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POST-COMMUNIST EASTERN EUROPE: The Difficult Birth of a Free Press

by

Bernard J. Margueritte

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The Joan Shorenstein Center

PRESS · POLITICS

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Harvard University
John F. Kennedy School of Government

INTRODUCTION

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Eastern Europe has proved more—and less—eventful than anyone might have predicted in the fall of 1989, when as Jacque Rupnik described it, "overnight, the Old gave way to the New."

The good news is well-remarked—these dozen countries, stretching in a cultural archipelago between Russia and the West, with more than 125 million citizens, have moved forward, not backward, in the years since the Iron Curtain fell.

Overall, after sharp initial falls, production and GNP are up, foreign trade growing, and the outlines of a democratic civic culture taking root. Some countries are doing obviously better than others economically, and all remain odd amalgams, despite free market rhetoric, of East and West, mixed economies verging quite often on the mixed-up, so complicated are the ownership and responsiblity patterns that persist.

To some, the reemergence of governing parties with their history in the old Communist parties causes alarm; but so far, the new rules have been honored, and democracy sustained. Here again there are exceptions, but one needs to remember that none of these countries had any ongoing experience of democracy whatsoever before 1989. Tiny Czechoslakia, the sole democratic republic prior to the Berlin Wall's collapse, was so for barely twenty years.

The press—so absolutely vital to East European democracy—reflects this checkered past. After decades of harboring hopes of greater freedom, of sustaining samizdat sheets and relying more often on rumor than the official press for "real" news, the East European press has fallen on a time all too often at odds with the ideals once held by many of the region's journalists, dreams of what one called "a post-commmunist profession."

As Franco-Polish journalist Bernard Margueritte notes, "The revolution in Eastern Europe...was not merely an economic and political revolution. It was above all a moral, even spiritual, uprising." What's apparent, six years after that first revolution, is how far the region's press stands from completing its moral and spiritual odyssey out of the past.

Beset by weak professional training and standards, by intense competition, by an invasion of Western investors, managers, and press models, today the Eastern European press is at sea, freed of its old Communist moorings (or shackles), but without a clear course to sail.

Alongside attempts to create serious, responsible journalism are cynical, sensationalist tabloids. Party appartchiks and their allies have all too often curiously come into possession of the most valuable media properties, and when broadcast rights have been auctioned off, frequently it has been into a market rife with bribery and corruption.

The role of the West, left essentially to ambitious entrepreneurs, has been a mad scramble for profits and market share, rather than the inculcation of civic values and democratic culture that, in the long run will be the best protector of press freedom.

Margueritte, surveying the scene across Eastern Europe, displays the disappointment and apprehension that many share who've looked closely. As he says, "There are no more taboos anymore..but we are still far away from what Poles, Czechs, Slovaks—indeed all the peoples of this diverse region—had dreamed about at the dawn of their new freedom..."

Margueritte points to encouraging signs at the same time, however, and finds that there are things people both in the East and West can do to make a difference. At the end of his paper, he outlines and evaluates several of these actions.

Will they succeed, at a level Margueritte and other dedicated journalists in the region find satisfying? That remains the open, and problematic, challenge. The power of Margueritte's critique—read in an American society itself awash in "OJ"—is the power of the moral claim his inquiry makes. Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, rushing headlong toward capitalism, offer those of us raised, educated, accustomed—and inured—to it a prism through which to see not only the frustrations of a newborn society seeking civility in the highest sense, but a reflection of what has come of our own hopes and dreams for the same.

In that sense alone, beyond its documentation of Eastern Europe's fragile press, it is a challenging and enriching study.

Richard Parker
Senior Fellow, The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy
John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University

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POST-COMMUNIST EASTERN EUROPE:
The Difficult Birth of a Free Press
(with a particular emphasis on the case of Poland)

The revolution in Eastern Europe, if "revolution" it was and not largely an abdication of power by the Communists, was not merely an economic and political revolution. It was above all a moral, even spiritual, uprising. Polish workers, whether from the mines, the steel foundries, or the shipyards were fighting first for their human dignity. Thus in August, 1980 the call for freedom of the press was an essential prerequisite to the broader list of demands by the striking Gdansk workers. (At the very same moment students were demonstrating outside the shipyard gates, carrying that demand to the rest of Polish society with chants of "prasa klamie!"—"the press is lying!"). Throughout the decade of "revolution," from Solidarity's birth in August, 1980 to the formation of the first Solidarity government in August, 1989 the desire to have access to honest, informative media was fundamental.

