trends in the ethics of advertisers and media managers. Media management sometimes bribes advertising agencies for ad placements, according to the MSI panel. And while state advertising was not a problem from 2006 to 2008, a scandal about a government minister allocating advertising contracts that included quid pro quos for favorable coverage from the media erupted in 2009. While the minister for sports and youth, Monica Iacob Ridzi, had to resign after the scandal broke, none of the television stations that had received the preferential contracts ever gave an official explanation.²⁵³

Active Watch,²⁵⁴ Media Monitoring Agency, and CIJ²⁵⁵ conducted a study that showed that only 32 percent of the journalists surveyed believed that ethical norms were respected in Romania. Alarming, half of the journalists could not point out any professional canon or ethical code.²⁵⁶ With very low revenues for media outlets and lack of incentives for quality reporting, many Romanian journalists resort to advertisement contracts to secure a decent living.

Journalists often fail to address relevant issues. Instead of investigating and going out into the field to pursue original topics, or posing questions of officials, print journalists tend to cover the news from the office, following what the news networks are broadcasting, rather than encouraging public debate by presenting different information from other media outlets.

Citizen access to foreign or domestic media is not an issue here, but the Romanian public, like so much of the rest of the world, seems to prefer tabloid news to more judiciously curated offerings. The highest quality newspapers established after the fall of communism, and developed during the consolidation of democracy, (*România Liberă*, *Evenimentul Zilei*, *Academia Catavencu*, etc.) have gradually sunk below 50,000 copies²⁵⁷ and are being replaced by the growing number of tabloids.

The Romanian population is still divided between the 55 percent living in urban areas and the 45 percent living in rural areas. Urban citizens have more access to all kinds of media, while rural households have fewer options. As in much of the world, there is a striking difference in quality between local and national newspapers. It is generally acknowledged that the best journalists work in the capital city, Bucharest. Local journalists may also serve as spokespersons for local governments and party organizations.

Romanians also like to get their news from television. Public trust in the broadcast media dropped after the media-presidential tug of war that ended in successful re-election for President Basescu.²⁵⁸ His strategy, since the main media were openly working against him, was to work with local party organizations around the country, while publicly counter-attacking the national media.

Efforts to form more effective journalist associations have not borne much fruit. Journalists are skeptical of joining trade unions, which might help them advocate for higher journalism standards. This reluctance is thanks partly to antipathy generated during the Communist times, the IREX MSI panel said. The CIJ, Media Monitoring Agency, and the Romanian Helsinki Committee often work to advocate for press freedom issues.

“We are asking ourselves every day why we are doing this,” said Avadani, whose CIJ trains over 300 people a year in journalism ethics and practice, including diversity programs and Roma coverage. There are too many media outlets to go around for the pool of advertising dollars available, she said. “Most of these media channels were set up not to function as profitable businesses. They were there to promote certain interests—economic, or political, or both, since those things are closely related here.”²⁵⁹

Avadani would like for schools to teach about independent media and media literacy. Teens who are using Twitter and Facebook “need to be shown how they can use media to monitor the society around them” and “be responsible for their own privacy and their image for the future,” she said. She found little donor interest in her proposal to create an appropriate school curriculum, saying the proposal was considered “not strategic.” The Parliament seems more interested in passing laws requiring religion education than civic education, which stops in the seventh grade, she said.²⁶⁰

The most recent Eurobarometer (2009) showed that approximately 70 percent of Romanians trust the public broadcaster as opposed to the Parliament (24 percent), Department of Justice (26 percent), or the police (36 percent). Peter Gross concluded that: “There is general agreement among politicians, media moguls and the leadership of their media enterprises ... that the Romanian media are the country’s ‘public opinion.’ The public is clearly not part of public opinion or its formation.”²⁶¹

The only reasonably healthy media are tabloid and non-political. Online journalism has yet to become a serious force, with only 3-4 percent of the 250 million euro advertising market in 2009.

Impact of the Financial Crisis

“The Romanian media market has been dramatically affected by the financial crisis, which struck it in the middle of a frenzy of investment ... The parliamentary and presidential elections of 2008 and 2009 respectively only served to make things worse, pushing media outlets weakened by the crisis towards one or other political interest,” the OSI report found. The only reasonably healthy media are tabloid and non-political. Online journalism “has yet to become a serious force,” with only 3-4 percent of the 250 million euro advertising market in 2009.²⁶²

Some important newspapers disappeared in 2009. The problem was more visible in the print media because local television stations are affiliated with national networks, Avadani of ICJ said. Some newspapers went online, but without much notice to the audience. For example, Mediapro had four local newspapers in print, and moved them suddenly online with no notice to the public. “People simply went to the newsstands and they found the newspaper was no longer there,” she said. For some, even cutting the cost of printing was not enough to keep them afloat. “What was lost was the sense of community, the link between the community and local authorities,” she said.²⁶³

Dragomir wrote about how one of Romania's oldest newspapers, *Gazeta de Transilvania*, was founded in 1838 in the small town of Brasov, shuttered by the Communists, and then reopened in triumph after 1989. Now it seems to have closed for good, on June 26, 2009. "The economic downturn has taken its toll on both the old and new guard in the Romanian media. And it's the same across Eastern Europe," he said in *Transitions Online*.²⁶⁴

But in Deva, in the Transylvania section of Romania, employees of a newspaper that closed decided to do something about it. They put their resources together. "Among all this madness, with advertising revenues going down, they started a new newspaper. They have celebrated one year of existence," said Avadani. ICJ trained the editor, who came from local TV, and some of the reporters. The paper has turned a small profit by providing both serious information and soft news about the life of the community, she said.²⁶⁵

The Internet

As in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, and other countries in the region, the Internet may offer some hope for Romanian journalists looking to do more independent work. But online journalism is still in its early stages here, with no magical new business model to sustain quality work.

HotNews.ro was founded in 1999 by a group of journalists as a press review, republishing important news from the newspapers. It was dubbed "hot news" because all the news was taken from elsewhere; but in 2005 it started doing some original journalism. By 2008 it employed about 50 journalists, including some working on original reporting and interactive projects not possible at the big media organizations where they used to work. Assisted by a grant from the European Union in March 2009, *HotNews* innovated a better editing platform and more interactive interface. It specializes in local government, environment, education, and entrepreneurial education and communication. Its English website is <http://english.hotnews.ro/>

Romania's internet penetration is growing fast after lagging behind other Central and Eastern European countries. More than 7 million of Romania's 22.2 million people are online.²⁶⁶

Most websites are still set up only as shop windows or storage for the print and TV media, and do not create separate content. ICJ's survey of 250 Romanian journalists and media managers found that 75 percent said they had no online training, and 50 percent had no training in "anything." Only 17 percent would be willing to pay for journalists' training, and 22 percent for managers' training. "They know that if they expand online, there is no guarantee they will make money," Avadani said.

Endnotes

1. Ithiel de Sola Pool's famous phrase, coined even before the Internet was developed.
2. This phrase is adapted from a much earlier time of technological and political disruption: Matthew Arnold's famous *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse* (1855), st. 12.
3. "Overview," *Footprint of Financial Crisis in the Media*, Open Society Institute Media Program, January 2010.
4. Karol Jakubowicz and Miklós Sükösd, eds., *Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Change in a Global Perspective*, (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect Books, 2008).
5. This report assumes the normative value of "independent news media" or "iron core" journalism as defined by Alex Jones in *Losing the News* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). It is "the form of news whose purpose is to hold government and those with powerful accountable." This is "fact-based news, sometimes called 'the news of verification' as opposed to the 'news of assertion'." This definition of good journalism is a small portion of what is offered today as "news" in most countries, but it is seen as essential to an informed citizenry in any democracy.
6. Aaron Presnall, et. al, "An Imperative to Innovate: Sustainable Journalism Training in Central and Eastern Europe" (Washington, D.C.: Jefferson Institute, 2007).
7. Karol Jakubowicz and Miklós Sükösd, eds., *Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Change in a Global Perspective* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect Books, 2008). (Jakubowicz is chairman of the Intergovernmental Council of the UNESCO Information for All Program, and a member of the Council of the Independent Media Commission in Kosovo; Sükösd is a media scholar).
8. Initially known as the Center for Foreign Journalists.
9. For more on this history, see Ellen Hume, *The Media Missionaries* (Miami: The Knight Foundation, 2004).
10. Hume, op cit.
11. Hume, op.cit.
12. There still are some pro-democracy grants for the Central and Eastern European region for multimedia and minority training, as well as cross-border and minority projects. Transitions in Prague, the International Centers for Journalists in Budapest and Bucharest, and the South

East European Network for Professionalization of the Media are among those who still get modest Western funding for such targeted projects.