But today, five years after Communism's collapse, we need to ask whether this dream of a free press—a dream not just of workers and students, but of so many other elements of Eastern European society—has been fulfilled. Has the introduction of the market economy in this part of the world given birth to an informative, trustworthy, quality media? Among those attempting to answer the question, many are finding their research leads to disturbing conclusions. The Polish sociologist Marcin Frybes of the Centre d' Analyse et d' Intervention Sociologique in Paris, for example, in a remarkable article gave voice to the most disturbing conclusion of all: "Observing the evolution of the situation, it is not at all obvious that the media's adaptation to the rules of the market economy is giving the people of Eastern Europe an answer to their old problems." Frybes then goes on to stress the need finally to get rid of lies and manipulations, and so recover what he calls a capacity "to achieve a self-representation as a society able to think about itself freely and independently of all kind of power."[1]

Eastern Europe today remains far away from such "self-representation". This is true in part because of the tragic legacy of the past. The catastrophic structure of industry, obsolete equipment, inadequate infrastructure, ecological disaster, and onerous debt repayment schedules place a heavy burden upon nominally free societies. They are, though, only the most obvious restrictions upon real freedom of action. In many ways the political and psychological legacies are heavier. Worse yet, there are new burdens taking hold in these "democratic" countries.

The objective now is to make money as rapidly as possible. The emerging business class in Eastern Europe, and Western investors do not on the whole seem to care about long term social, cultural or political goals. So while lip service may be paid to the circulation of ideas as the life-blood of nascent democracy, the truth is that the bottom line is the bottom line, and the sacred "mission of the press" is in some ways in no better shape now than it was under the Communists. Sadly, not only is the "ethos" of Solidarity today long forgotten, but the splendid pre-Communist traditions of Central European humanism are being ignored too and so may soon be forgotten.

While this paper focuses upon the media, it may shed some light on other problems facing post-Communist Eastern Europe. One immediately gets a sense of how entangled the various forms of mass communication are in the process of reform by posing at the outset a commonsensical question: How can we possibly hope to have democratic media in not-yet-democratic countries? Put another way, why should the press be any better than the rest of society?

\This question at once faces us with a dilemma, for how, in turn, is it possible to build a democratic society in countries without a vigorous free press? When Polish President Lech Walesa in 1993 told the newly-created Polish Media Council that "the level and state of the mass media determine the development of democracy," he should have been speaking the obvious to the converted.[2] Western experts, too, have repeatedly stressed the point. The words of Professor Colin Sparks offered at a seminar in Budapest well represent the Western view that the press remains "one of the main channels by which citizens can be informed about the world and the problems and choices facing their government, and in which they can find reasoned discussions of alternative policies and possibilities."[3]

The new democratic countries of Eastern Europe are at a historic crossroads, and so our fundamental question has inescapable corollaries. Is the press solid, honest and informative? If

not, should we in the West accept the implications of our beliefs about the crucial role of a free press and worry that the whole process of building democracy in Eastern Europe is endangered? The implications form the horns of our dilemma: no democratic press in not yet democratic countries and no real possibility to build democracy without the support of serious media. Finally, what can we, in the West, do to break this vicious circle by helping create high-quality media in Eastern Europe?

As a contribution to the ongoing debate about the media and its emerging role in Eastern Europe, let me offer the following propositions as a basis for discussion:

◦ *We have in Eastern Europe a completely new landscape.* Media as an institution is not only a part itself of the landscape, but that part through which we visualize the rest. Potentially, at least, we now should be able to see much better, for the view is far less obstructed: gone is the "wooden tongue" of Communist propaganda, gone are all the taboos, indeed, gone are all the limitations of the past. The Western press is available everywhere, and there have been serious Western investments in the Eastern European press. Censorship has disappeared and new legislation meant to protect press freedom has been adopted, although with great unevenness, and only in some countries.

◦ *It is hard to build the new from the remnants of the old.* Eastern European journalists are, for the most part, people of the past. Under Communism, many were defenders of oppressive regimes, while some were leaders of the opposition. Ideology forced both sides into positions of bias. It is important to acknowledge that "Solidarity-style" journalists had to be propagandists too: fighters, men and women defending an "ideological cause."

Sadly, neither group has really changed. Therefore neither the apologists nor the opponents of the *ancien régime* know from experience what an informative, objective, unbiased press is supposed to be. Worse, the siege mentality formed over the years on both sides lingers; many wouldn't want an unbiased press even now. To these journalists, there is still too much at stake. How then, in this crucial area of public life, is it possible to build the future with the people of yesterday?

◦ *The lack of professional qualifications is embarrassing.* Even with the best intentions, it would be hard to have serious media with a majority of unprofessional journalists. But the hard truth is that most men and women in Eastern European media have learned the tools of the trade haphazardly at best. The lack of adequate preparation for an ever more complex profession will be as difficult to overcome as in other professions, perhaps more difficult, for other fields such as business seem to take the need for long-term, formal preparation more for granted.

◦ *People working in the media have grown accustomed to following orders.* Why then should we now expect them suddenly to show initiative and personality? As in many social arenas, indifference and apathy are still pervasive. While complaining about a lack of independence, journalists not only are still ready to take orders, but are often hanging around waiting for them.

◦ *The new rulers show the tendency, inherited from the past, to control the media.* The leaders of Eastern Europe today, even those who fought bravely for democracy, have lived too long in Communist societies not to be contaminated by their illnesses. Now, *nolens volens*, and often unconsciously, they adopt the methods they so criticized in the past. Evidently it is not so bad after all if the political leadership tries to control the press!

◦ *The Western media giants have invaded Eastern Europe.* This penetration has brought a new dependency, but this time from the West, not the East. Whether the new domination will eventually prove even more dangerous than Communist authoritarianism to deeply-rooted, complex cultural traditions remains unclear.

◦ *The introduction of free market economics has produced a push toward money-making by all means.* For the media, the obvious consequence is the development of tabloid journalism, with its emphasis upon sensationalism, sex and violence. And it is only slightly less obvious that the free market and the advertising business are the new gods. The old "ethos" of Solidarity, the moral and spiritual revolution of Vaclav Havel and Lech Walesa, are ignored, if not forgotten.

◦ *The most valuable publications of the past are disappearing.* In many cases, press standards have dropped even in comparison with Communist times and the "quality" media—the literary reviews and intellectual magazines once heavily subsidized by the socialist state—have disappeared or face serious difficulty.

◦ *There is no collision, but rather collusion, between the erstwhile nomenklatura and the new "democratic" leadership.* Prominent former Communist leaders, even former members of the

security apparatus, today occupy influential positions in all aspects of Eastern European life. In the media specifically, this collusion between the old and new has even been financed by Western money, giving an unexpectedly ironic twist to the term "joint venture." Among readers, listeners and viewers, as a result, there is a spreading sense of disillusionment, a growing cynicism that in capitalism, truth can be bought, and quite cheaply at that.

◦ *The sins of the past are difficult to overcome.* The problem is not just that Communism's legacy, in its moral and psychological dimensions, or economic and political consequences, is devastating. With the introduction of the free market many of the worst consequences of that legacy have been exacerbated, even as unrestrained—or as the Poles term it, "wild"—capitalism creates often dramatic, and usually unanticipated, problems of its own. It is fair to say that the West has not strained to lessen such social costs in this crucial transitional phase. If one narrows the focus to the dimensions of our case study, we think any informed analysis will reach the conclusion that the investments of Western media tycoons have done little to help build a truly democratic press in Eastern Europe. Perhaps we've reached a propitious moment to reassess Western involvement. Should we not be asking whether investments are the sole way, or even the principal way, we can help Eastern Europe build a democratic press?