13. See Judith Vidal-Hall's work and Miklós Sükösd and Peter Bajomi-Lazar, *Reinventing Media: Media Policy Reform in East-Central Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003).
14. Despite creating a popular news website, *Gazeta Wyborcza* is suffering like any other print newspaper from the worldwide syndrome of declining audiences and advertising in traditional media and the resulting tabloid trend.
15. Miklós Haraszti, former Hungarian dissident, member of parliament, and journalist, (who gained both a detailed country-by-country understanding and a regional perspective, as OSCE representative on freedom of the media from 2004-2010), e-mail to the author, May 18, 2010.
16. The new Hungarian media law introduces such vague and sweeping regulations of media content that press freedom advocates claim that its intention and likely impact are the equivalent of censorship. See Hungary section of this report.
17. Haraszti, e-mail May 18, 2010.
18. "Overview," *Footprint of Financial Crisis in the Media*, Open Society Institute Media Program, January 2010. That one outlet, the newspaper, *Diena*, recently was sold to a politically ambitious Latvian entrepreneur, and its independence may be compromised. See the Latvia section of this report.
19. Peter Bajomi-Lazar, *From Political Propaganda to Political Marketing: Changing Media Politics in Post-Communist Democracies* (manuscript of forthcoming book, 2010).
20. Mark Thompson comments at conference, "Beyond East and West: Two Decades of Media Transformation after the Fall of Communism," Central European University, Budapest, June 25-27, 2009.
21. Bajomi-Lazar, Peter, "The Consolidation of Media Freedom in Post-Communist Countries," in *Finding the Right Place on the Map*, (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008) 73.
22. After President Lech Kaczynski's death in a plane crash, an emergency election in July 2010 brought in President Bronislaw Komorowski of the Civic Platform party. He is friendlier to the European Union and Polish civil society. A group of non-profit agencies, including intellectuals and artists, are at work on a project to de-politicize the media.
23. Marius Dragomir, "Stop the Presses," *Transition Online*, April 30, 2008.

24. Haraszti, interview in Budapest, June 1, 2010.
25. See Hungary section of this report. A former Fidesz party member of parliament was named to head a newly consolidated media council. This central media “czar,” appointed for a nine-year, renewable term, appoints the leaders of Hungarian public media and supervises all media regulations.
26. “The Image of Ethnic Roma in Printed and TV News,” published in 2009 by the National Agency for Roma, sponsored by the Secretariat-General of the Romanian Government.
27. Jakubowicz and Sükösd, *Finding the Right Place on the Map*, 34.
28. Epp Lauk, “How Will it All Unfold” in *Finding the Right Place on the Map*, (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008).
29. Ibid.
30. This definition was offered by Thomas Lansner in comments at a conference, “Beyond East and West: Two Decades of Media Transformation after the Fall of Communism,” Central European University, Budapest, June 25-27, 2009.
31. Zrinja Peruško and Helena Popović, “Media Concentration Trends in Central and Eastern Europe,” in *Finding the Right Place on the Map* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008) 170. Their article has a full analysis of the ownership of the different media throughout Central and Eastern Europe.
32. Research by the Romanian Center for Investigative Journalism, for example, found that as many as half of all media owners in Bucharest have been under investigation for racketeering or money laundering. From David Kaplan interview with Paul Radu, Co-Founder, Romanian Center for Investigative Journalism, September 25, 2007, as quoted in Kaplan’s CIMA report, *Global Investigative Journalism: Strategies for Support*.
33. Zrinja Peruško and Helena Popović, “Media Concentration Trends in Central and Eastern Europe,” in *Finding the Right Place on the Map*, 183.
34. Gordana Jankovic characterized the Czech media as the success story of the region in an interview with the author in Hong Kong, October 2009.
35. Jiří Pehe, interview with the author, Prague, June 23, 2010. Pehe, who heads the New York University campus in Prague, is a former Czech journalist and dissident, and longtime advisor to former Czech President, Václav Havel.
36. Colin Sparks, “After Transition: The Media in Poland, Russia and China,” in *Finding the Right Place on the Map* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect Books, 2008) 46-47.

37. Ivan Krastev, a political scientist, was the advisor to the ambassador in the story. He recounted this in an interview with the author in Southampton, N.Y., August 14, 2010.
38. Interviewee asked not to be identified by name. Interview with the author, Washington, D.C., June 2010.
39. Vidal-Hall comments at conference, “Beyond East and West: Two Decades of Media Transformation after the Fall of Communism,” Central European University, Budapest, June 25-27, 2009.
40. Dragomir, “Survival Year,” *Transitions Online*, January 11, 2010.
41. Angelika Wyka, *Media, Transition and Democracy in Central Europe 1989-2009*, paper presented at “Beyond East and West: Two Decades of Media Transformation after the Fall of Communism,” conference, Central European University, Budapest, June 25-27, 2009.
42. Pehe, interview, op.cit.
43. In November, 2009, two popular Hungarian radio station licenses were denied renewal for their owners, who had developed successful businesses with loyal audiences, and instead were handed over to individuals associated with the top competing political parties, The Socialists (MSZP, then in power) and the Fidesz conservatives (who won the April 2010 elections.) See Hungary section of this report.
44. Sándor Orbán, e-mail to the author, August 1, 2010. Orbán, the former director of the Center for Independent Journalism in Budapest, is a veteran journalism trainer who has watched the ups and downs of media development.
45. Czech public television is a notable exception, see Czech Republic section of this report.
46. Orbán, e-mail to the author, August 1, 2010.
47. Adapted from Matthew Arnold, *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse* (1855), st. 12.
48. Vidal-Hall, unpublished paper delivered at conference, “Beyond East and West: Two Decades of Media Transformation after the Fall of Communism,” Central European University, Budapest, June 25-27, 2009.
49. Miklós Sükösd and Bajomi-Lazar, *Reinventing Media: Media Policy Reform in East-Central Europe*, 15.
50. Dragomir, “Survival Year,” *Transitions Online*, January 11, 2010.
51. Harazsti, interview with the author in Budapest, June 1, 2010.

52. Timothy Garton Ash, “Helena’s Kitchen,” *The New Yorker*, February 15, 1999.
53. Pehe, interview, op.cit.
54. The role of the television show, *Dallas*, in depicting to Communist audiences an affluent lifestyle in the democratic West has been noted. See, for example, Nick Gillespie and Matt Welch, “How ‘Dallas’ Won the Cold War,” *Washington Post*, April 27, 2008. Also see Dieter Buhl, *Window to the West: How Television from the Federal Republic Influenced Events in East Germany* (Cambridge: Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, 1990.) Buhl noted: There has been only limited research as yet on the reception of Western entertainment. Hesse, in his studies, concentrated on two of the most popular series. He found out that 40 percent of the East German women polled and 21 percent of the men watched *Dallas* regularly; *Dynasty* attracted 37 percent of the female viewers each week, 18 percent of the males. As Dr. Shepard Stone, former director of the Berlin Aspen Institute and an experienced observer of East German developments, observed, there were especially two reasons for the widespread fascination: “East German women were just overwhelmed by the elegant dresses worn in these series, and the men loved the wonderful cars being driven around Dallas and Denver.”
55. Ivan Krastev, interview with author in Southampton, N.Y., August 14, 2010. For example, “only 38 percent of Hungarians consider EU membership a good thing, according to a poll by Eurobarometer in the summer of 2010. A plurality of respondents, 45 percent, said it was neither good nor bad, while 15 percent were against EU membership...The popularity of the EU has plummeted to record lows in the member states, as just 49 percent of EU citizens believe that their country has benefited from EU membership, with 18 percent seeing membership as bad.”—excerpt from the Hungarian newspaper, *Nepsabadsag*, August 28, 2010.
56. Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 21.
57. For a good description of this journalistic ideal, see Alex Jones, *Losing the News* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *Elements of Journalism* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001, 2007).
58. Marc Morjé Howard, “The Weakness of Post-Communist Civil Society,” *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 13, No. 1, January 2002.
59. Telephone interview with the author, October 11, 2010.
60. Epp Lauk, “How Will It Unfold,” *Finding the Right Place on the Map*.
61. Quoted in Epp Lauk, op.cit.
62. Epp Lauk, op.cit.