◦ *Unfortunately there is precious little desire to undertake a reassessment of the role of the West.* The early enthusiasm of Western observers, after the so-called "revolution," is long gone. Mal Mallette, director of special projects for the World Press Freedom Committee, drew conclusions after visiting Eastern Europe which suggest that today the situation may be even worse than we've assumed. Mallette rendered his sober assessment yet more sober by pointing out that he and his two colleagues arrived already well-informed, and presuming the worst. "We knew, for example, that the Communist establishment—the *nomenklatura*—still controlled newsprint, distribution, and most of the sparse and obsolete equipment." Yet, even so, Mallette still concluded, "Our preconceptions fell short of the grim realities."[4]

Let's now attempt to give more substance to our assertions:

THE NEW MEDIA LANDSCAPE

At first glance, Eastern European media have changed radically. Gone is the uniformity of the Party press, once so boring, biased, full of lies. Freedom of expression seems to be complete. New papers, magazines, radio and TV stations have appeared. Technical equipment has been greatly improved. Consider the Polish case: there is better paper (imported from Finland), modern offset printing, even color in magazines and some newspapers, all enhancing a tremendous diversity of styles and interests. Publications from all over the world, so hard to find only a short time ago, are readily accessible in most cities.

The content of Polish TV's evening news has changed as well. According to a study done by the Warsaw Institute of Journalism, compared with 1989, 15 percent more broadcast time is spent on business affairs and 20 percent more on sports; by contrast, politics and religious topics each receive roughly 10 percent less attention.

In 1989, 90 percent of the Polish press, not to mention TV and radio, was under the direct control of the Communist Party. When the first Solidarity-dominated government took control later that year under Tadeusz Mazowiecki, it moved quickly to end this domination. By April, 1990 it had abolished formal censorship of the press and established a commission to oversee dismantling of the old state press system.[5] The commission's first task was to end the gigantic monopoly RSW Prasa, which controlled the printing and distribution of Poland's roughly 2,200 state-approved publications. At this point, 106 of Poland's most important daily and weekly papers have been put on the market. The commission has received 221 offers (17 of them from abroad), and 69 newspapers have been sold after competition, while 12 are still under dispute and 19 haven't found a buyer.

Unfortunately, there have been serious problems with the dismantling from the start. Lacking clear guidelines, the commission has frequently allowed newspapers to be sold to political allies of its members, often well below market value. For example, one of the Communist-era's leading papers, *Zycie Warszawy*, was sold to a group of Polish journalists supported by an Italian investor, in spite of better offers, because President Walesa and Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki apparently quietly asked that the paper be given to their friend Woycicki, *Zycie Warszawy*'s editor-in-chief.

Two other cases reflect similar political dealings. The popular weekly *Polityka* (whose former editor, Mieczyslaw Rakowski, was the last leader of Communist Poland) remains in the hands of its journalists. For this, the staff at

Polityka can thank their editor, Jan Bijak, who happens also to be a member of the commission. The second case is less typical, more interesting and complex.

It involves *Gazeta Wyborcza*, today the largest paper in Poland. *Wyborcza* originated under the sort of unusual circumstances which constituted politics in the last stages of the *ancien régime*. In June, 1989, Poland's Communist rulers had agreed to parliamentary elections and made an unprecedented concession: a portion of the seats were to be freely contested. As a consequence, the Solidarity movement was allowed to establish an "election newspaper" (that is what *Gazeta Wyborcza* means). Funding for the paper came in part from the U.S. government's National Endowment for Democracy. The paper was supposed to represent Solidarity as a whole, but Solidarity's left wing took control. As a result, in 1990 President Walesa asked the paper to stop using the Solidarity logo in its masthead. But if Walesa hoped this would temper the paper's leftist slant, he was mistaken; *Gazeta Wyborcza* became even more openly leftist.[6]

Other groups of Solidarity continued the protest, even going to court in an attempt to win Solidarity's newspaper back for Solidarity, but the efforts have not so far gone anywhere. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, meanwhile, has become ever more successful, and now sells some 700,000 copies a day. *Wyborcza* may not be very professional (the text is full of mistakes and terribly biased), but it is a very lively paper with lots of practical and useful news for the average citizen on day-to-day life.

One might be tempted to downplay such "irregularities" as an inevitable part of the birth pains induced by the transition from one set of social values to another. The worrisome thing is that all these "birth" problems increasingly seem to be less transitory with the passage of time, and rather more the defining elements of how the "new" media operate—and will continue to operate—throughout Eastern Europe. Poland's N.I.K. (Supreme Chamber of Control) produced a 100-page report on the transfer of media property which condemned "the wrongdoings, the improprieties and inadequacies [found] in every controlled area."[7]

Beyond all these chronicled "improprieties," one can't help but be struck by what goes unmentioned: that old Communist-era publications have done extremely well, despite their origins. Whether under new management or old, they have retained their former readerships even while new, creative ventures still find the soil of Eastern Europe a difficult place to take root.

Very few new titles have been able to survive in the market, whether in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia or Hungary. Some 2,500 new publications have appeared on the Polish market, and half of them have been short-lived. This rapid turnover is not just a Polish phenomenon; in Hungary two-thirds of the new titles have already disappeared.

For Poland, the two serious exceptions to this generalization have been *Gazeta Wyborcza* and the weekly *Nie*. The latter is edited by Jerzy Urban, General Jaruzelski's spokesman during martial law. It has achieved remarkable success, and now sells 600,000 copies per week. Alas, the terms which best describe the paper's character are "sensationalist," "pornographic," "anti-Western," "anti-intellectual" and "anti-Church"—above all, "*anti*," as its title *Nie* ("No") explicitly suggests. To say this publication is an object of widespread controversy in the journalistic community and among the public hardly does it justice.

Perhaps the best example of how enduring and resilient the *ancien régime* press has proven to be is the "happy ending" (one of the Poles' favorite borrowings from English; it seems so appropriate here) achieved by virtually all the former Communist party papers. The official daily of Polish Communism was *Trybuna Ludu* (*Tribune of the People*). The chief concession it made to capitalism was to drop "the people" from the title; today the paper putters along happily as *Trybuna*, leaving one to wonder whether its editors in their cynicism better understand capitalism than they did Communism. The same holds true in the Czech Republic where the three major daily newspapers remain *Rude Pravo*, the former organ of the Communist party; *Mlada Fronta* (now *Mlada Fronta Dnes*), former newspaper of the Socialist Youth Union; and *Vecerni Praha*, previously financed by Prague's Party committee. In Hungary, *Nepszabadsag*, the former Communist Party paper, is still the number one daily in the country, with 340,000 copies sold at an annual profit of $10 million.

Throughout Eastern Europe, this durability of the old Communist Party papers is even more evident in the regional press. Radio Free Europe researcher Edith Oltay has pointed out that in Hungary most of the local dailies which existed under Communism have managed to survive.[8] The same is true for Poland, where *Gazeta Robotnicza* in Silesia, *Glos Wielkopolski* in

Poznan and *Gazeta Krakowska* in Cracow, all publications of the past, remain by far their regions' predominant papers.

So when one talks about the birth of the free press in Eastern Europe it is important to remember that the old, unfree press has hardly withered away. Anna Sabbat-Swidlicka, another Free Europe researcher, sums up the situation:

> The once Communist-owned press has been privatized and its market is more or less stable, but the press is still dominated by the old, established publications that used to be owned by the Communist party's publishing empire. Although dismantling that empire was one of the priorities of the Solidarity governments, the way in which it was done actually helped to enrich the Communist nomenklatura, perpetuated the existence of old titles, and gave an unfair advantage to journalists of the old Communist school.[9]

Nonetheless, a few interesting papers have emerged; such as *Gazeta Wyborcza* in Poland (despite limits noted earlier), the daily *Lidove Noviny* (circ. 125,000) and the weekly *Respekt* (circ. 60,000) in the Czech Republic. Perhaps the best of the new is *The Warsaw Voice*, a high-level and objective English-language publication, created with American participation.