63. Epp Lauk, op.cit.
64. Epp Lauk, op.cit.
65. See “Lidove Noviny vs. Gazeta Wyborcza,” in Ellen Hume, *The Media Missionaries* (Miami: Knight Foundation, 2004).
66. Persephone Miel, interview with the author in Boston, June 8, 2010, shortly before her death from cancer on June 28. She was an unusually effective and personable media developer, and is sorely missed by her colleagues. Perhaps one reason why the Czech public television news is more independent from government interference is because of the strong role of trade unions, as Tomas Vrba pointed out in an interview in Prague two weeks later: “Trade unions blocked many changes, for good and for bad.”
67. Interviewed in Washington, D.C., in June, 2010. The official, who asked not to be identified, predicted that while some aid was returning to trouble spots in Georgia, Macedonia, and Serbia, there would not be any return of U.S. aid to the more stable countries in this report: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, or the Baltics.
68. The media development NGO official, who asked to remain anonymous, was interviewed in Washington, D.C. in June, 2010.
69. Ioana Avadani, telephone interview with the author, June 1, 2010.
70. Peter Gross, “Dances with Wolves: A Meditation on the Media and Political System in the European Union’s Romania,” *Finding the Right Place on the Map* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008), 125. Gross is the director of the School of Journalism and Electronic Media at the University of Tennessee and has published many books on Eastern European media.
71. Elisa Tinsley interview with the author, Washington, D.C., June 2010 and subsequent e-mails.
72. *Media Law Assistance: Establishing and Enabling Environment for Free and Independent Media to Flourish*, Working Group Report, Center for International Media Assistance, May 18, 2007.
73. Peter Bajomi-Lazar, “The Consolidation of Media Freedom in Post-Communist Countries,” *Finding the Right Place on the Map*, 73-75. The EU helped to push the potential EU members from CEE toward more democratic regimes, including media laws. Determining why some post-Communist countries were more susceptible to democracy than others is beyond the scope of this report, but it seems obvious that countries with pro-liberalization movements in the 1990s were more attractive to the EU, and vice versa, than states within the USSR which have essentially continued the practice of authoritarian control.
74. Miklós Harazsti, interview with the author in Budapest, June 1, 2010.

75. Miklós Haraszti, e-mail to the author, May 18, 2010. Haraszti said that Czech President Václav Klaus not only resisted his 2009 request to veto the law, but was an architect of its passage. “In particular, the amendment makes it possible to sentence journalists to up to five years in prison for publication of conversations wiretapped by the police. I stressed that the fight against wrongdoing and corruption would require a waiver that allows lifting this sanction in cases where unauthorized disclosure turns out to be in the public interest. The new rules do not provide for such a defense.” In addition, the Czech media amendment confirmed the same liabilities for journalists who publish secrets as for officials who reveal them. “I asked him to help restore this important distinction, which is typical in modern democracies,” Haraszti said. The law kept the same liability and also retained defamation as a criminal offence.
76. Haraszti, interview with the author in Budapest, June 1, 2010. Even though he didn’t sign a new draconian media law, Polish President Lech Kaczyński had a poisonous relationship with the press before he died in a Russian plane crash in April 2010.
77. Ioana Avadani, telephone interview with the author, June 1, 2010.
78. Sandor Orbán and Ilona Moricz, interview with the author in Budapest, May 13, 2010.
79. In November, 2010, after many parts of the controversial media law already passed, two Hungarian newspapers published blank front pages in November, 2010, as the final part of the media law package was being finalized. See Hungary section of this report.
80. Sandor Orbán, interview with the author, Budapest, September 10, 2010.
81. Éva Simon, interview with the author, Budapest, June 4, 2010.
82. Katarina Pikorna-Ignatowicz, “Miedzy misja a politycznym uwik aniu TVP w przesz osci I wspo czesnie,” in Waniek, Danuta and Janusz Adamowski eds., *Media masowe w praktyce spo ecznej* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, 2007). As quoted in Czepek, Andrea, Melanie Hellwig, and Eva Nowak, eds. *Press Freedom and Pluralism in Europe: Concepts and Conditions* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect Books, 2009).
83. Mark Thompson of OSI noted that in Central and Eastern Europe, the fragmentation of new audiences has been slower due to the underdevelopment of new platforms. Comments at “Beyond East and West: Two Decades of Media Transformation after the Fall of Communism,” conference, Central European University, Budapest, June 25-27, 2009.
84. For more about this, see Czech Republic section of the report, and Jean-Pierre Tailleur, “A New Experience in Journalism, at Multiple Levels,” *Editorswebblog.com*, http://www.editorsweblog.org/analysis/2009/05/nase_adresa.php.
85. Gordana Jankovic, interview in Hong Kong, February, 2010.

86. These statistics are from Marius Dragomir, “News of the Eastern Front,” *Transitions Online*, May 31, 2010, based on a study by Gemius and the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) Europe, covering Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine; the EU broadband penetration number is from the European Competitive Telecommunications Association. “The majority of the countries from Western Europe have a broadband penetration rate of over 20 percent and the lowest performance can be observed in Greece – 13 broadband lines per 100 inhabitants. At the same time, in CEE the average rate equals 15 percent and there are still countries with less than 10 broadband lines per 100 inhabitants, such as Bulgaria, Poland, or Croatia. Moreover, taking into consideration the countries not included in the ECTA survey, the huge gap between Russia and Ukraine and the rest of the market can be noticed. According to the ITU, the broadband rate in Russia in 2008 was only 3 broadband lines/100 inhabitants. In Ukraine the broadband rate was even smaller with 2 broadband lines/100 inhabitants,” the Gemius/IAB study said.
87. Marius Dragomir, “News of the Eastern Front,” *Transitions Online*, May 31, 2010.
88. USA official, declined to be identified, interviewed in Washington, D.C., in June 2010.
89. Peter Molnar, interview, Budapest, August 2010.
90. Miklós Haraszti, comments made at “Beyond East and West: Two Decades of Media Transformation after the Fall of Communism,” conference, Central European University, Budapest, June 25-27, 2009.
91. Miklós Haraszti, in an interview posted on the OSCE website, March 5, 2010.
92. Esther Dyson, interview with the author, Washington, D.C., June 9, 2010.
93. Jiří Pehe interview with the author in Prague, June 23, 2010.
94. Marius Dragomir, “News of the Eastern Front,” *Transitions Online*, May 31, 2010.
95. The media development NGO official asked to remain anonymous. Interviewed by the author in June, 2010 in Washington, D.C.
96. Hungary has its own “Pulitzer Prize” awards, in honor of Hungarian-born Joseph Pulitzer, who later moved to the USA and helped to invent both yellow journalism and “objectivity” after a tiff with the Missouri Democratic Party establishment. See: Thomas C. Leonard, *The Power of the Press* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 174-176.
97. Tomas Vrba, interview with the author in Prague, June 24, 2010.
98. See Peter Green, “Czech Republic Pays \$355 Million to Media Concern,” *The New York*