By comparison to the print press, Eastern Europe's electronic media are showing signs of a much broader diversification. Poland now has 25 private TV stations and 110 private radio stations. Technically most of these outlets are still illegal, since the Media Council has licensed—as required by law—only a few stations, such as PolSat. This broadcasting explosion is a phenomenon not limited to Poland. Even in Bulgaria, Sofia now has a half dozen independent radio stations. And "illegality" remains more or less a hypothetical concept: several private Polish TV stations are transmitting without so far being subject to penalties. Nevertheless, this is a dangerous situation, with potentially serious repercussions in the volatile atmosphere of Polish politics. The adoption of the law on broadcasting by the Polish Parliament in December, 1992 at least is slowly beginning to bring order where none had existed before.

Moreover, while cable TV is only at an early stage of development in Poland, many people are watching satellite TV programs, such as CNN, British Sky TV, plus dozens of German, French, and Italian programs thanks to the existence of over one million home satellite dishes.[10]

THE NEW LEGISLATION

It should be noted here that law *per se* is certainly not a panacea. After all, constitutions of the former Communist countries taken literally were quite liberal (students in Warsaw, for example, for decades demonstrated demanding "respect for the Constitution," not its replacement). Yet there can be no truly free press without adequate protective legislation as a necessary, if not sufficient, pre-condition. Thus it is particularly unsettling to have experts such as Marvin L. Stone and Leonard H. Marks, chairman and deputy chairman respectively of the International Media Fund, assert that the uncertain status of Eastern Europe's proposed media laws represents a fundamental obstacle to carrying out the privatization process properly. The legislative morass, they note, is one of the reasons why "the march toward media freedom has been slowed to a crawl in several [Eastern European] countries."[11] To date, few new press laws have been adopted, usually not very good, and a lot of drafts, mostly unsatisfactory, have been put forward. How curious it is that, notwithstanding the rejection of totalitarian principles for democratic ones, Lenin's dictum that "politics don't have to follow the law, but the laws must be subordinate to politics" still continues to hold sway.

The first new press law in Eastern Europe was adopted in Lithuania in February, 1990. It was followed by similar laws proclaiming the freedom of the press in Latvia, Estonia, Georgia, Armenia and Moldavia. The former Soviet Union adopted its final press law on June 12, 1990. The first Russian statute on the media was signed into law by Boris Yeltsin in December, 1991.[12] Article 1 of the law proclaims that the media "are not subject to restriction unless so provided by the legislation of the Russian Federation pertaining to the mass media." Scrutinizing its 62 articles, however, one finds a very complex registration procedure, a prohibition of publication of state secrets or "any other specially guarded secret", the right of the court to order journalists to reveal their sources, the obligation to publish denials up to twice the length of a contested article or broadcast, and a punishment for "abuse of freedom of mass media." Similarly, the Yeltsin Constitution "guarantees" freedom of the press but adds that "restrictions of human rights and freedoms may be introduced only... when essential to protect the state system, to ensure security and public order and to protect public health and morality."

The Lithuanian law is broader that its Russian counterpart since under "media" it includes also press agencies, VCRs and book publishing. In Poland, as we have seen, censorship was eliminated by April, 1990 but a new broadcast law followed only in December, 1992, after unusually frank and heated public debate. Its promulgation then provoked serious doubts among a substantial portion of society since the law proclaimed the obligation of TV and radio to "respect the Christian value system," and its restrictions were more far-reaching, "broadcasts should not advocate activities contrary to the law or to the interests of the Polish State, or (express) attitudes and opinions contrary to the morality and the general interest."

This said, it is nevertheless remarkable that even now Poland remains only one of four former Soviet bloc countries (joined by the former Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, Latvia and Romania), to have passed new broadcast laws. In the Czech Republic, despite the personal commitment of President Havel, the government abandoned its attempt to pass a new press law after journalists protested vehemently against a draft containing media restrictions so complex that many doubted whether the solemnly-proclaimed freedom of the press could be respected.

Other East European parliaments find themselves in similar disarray. It will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for Hungary to adopt a press law since a two-thirds majority is required to pass it. One sign of that likelihood is that when an earlier draft was presented to the Hungarian Parliament in 1992, it failed to receive a single "yes" vote, a first in Hungarian parliamentary history.