- Times*, May 16, 2003. In one of those ironies that abound in Central and Eastern Europe, Petr Kellner, the reclusive billionaire who recently bankrolled the *NaseAdreša* media cafes around the Czech Republic, made \$530 million in a 2005 deal selling TV Nova back to CME, according to Marius Dragomir, “Independent Media for Sale, Cheap,” *Transitions Online*, March 8, 2010.
99. Jiří Pehe, interview with the author, Prague, June 23, 2010.
 100. Newton Media, “Czech Republic Country Report,” *Footprint of the Financial Crisis in the Media*, Open Society Institute, December, 2009.
 101. Newton Media, op cit.
 102. Marius Dragomir, “A Costly Retrenchment,” *Transitions Online*, May 4, 2009.
 103. See Ellen Hume, “*Lidove Noviny* vs. *Gazeta Wyborcza*,” in *The Media Missionaries*, op.cit.
 104. Ky Krauthamer, interview at *Transitions Online*, Prague, June 24, 2010. There is a huge number of visitors to the major Czech newspaper sites, which offer different content but are run by these major newspapers. *Mlada Fronta Dnes*’s, *iDnes.cz* and *Novinky.cz* have a combined monthly total of 5.5 million users.
 105. Marius Dragomir, “A Costly Retrenchment,” *Transitions Online*, May 4, 2009.
 106. Hodac was known to have connections with the Civic Democrat party of Vaclav Klaus, at that time in the opposition. Klaus was also a strong supporter of the privatization of the public television.
 107. “Czech TV Sacks Rebel Journalists,” *BBC News*, December 26, 2000, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1088710.stm> and “Czech TV Boss ‘Stable’,” *BBC News*, January 4, 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1101366.stm>.
 108. Marius Dragomir, “Swan Song of a Loyal Public Servant?” *Transitions Online*, July 26, 2010.
 109. *Mlada Fronta Dnes* reporter, Sabina Slonkova, was nearly killed in 2002 while investigating another politician in the Czech foreign ministry, who was convicted of hiring a contractor to assassinate her. She has continued to work as an investigative reporter for a website, despite fines imposed by the court for not revealing her sources. See “Journalist Sabina Slonkova Fined for Refusing to Disclose Names of Confidential Sources,” *IFEX*, February 10, 2009, http://www.ifex.org/czech_republic/2009/02/10/journalist_sabina_slonkova_fined/.
 110. Prison for Journalists Website, <http://prisonforjournalists.com/EN>.

111. Katerina Safarikova, “A Not So Sweet Aftertaste,” *Transitions Online*, September 18, 2008. She added: ““Provocation and hidden cameras are extreme reporting methods, and as such they must be used with great caution. There are no hard and fast rules, but civilized journalists generally concur that using these tools is justified if a nation’s security or economic well being are at stake. But party infighting? Most definitely not.”
112. Ky Krauthamer, interview at *Transitions Online*, Prague, June 24, 2010.
113. Centrum Holdings Website, <http://www.centrumholdings.com/en/about-us/>.
114. Newton Media, op.cit.
115. Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007) 16: “In England the first newspapers grew out of coffee-houses—numerous enough for some to be known for specializing in certain kinds of information...Later, in America, journalism grew out of pubs, or publick houses...The first newspapers evolved out of these coffeehouses when enterprising printers began to collect the shipping news, tales from abroad and more gossip, and political arguments from the coffeehouses and to print them on paper.”
116. In one of those ironies that abound in Central and Eastern Europe, Petr Kellner, the reclusive billionaire who recently bankrolled the *NaseAdreša* media cafés around the Czech Republic, made \$530 million in a 2005 deal selling TV Nova back to CME, according to Marius Dragomir, “Independent Media for Sale, Cheap,” *Transitions Online*, March 8, 2010.
117. Sourcefabric Website, <http://www.sourcefabric.org/en/home/about/15/About.htm?tpl=15>.
118. “Czech Republic,” Internet World Stats: European Union, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/europa.htm#cz>.
119. Sándor Orbán, interview with the author in Budapest, May 13, 2010. Sándor Orbán, no relation to Viktor Orbán, is the executive director of the South East European Network for Professionalization of Media (SEENPM), former head of the Center for Independent Journalism in Budapest, and a longtime regional journalism trainer.
120. “Hungary’s Strongest Leader Targets the Media,” editorial, *Washington Post*, July 19, 2010 and “The Putinization of Hungary,” editorial, *Washington Post*, December 26, 2010.
121. In Western Europe, Silvio Berlusconi’s Italy comes closest to having as much government influence over the private and public media. The text of the law translated into English, and other resources about the new media law, are found at <http://bit.ly/haWPVV>. The Hungarian government at first left out some sections in their official English translation, but these were added after complaints were made that they were avoiding full disclosure of some of the law’s contradictory or controversial parts.

122. “Analysts had hoped that the government would use its first few months in office to overhaul Hungary’s sclerotic institutions and implement structural reforms. But Mr. Orbán has instead focused much of his energies on consolidating Fidesz’s power by undermining key independent institutions, including the central bank, constitutional court and fiscal council, and passing a tough media law,” Chris Bryant, “Reform is route to tackle uncertainty,” *Financial Times*, December 6, 2010 and see also Chris Bryant, “Politics: Orban Consolodates Power,” *FT.com*, December 3, 2010, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/c210f8dc-fe68-11df-845b-00144feab49a.dwp_uuid=d0b749be-fdb8-11df-9ea5-00144feab49a.html#axzz18C7zj0do.
123. An impartial analysis of the media law’s provisions was difficult because of the broadly-worded, sometimes conflicting, provisions in the three separate media laws passed in 2010. This lack of clarity led critics to fear the worst about the government’s possible use of some provisions to punish free speech and independent journalism. In Éva Simon’s analysis, many blogs and websites, including Gawker, for example, would fall under this law. After the outcry, the government announced that the Internet provisions will be delayed for six months until immediately after Hungary’s EU presidency ends. Three elements were needed for a blog to qualify for regulation: 1. “Economic service” (a vague definition which implies the blog is offered for economic gain; for example, Google ads might be considered “economic services”) 2. Someone has editorial responsibility (this seems to apply to all blogs since arguably each is edited by the blogger), and 3. They aim to inform, educate, or entertain (which could be applied to virtually all content.) The Hungarian government’s official definition of media to be covered by the law was: “*Media product* shall mean individual issues of dailies or other periodical papers, internet newspapers or news portals, which are offered as a business service, for the contents of which a natural or legal person, or a business entity with no legal personality has editorial responsibility, and the primary purpose of which is to convey contents consisting of text or images to the general public with the aim of providing information, pleasure or education, in a printed format or through any electronic telecommunications network. Editorial responsibility shall mean the responsibility for the actual control over the selection and composition of the media content and shall not necessarily result in legal responsibility in connection with the media service.” The translation is from the Hungarian media authority’s English language website, <http://www.nmhh.hu/index.php?lang=en>
124. “EU’s Kroes to Examine Media Bill,” *Hungary Around the Clock*, December 27, 2010.
125. “Hungary Passes Law Boosting Government Control of Media,” *Reuters*, December 21, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6BK6KF20101221>.
126. “Martonyi Forced to Defend Media Bill,” *Hungary Around the Clock*, December 27, 2010.
127. “Orban Stands Firm on Media Bill,” *Hungary Around the Clock*, December 27, 2010.
128. “EU’s Kroes to Examine Media Bill,” *Hungary Around the Clock*, December 27, 2010.

129. IProtest Website, www.iprotest.hu.
130. Hungary Around the Clock, “Orban stands his ground on media law,” *Politics.hu*, January 7, 2010, <http://www.politics.hu/20110107/orban-stands-his-ground-on-media-law>.
131. The first law of the three-part media package passed July 22, combining ORTT, the former national radio and television authority, and the telecom authority, NHH. The prime minister appointed the head, Annamária Szalai, and parliament appointed the other regulatory council members, all from the Fidesz party, for renewable nine-year terms. See “Protest Over the New Media Law,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, December 3, 2010, <http://esbalogh.typepad.com/hungarianspectrum/2010/12/protest-over-the-new-media-law.html>.
132. Éva Simon, freedom of expression program director for the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, interview with the author, Budapest, June 4, 2010.
133. See coverage of this in: The European Blog Action Against Censorship in Hungary Blog, <http://www.bloggingportal.eu/blog/european-blog-action-against-censorship-in-hungary/>.
- “Polish Editor Criticises Hungary’s New Media Law,” *Thenews.pl*, December 21, 2010, http://www.thenews.pl/international/artykul145926_polish-editor-criticises-hungarys-new-media-law.html.
- Zoltan Simon, “Hungary Approves ‘Chilling’ Media Law Over Protests,” *Bloomberg*, December 22, 2010, <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-12-21/hungary-approves-chilling-media-law-over-protests.html>.
- “Ungarn Schränkt Die Presse Ein,” *N-tv.de*, December 21, 2010, <http://www.n-tv.de/politik/Ungarn-schraenkt-Pressesfreiheit-ein-article2204086.html>.
- Ungarn Führt Die Zensur Ein,” *Zeit Online*, December 2010, <http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2010-12/ungarn-mediengesetz-orban>.
- Marcin Sobczyk, “Hungary Approves Controversial Media Law,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 21, 2010, <http://blogs.wsj.com/new-europe/2010/12/21/hungary-passes-controversial-media-law/>.
- “Hungary to Create New Media Watchdog,” *BBC News*, December 21, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-12051665>.
- “Hungary’s Parliament Approves a Controversial Media Bill,” *The New Age*, December 21, 2010, http://www.thenewage.co.za/6369-1020-53-Hungary%27s_parliament_approves_a_controversial_media_bill.
- “Ungarn: Neues Mediengesetz Stößt in Europa Auf Kritik,” *Focus Magazin*, December 22,

2010, http://www.focus.de/politik/ausland/innenpolitik-ungarn-neues-mediengesetz-stoesst-in-europa-auf-kritik_aid_583987.html.

“Maďarská Vláda Má Kontrolu Nad Obsahem Zpravodajství,” *Zpravy.rozhlas.cz*, December 21, 2010, http://www.rozhlas.cz/zpravy/evropa/_zprava/madarska-vlada-ma-kontrolu-nad-obsahem-zpravodajstvi--826795.

134. The public media were under control of the parliamentary parties. By tradition as well, the Hungarian media have been politically partisan rather than “objective.”
135. Annamária Szalai, head of the consolidated National Media and Telecoms Authority (NMHH), offers the government’s views about the media law, in this English language interview: Csilla Halász, “Press Laws,” *HetiValasz.com*, December 29, 2010, http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://hetivalasz.hu/english_hungary/press-laws-30495/. She also was quoted in, Matej Hruska, “Hungarian Media Law ‘Turns Clock Back to Communism, Say Press Advocates,’” August 5, 2010, <http://euobserver.com/9/30581>.
136. Balázs Bodó, telephone interview with the author, October 11, 2010.
137. See “Hungarian Media Legislation Severely Contradicts International Standards of Media Freedom, Says OSCE Media Freedom Representative,” *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)*, press release, <http://www.osce.org/item/45940.html>.
138. Máté Dániel Szabó, telephone interview with the author, August 19, 2010.
139. “Hungary Sees Blank Page Protest Over Media Bill,” *BBC News*, December 2, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11899075>.
140. One presenter, Attila Mong, and his editor, Zsolt Bogar, were suspended from editing and presenting the 180-minute morning program and remained under investigation by Hungarian authorities for the incident. They continue working as journalists at the radio station. “Kossuth hosts suspended for protest,” *Hungary Around the Clock*, December 21, 2010.
141. For more about the fines, see Robert Hodgson, “Small Publications Fire Blanks Against Government’s Media Law,” *The Budapest Times*, December 8, 2010, http://www.budapesttimes.hu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16170&Itemid=27.
142. Éva Balogh, “The Hungarian Media Law is Passed,” *Hungarian Spectrum*, December 22, 2010.
143. Andy Sennitt, “IPI Criticises Hungary over media secrecy law,” *Radio Netherlands Worldwide*, November 9, 2010, <http://blogs.rnw.nl/medianetwork/ipi-criticises-hungary-over-media-secrecy-law>. IPI and the South and East Europe Media Organization sent a joint

delegation to Hungary in December to study the press freedom environment. International Press Institute Website, <http://www.freemedia.at/press-room/public-statements/singleview/5242>.

144. The court unanimously struck down the Orbán government's 98 percent tax on severance pay. Instead of abiding by the court's ruling, the government moved to reduce the court's jurisdiction over budget-related laws. The constitutional showdown continues, as the court must rule on whether its jurisdiction can be so curtailed. See MTI, "Hungary PM Upholds Plan to Change Top Court's Scope of Authority," *Politics.hu*, November 2, 2010, <http://www.politics.hu/20101102/hungary-pm-upholds-plan-to-change-top-courts-scope-of-authority>. The court's unanimous act of independence was surprising, since its newest member was Orbán's old teacher and former government minister, István Stumpf. Stumpf's confirmation by Fidesz-controlled Parliament had been interpreted as another signal that the country's institutions would lean toward Orbán's initiatives. For more about Stumpf, see note 161.
145. The reporter asked that her name not be used. Phone interview and e-mail to the author, September 20, 2010.
146. Unofficial political alliances and lack of ownership transparency make media influence hard to pin down. See Peter Murphy, "Politics Killed the Radio Stars," *Transitions Online*, December 10, 2009.
147. Peter Murphy, *op. cit.*
148. See note 135.
149. Anna Szilágyi, television journalist, interview with the author, August, 2010.
150. Peter Molnar, interview with the author, Budapest, August 2, 2010. He unsuccessfully opposed the highly politicized supervisory structure created by the law, which officially passed in 1996.
151. See note 145.
152. The MSZP party was created during the democratic transition of 1990 by the former communist party. Fidesz was a progressive-left party until the mid-1990s, when Viktor Orbán turned it to the right. Many former dissidents were part of the early liberal Fidesz party in Parliament, including Peter Molnar and Miklós Haraszti.
153. Sándor Orbán, interview with the author in Budapest, May 13, 2010. Viktor Orbán and Fidesz were in power previously from 1998 to 2002, but were defeated by the MSZP. In 2006, the MSZP prime minister admitted at a private gathering that their party had fudged the economic figures and lied to get elected. The statement, secretly taped, was made

public. The MSZP never recovered from this and other subsequent scandals.

154. Peter Molnar, op.cit.
155. Éva Simon interview, op.cit. The HCLU is an exception.
156. Josef Peter Martin, “Hungary Country Report,” *Footprint of Financial Crisis in the Media*, Open Society Institute, December 2009.
157. Éva Simon, interview, op.cit.
158. The study by the MTA-ELTE Communication Theory Research Group in February 2007 conducted on behalf of the Association of Hungarian Journalists, surveyed close to 1000 media workers. They use the phrase “right wing” in the study. See “Az Újságírók Harmada Nettó 200 Ezernél Többet Keres,” *Origo.hu*, February 27, 2007, <http://www.origo.hu/allas/tipp/20070227azujsagirok.html>, (accessed August 18, 2010).
159. The Hungarian Audit Bureau of Circulations (Matesz) audits 147 publications. The list of these is available at: Matesz, “Public Data,” The Hungarian Audit Bureau of Circulations, http://matesz.hu/data/#mainpart_3, (accessed August 20, 2010).
160. Fábrián, Sándor Péter, “Az Ingyenes Napilapok Térnyerése És Hatása A Sajtópiacra,” [“The Spread of Free Newspapers and their Effect on the Media Market”] *Médiakutató*, Autumn 2007, http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2007_03_osz/05_ingyenes_napilapok/05.html (accessed August 22, 2010).
161. RTL Klub’s ownership changed when the Hungarian media company infocenter.hu, closely associated with Fidesz-friendly investors Tamás Fellegi and István Stumpf, acquired a 31 percent stake just days before the April 2010 election. Thanks to a quick series of transactions, Fellegi technically never owned RTL shares. Both men divested their media shares before assuming senior posts appointed by the new Fidesz government. See Media Investment Corporation, “Announcement of Infocenter.hu Plc.,” *infocenter.hu*, April 23, 2010, http://infocenter.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=64:announcement-of-infocenterhu-plc&catid=35:angol&Itemid=67.
162. See for instance: “Soha nem látott mélypontra az MTV nézettsége,” [“The Rating of MTV Has Never Been Worse”] *Index*, January 18, 2008, <http://index.hu/kultur/media/tele7254/> (accessed July 26, 2010).
163. About the investigation: “Hütlén kezelés miatt nyomoz a rendőrség,” [“Police Investigation because of Fraud”] *RTL*, December 8, 2009, <http://www.rtlklub.hu/hirek/belfold/cikk/294457> (accessed July 29, 2010).
164. Cited in: “Soha nem látott mélypontra az MTV nézettsége,” [“The Rating of MTV Has

Never Been Worse”] *Index*, January 18, 2008, <http://index.hu/kultur/media/tele7254/> (accessed July 26, 2010).

165. “Digital broadcasting postponed,” *Hungary Around the Clock*, December 21, 2010.
166. Tamás Bodoky, “Támad a civil média: minden ötödik Index olvasó blogol,” [“Civic media is Coming: Every Fifth Index Reader Blogs”] *Médiakutató*, 2008/Summer, http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2008_02_nyar/06_civilmedia_index_blog.
167. Sándor Orbán, interview with the author, Budapest, May 13, 2010.
168. Marietta Le, interview with the author, Budapest, May 27, 2010.
169. “The online discourse is maintained mainly by the younger generation and their political preference is the right, if not the far right,” concluded Jozsef Peter Martin in “Hungary Country Report,” *Footprint of Financial Crisis in the Media*, Open Society Institute, December, 2009. See also Mónika Mátay and Ildikó Kaposi, “Radicals Online: the Hungarian Street Protests of 2006 and the Internet,” in *Finding the Right Place on the Map*, (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008).
170. Bruno Waterfield, “Hungary Elections: First Step to Power for Far-Right Since Nazi Era,” *The Telegraph*, April 11, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/hungary/7578561/Hungary-elections-first-step-to-power-for-far-Right-since-Nazi-era.html>.
171. There was a removal request made to stop the website by the Hungarian public prosecutor, but no court decision was made against it. E-mail from Éva Simon, September 10, 2010.
172. Web Audit Website, <http://webaudit.hu/>.
173. Jozsef Peter Martin, “Hungary Country Report,” *Footprint of Financial Crisis in the Media*, Open Society Institute, December, 2009.
174. Jozsef Peter Martin, op.cit.
175. Jozsef Peter Martin, op.cit.
176. Sándor Orbán, interview with the author in Budapest, May 13, 2010.
177. Philanthropy in Central and Eastern Europe is a big challenge not only because of the economic downturn, but because tax laws are not as supportive of charity as they are in the USA. Sandor Orbán said in May 2010, that financial support to advocate for press freedom is hard to find: “Without OSI nobody would exist.”
178. E-mails to the author from Tivadar Hüttl, HCLU, June 10, 2010.

179. Janis Chakars, “Role Reversals: Latvian Rebel Journalists and their Views since the Alternative Became the Norm,” paper delivered at “Beyond East and West: Two Decades of Media Transformation after the Fall of Communism,” conference, Central European University, Budapest, June 25-27, 2009.
180. Epp Lauk, “How Will it Unfold,” *Finding the Right Place on the Map*, 196-197.
181. Chakars, from University of North Carolina Wilmington, described the importance of *Diena* from the start of Latvia’s post-Communist period: “After independence on May 4, (1990) the Supreme Council continued its work with a dizzying array of laws and decrees. It found that the press was not keeping up in publicizing these decisions. The government wanted a single place that would consistently and comprehensively publish their decisions. A band of journalists wanted to use the need for a new newspaper to start a different kind of publication to suit a democratic society. The success of the movement “demanded another kind of journalism.” This was to be a journalism modeled on Western conventions, objective, and free of opinion within news. The view was that Latvia needed “simply a great daily newspaper.” Thus, *Diena*’s founders had its editorial independence and even eventual privatization agreed upon at its start. *Diena* fashioned itself after *The New York Times* and aimed to gather in one place, “all the news that’s fit to print.” No other paper had attempted to compile a comprehensive record of events. Such attempts simply did not fit the Soviet model, which paid little attention to thoroughness or timeliness, to say nothing of objectivity. *Diena* was so intent on breaking Soviet journalistic habits that it assembled a staff almost entirely of inexperienced journalists who were fresh out of university. Still, *Diena* openly supported the cause of independence and played an active role in moments of crisis. At the start of the August coup, the government called upon it to be *the* newspaper of Latvia and its leaders. “To Everyone! To Everyone! Hour X has struck!” ran its banner headline, but even so space was allotted to Alfreds Rubiks, the anti-independence leader.” Chakars, op.cit.
182. Rita Radusa, “Latvia Country Report,” *Footprint of Financial Crisis in the Media*, Open Society Institute, December, 2009.
183. Olga Proskuova, as quoted Radusa, OSI report, op. cit.
184. Radusa, OSI report, op.cit.
185. Arvils Aseradens, as quoted in Radusa, OSI report, op.cit. The statistics cited also are from this report.
186. Edward Lucas, as quoted in Radusa, OSI report, op.cit.
187. Pauls Raudseps, “How to Destroy a Newspaper,” *Dagens Nyheter* (Swedish newspaper), December 3, 2009, <http://www.oyo.lv/posts/cita-diena-2009-dec-04-how-to-destroy-a-newspaper>.

188. Gunta Sloga, e-mail to the author, September 6, 2010.
189. Nina Kolyako, “Viesturs Koziols Buys Controlling Interest in Diena,” *The Baltic Course*, June 8, 2010, http://www.baltic-course.com/eng/markets_and_companies/?doc=30090.
190. Pauls Raudseps, “How to Destroy a Newspaper,” op.cit.
191. The party did very poorly in the election despite this media buildup.
192. Gunta Sloga, op.cit.
193. Gunta Sloga, op.cit. She was particularly concerned about the signs of political bias at Latvian public television because it was hosting the debates before Latvia’s parliamentary elections in October 2010.
194. Janis Chakars, op.cit.
195. Aleksandr Krasnitsky, editor of *Telegraf*, the third largest Russian language newspaper in Latvia, telephone interview with the author, September 6, 2010.
196. “Press Under Pressure,” *The Economist*, December 9, 2010, http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2010/12/latvias_media. The article said: “Take, for example, the fate of the Latvian daily *Telegraf*, one of the best Russian-language news outlets in the region. Previously owned by a local businessman, Telegraph’s ownership is now unclear. ‘I know that the old owners have sold their business, but I do not know who bought it,’ said the chairman of the company, Jānis Jurkāns. The ownership trail now ends with an anonymous company in Cyprus, Kinonon Holdings Limited. But it seems (http://www.pietiek.com/raksti/telegraf_mainijis_ipasniekus_nonacis_antonova_kontrolē) that the ultimate beneficial owner may be Snoro Media Investīcijas, a subsidiary of the Lithuanian-based Bankas Snoras which also owns 88.92 % of Latvijas Krājbanka. Snoras’s biggest shareholder is Vladimir Antonov, a businessman with good ties to the Russian authorities. His representative denies he has any links with *Telegraf*.

“Mr Antonov is no stranger to controversy. Earlier this year he complained after Sweden and USA blocked his bid (http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/11/opinion/11iht-edantonov.html?_r=1) to buy the carmaker Saab. According to Mr Antonov, this was due to “a misplaced fear of Russian money”. Mr Antonov’s father Aleksandr has been in the news too. He controls Russia’s Convers group and survived an assassination attempt last year in Moscow.

“When Bankas Snoras established its media subsidiary last summer it made no secret of its plans to buy Baltic media (<http://www.telegraf.lv/news/pribaltiiskie-smi-mogut-skupity-rossiyane>). Many titles are going cheap because of falling revenues caused by the recession. “Controversy erupted last week when Telegraph’s editor-in-chief, Aleksandr Krasnitsky,

was sacked, after the paper published a story about a nine-year-old schoolboy threatened with expulsion for insulting Nils Ušakovs, mayor of Riga and a leading figure in the opposition (and supposedly pro-Russian) Harmony Centre party. The mayor was said to be so furious with the story that he ripped the paper to pieces.

“The story quickly disappeared from the *Telegraf* website (though it can still be found elsewhere: <http://din.lv/?menu=14&news=6295>) and the paper announced that Mr Krasnitsky had stepped down. Mr Ušakovs, once the paper’s news editor, denies any involvement. But two influential journalists also quit the paper in solidarity with their former boss, and complained of censorship (<http://politika.lv/blogi/index.php?id=62128>). Others said they would do the same once they had found new jobs. The local journalists association accuses the paper’s new owners of violating the constitution (<http://www.delfi.lv/news/national/politics/zurnalistu-asociacija-notikumi-telegraf-ir-apdraudejums-varda-brivibai.d?id=35496337>).”

197. Janis Chakars, op.cit.
198. Krasnitsky, op. cit. While he agreed that Russian print media is “much more opinionated,” he said he tried to separate fact and opinion in *Telegraf*, “unlike other brands which are more sensationalist and ethnically biased.” He contended that the Latvian language media also are biased, but are not as overt about it.
199. I am indebted to my CEU student, Diana Kalacinska, for her paper on this subject, “Invisible Line Between Journalism and PR Cast Study of Latvia,” Central European University political science department, February 2010.
200. *Do you CEE: Interactive Overview of Central and Eastern Europe Markets 2009*, study by Gemius and the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) Europe, covering Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine.
201. Pauls Raudseps, e-mail to the author, September 5, 2010.
202. *Do you CEE*, op.cit.
203. Kowalski, Tadeusz. “W Kierunku rynku. Zmiany w prasie codziennej na tle tendencji europejskich,” in *Podstawowe czynniki przemian polskiego rynku prasowego lat 1996-2006*,” material y konferencyjne pod red. Jana Kani, Poznan. 2006.
204. See Peggy Simpson, “In Poland, Women Run the Largest News Organization,” *Nieman Reports*, Winter 2001.
205. Colin Sparks, “After Transition, the media in Poland, Russia and China,” *Finding the Right Place on the Map*.

206. Tomasz Goban-Klas, “Politics versus the media in Poland: a game without rules,” *The Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 1996, vol. 12, No. 4, 24-41.
207. Colin Sparks quoting the work of Karol Jakubowicz in “After Transition, the media in Poland, Russia and China,” *Finding the Right Place on the Map* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2008).
208. The news media in Poland “are much more involved in politics than Western Europe,” noted veteran Polish journalist Igor Janke in a telephone interview with the author, October 11, 2010.
209. Igor Janke, op.cit.
210. Irena Maryniak, “From Patriotism to Plurality, The Polish Media Journey,” in *Eurozine*, March 20, 2009, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-03-20-maryniak-en.html>.
211. Miklós Haraszti, interview with the author, Budapest, June 1, 2010. Journalist Igor Janke, whose *Rzeczpospolita* newspaper supported Kaczynski, said Kaczynski’s leadership was unfairly caricatured in the Western media as anti-democratic and anti-media because he and his party, “were not masters of public relations” and were using combative language to take on the liberal elites from the post-Communist period. Igor Janke op.cit.
212. Polish journalist, Janke was skeptical that this was anything more than window-dressing: “They have a completely different style. The essence of politics has not changed that much. In media, they are doing exactly the same,” continuing to exert their political influence over both public and private media, he said. Igor Janke op. cit.
213. Andrzej Kaczynski, “Poland Country Report,” *Footprint of Financial Crisis in the Media*, Open Society Institute, December 2009.
214. Katarzyna Pokorna-Ignatowicz. Quoted in Czepek, Andrea, Melanie Hellwig and Eva Nowak, eds., *Press Freedom and Pluralism in Europe: Concepts and Conditions* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect Books, 2009).
215. Maren Röger and Johann Roppen, “Nordic failure - German success. Strategies of foreign media companies in Poland 1989-2009”, paper presented at the International Conference - Beyond East and West: Two Decades of Media Transformation After the Fall of Communism, Central European University, Budapest, June 25-27,2009, Budapest, Hungary.
216. Grzegorz Piechota, “Poland’s *Gazeta Wyborcza* Provides Platforms for Community Involvement in Journalism as a Social Good,” forthcoming report for the International Press Institute, September, 2010.
217. Wanda Rapaczynski, interview with the author, Southampton, N.Y., August 14, 2010.

218. Maren Roger, “Political or Commercial Interests? Poland’s Axel Springer Tabloid, Fakt, and Its Coverage of Germany,” in Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska, Michał Glowacki, Karol Jakubowicz and Miklós Sükösd eds., *Comparative Media Systems*, (Budapest: Central European Press, 2010).
219. Irena Maryniak wrote about this in *Eurozine*: “At the time, largely to comply with EU audiovisual policy requirements, an amendment to the 1992 Broadcasting Act was being prepared with a view to introducing anti-concentration laws and greater transparency in media ownership. Had the amendment been passed, the publisher of a national daily would have been disqualified from holding a licence for a national radio or television channel. But it was not – largely thanks to the repercussions following allegations that members of the governing elite had attempted to solicit a massive bribe from Adam Michnik to introduce changes into the Broadcasting Act that would benefit Agora and allow it to buy up Polsat. The allegations centred on secret tape recordings made in Michnik’s office in July 2002 that revealed the film producer Lew Rywin, internationally known for his work on *Schindler’s List* and *The Pianist*, had tried to persuade Michnik to offer \$17.4 million to the ruling SLD (Democratic Left) Party in exchange for the said changes to the broadcasting law amendment. Rywin indicated that he was representing a group of public figures including Prime Minister Leszek Miller and the head of Polish Public Television, Robert Kwiatkowski. *Gazeta* hung onto the recording for five months to explore the full story and finally blew the whistle in December 2002. Parliament ordered an immediate investigation that disclosed serious irregularities in legislative procedures and led to criticism of the amendment and its withdrawal from parliament. In March 2004, a new, simpler amendment was passed to comply with the EU’s AVMS Directive; ironically, this held no anti-concentration clauses. In April, Lew Rywin was sentenced to two years imprisonment for fraud and a month later Prime Minister Leszek Miller resigned. Just who, if anyone, was behind Rywin’s visit to Michnik remains a mystery. The court that sentenced Rywin concluded that he had been acting on his own initiative, but the Prime Minister, along with head of public service television (TVP) Robert Kwiatkowski and Włodzimierz Czarnasty of the National Radio and TV Broadcasting Council (KRRiT) were nevertheless named in parliament as the men behind Rywin’s proposal. A few months on, a court of appeal concluded that Rywin had been acting on behalf of a still unidentified group.” Irena Maryniak, “From Patriotism to Plurality: The Polish Media Journey,” *Eurozine*, March 20, 2009, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-03-20-maryniak-en.html>.
220. Haraszti, interview with the author, Budapest, June 1, 2010.
221. Timothy Garton Ash, “Helena’s Kitchen,” *The New Yorker*, February 15, 1999.
222. Michał Glowacki, *Mission impossible? The controversies over the public service broadcasting remits in Poland*, paper delivered at “Beyond East and West: Two Decades of Media Transformation after the Fall of Communism,” conference, Central European University, Budapest, June 25-27, 2009. The University of Wrocław scholar noted the sleazy quality of its programming: “The controversies over the Polish “Stars Dancing on Ice” (a

Polish version of the BBC program, on Polish public television) started already in the very first edition. One of the jury member was a Polish female singer, Doda, who first appeared in reality show broadcasted in commercial TV station. During one of the first programs Doda threw a pink flute into athlete Przemyslaw Saleta, who in a response offered her an oral sexual activity. More controversies appeared in the last edition, where Justyna Steczkowska, running the show, compared Doda to skating Gosia Andrzejewicz and stated that she has the “pink inside.” Doda called Steczkowska “silly colour-blind person,” and defined Jola Rutowicz’s skating abilities as proportional to her intelligence. Fashion designer Tomasz Jacyków, who appeared in the jury also during the last edition, advised Jola Rutowicz to “bend more rarely over a toilet bowl.” After one of his comments, competitor Gosia Andrzejewicz promised to find him a new job in the sewage treatment plant.”

223. Andrzej Kaczynski, op.cit.
224. Gareth Jones, “Poland targets ex-neo Nazi TV chief with court move,” *Reuters*, July 8, 2009.
225. Poland agreed to European Union recommendations to introduce digital terrestrial TV by July 2013. “This change will cause avalanche effects such as audience distraction and personalization. Public television will lose its leadership and as a result politicians won’t be so eager to appropriate it. Public radio without financial support from license fees won’t survive in today’s shape (4 nationwide programs and 17 regional branches).”—Szynol, Adam, “20 Years of Foreign Companies Presence on Polish Press Market with Particular Consideration Regional Dailies,” paper presented at “Beyond East and West: Two Decades of Media Transformation after the Fall of Communism,” conference, Central European University, Budapest, June 25-27, 2009.
226. Quoted in Irena Maryniak, “From Patriotism to Plurality, The Polish Media Journey,” *Eurozine*, March 20, 2009, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-03-20-maryniak-en.html>.
227. *Do you CEE? Interactive Overview of Central and Eastern European Markets 2009*, study by Gemius and the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) Europe.
228. Igor Janke, op.cit.
229. Grzegorz Piechota, “Poland’s *Gazeta Wyborcza* Provides Platforms for Community Involvement in Journalism as a Social Good,” part of the report, *IPI Report: Brave News Worlds*, International Press Institute, September, 2010, www.freemedia.at/fileadmin/.../Brave_News_World_IPI_Poynter.pdf.
230. “Pawel’s blog directly competed with all the TV news channels, radio newscasts, and newspaper portals. In just 5 days it attracted 157,000 unique users in a city of 630,000 inhabitants. That’s about one third of what our established local news portal of *Gazeta* for Wroclaw is attracting monthly,” said Grzegorz Piechota, op. cit.

231. Andrzej Kaczynski, op.cit.
232. Research by the Romanian Center for Investigative Journalism, for example, found that as many as half of all media owners in Bucharest have been under investigation for racketeering or money laundering. From David Kaplan interview with Paul Radu, Co-Founder, Romanian Center for Investigative Journalism, September 25, 2007, as quoted in Kaplan's CIMA report, *Global Investigative Journalism: Strategies for Support*. See also "Europe and Eurasia," *Media Sustainability Index*, IREX, 2010, 96.
233. Peter Gross, "Dances with Wolves: A Meditation on the Media and Political System in the European Union's Romania," *Finding the Right Place on the Map*, 125. Gross is the director of the School of Journalism and Electronic Media at the University of Tennessee and has published many books on Eastern European media.
234. Gross, op.cit, 125.
235. Survey by the Romanian Center for Independent Journalism, as quoted in "Europe and Eurasia," *Media Sustainability Index (MSI)*, International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), 2010. IREX's thorough MSI survey helped inform much of this Romania report, and also appears to be the foundation for the OSI, "Footprint of Financial Crisis in the Media," published by the Open Society Institute in December 2010.
236. Marius Dragomir, "Politics by Other Means," *Transitions Online*, December 14, 2009.
237. "Europe and Eurasia," *Media Sustainability Index (MSI)*, International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), 2009.
238. Ioana Avadani, telephone interview with the author, June 1, 2010.
239. "Europe and Eurasia," *Media Sustainability Index (MSI)*, International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), 2009.
240. "Europe and Eurasia," *Media Sustainability Index (MSI)*, International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), 2010.
241. See note 235.
242. "Europe and Eurasia," *Media Sustainability Index (MSI)*, International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), 2010.
243. Gross, op.cit, 128.
244. IREX, MSI, op.cit., 96.

245. Iulian Comanescu, “Romanian Country Report,,” *Footprint of Financial Crisis in the Media*, Open Society Institute, December 2009. (His report seems to have drawn heavily on the IREX MSI.)
246. Gross, op. cit., 128.
247. In 2007, Alexandru Sassu, member of the Social Democrat Party (PSD), was appointed as president of the Romanian PSB, as a compromise reached with the Liberals who appointed their own man as head of the national broadcasting council, CNA. As soon as he became president of TVR, Sassu replaced the head of the news department, Rodica Culcer, with Mădălina Rădulescu, who was probably more in line with his own interests concerning the editorial line. Sassu’s term as president of TVR is considered highly controversial due to accusations of favoring his party (PSD) in the electoral campaign and for appointing temporary people from his own political entourage in key positions that were supposed to be permanent. Eventually, in the summer of 2010, Sassu was dismissed by the Parliament who voted against his annual report, and replaced by Alexandru Lăzescu. The new president Lăzescu immediately reappointed Rodica Culcer as head of the news department, giving her back the editorial authority that she enjoyed before. Alexandru Lăzescu’s appointment gives Romania hope for a freer PSB. Lăzescu’s agenda focuses on giving voice to more experts than politicians in order to restore the credibility of the TVR news programs.
248. “Insulta Și Calomnia Pedepsite Din Nou În Codul Penal,” *Realitatea.net*, http://www.realitatea.net/insulta-si-calomnia-pedepsite-din-nou-in-codul-penal_40155.html.
249. Haraszti, e-mail to the author, May 18, 2010, and interview with the author in Budapest, June 1, 2010.
250. Dan Duca, “Olguța Vasilescu - Război Cu Postacii. Înjurăturile Pe Internet Vor Fi Interzise Prin Lege,” *Realitatea.net*, August 11, 2010, http://www.realitatea.net/vasilescu-razboi-cu-postacii-injuraturile-si-obsценitatile-pe-internet-vor-fi-interzise-prin-lege_728348.html.
251. Dan Duca, “Comănescu: Legea Internetului Nu Se Va Putea Aplica,” *Realitatea.net*, August 10, 2010, http://www.realitatea.net/comanescu-legea-internetului-nu-se-va-putea-aplica_728379.html.
252. Patrick Butler, interview with the author, Washington, D.C., June 2010.
253. The stations were Realitatea TV, Antena 3, and Pro TV. IREX, MSI, op.cit, 99.
254. ActiveWatch Website, <http://www.activewatch.ro/>.
255. Centrul Pentru Journalism Independent Website, <http://www.cji.ro/>.
256. “Europe and Eurasia,” *Media Sustainability Index (MSI)*, International Research and

Exchanges Board (IREX), 2010, <http://irex.org/resource/romania-media-sustainability-index-msi>

257. Iulian Comanescu, “Romania Country Report,” *Footprint of Financial Crisis in the Media*, Open Society Institute, December 2009, http://www.soros.org/initiatives/media/articles_publications/publications/financial-crisis-media-20091201/romania-20091201.pdf.
258. Media Monitoring Agency/ActiveWatch criticized 2009 election coverage by broadcast television, finding that three-quarters of the programming consisted of talk shows with little connection to actual news or information. From the MSI Index 2010, quoting *Romania libera*: “Active Watch condamna compartamentul iresponsabil al televiziunilor in Campania electorala,” December 7, 2009.
259. Ioana Avadani, telephone interview with the author, June 1, 2010.
260. Ioana Avadani, op.cit.
261. Gross, op. cit., 129.
262. Iulian Comanescu, op.cit.
263. Ioana Avadani, op.cit.
264. Marius Dragomir, “A Shortage of Cash and Ideas,” *Transitions Online*, August 24, 2009.
265. Ioana Avadani, op.cit.
266. *Do You CEE? Interactive Overview of Central and Eastern European Markets 2009*, study by Gemius and the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) Europe.

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