So for all the complexities of these attempts to establish a legal framework for the media, the basic issue turns out to be relatively simple and straightforward: the new leaders of Eastern Europe are caught between their desire to improve democracy and their old-fashioned, Communist-era inclination to try to control the media.

"NEW-FASHIONED" ATTEMPTS AT CONTROL: THE ROLE OF THE WEST

Western media moguls didn't wait for the fall of Communism or the collapse of the Soviet Union to invest in Eastern Europe. The most audacious pioneer was undoubtedly the late Robert Maxwell, whose publishing house, Pergamon, had already established a joint venture with the Soviet Academy of Sciences in the mid-eighties. In the same period, Rupert Murdoch's News International had become the first Western organization to buy shares in a private TV station in Eastern Europe, Hungary's NAP TV. And by 1988, the Fininvest empire of Silvio Berlusconi had concluded a cooperation agreement with regional TV stations in the Soviet Union.[13]

Curiously, these pioneers have grown much more cautious since then. More recently, the most dynamic Western media organizations in the Eastern market have been Young and Rubicam, *Reader's Digest*, IP (a branch of Havas), EurExpansion, the French tycoon Robert Hersant, and the French radio station *Europe 1*.

Some groups have shown particular interest in the financial and advertising management of East-European media: Berlusconi, after taking control in 1989 of advertising and program abroad for Soviet TV, took charge a year later of financial management for Polish TV. At the same time, IP agreed to a series of similar contracts, first with Radio Danubius in Hungary and some regional TV stations in the Soviet Union, then with two new public stations in Eastern Germany. IP now controls the advertising management, national, international or both, of Estonian TV, Radio Danubius and TV1 in Hungary, two radio stations and one TV station in Latvia, Vilnius TV in Lithuania, Petersburg TV in Russia, Minsk TV in Belarus, Czech TV CTV and the Slovak S1, one radio and the two TV programs in Ukraine and, last but not least, Slovenian TV.

Many international groups have moved even further, becoming involved not only in management but full joint ventures. The inroads made in the business press of Eastern Europe by the group EurExpansion (formed by the French magazine *Expansion*, the American publishing company Dow Jones and the German economic paper *Handelsblatt*) have been particularly remarkable. This group owns shares in no less than six leading economic publications in the region: *Figyelo* and *Vilaggzdasag* in Hungary, *Gazeta Bankowa* in Poland, *Hospodarske* and *HN Ekonom* in the Czech Republic, and *Commersant* in Russia.

Robert Hersant, who controls 35 percent of the Parisian press (notably *Le Figaro* and *France-Soir*) and 18 percent of France's regional press, has taken over a still more impressive share of the Eastern European market. In Poland, for example, he owns shares in eight big newspapers ranging from 30 percent of the regional *Dziennik Zachodni* to 70 percent in *Express Illustrowany*,

and including the former governmental paper, *Rzeczpospolita*. He also has important shares in *Magyar Nemzet* (Hungary), *Mlada Fronta Dnes* (Czech Republic) and *Business in Russia*.

Then there is Michael Ringier, a Swiss, who bought seventeen Czech publications, like *Lidove Noviny*, the best newspaper in the country, the company Euroskop, a publisher of magazines for women, TV and movies, as well as *Reflex*, the country's most prominent full-color magazine.[14] Or consider Axel Springer, the German press baron, who has won control (curiously, at no cost) of four regional Hungarian newspapers.

In broadcasting, Hachette's *Radio Europe 1*, is already playing a leading role (Hachette is the top media group in France). It started the first private radio station in 1990 in Czechoslovakia, then moved on to build *Europa Plus Moscow*, *Europa Plus Petersburg* and *Europe 2* in Prague. Turn to the TV market and you discover that satellite broadcaster Astra, from Luxembourg, is the principal beneficiary of the rapid development of satellite receivers in above all, Poland, but in much of Eastern Europe as well. HBO, a division of Time-Warner, meanwhile has set up the first cable TV system in Eastern Europe, *Global TV* of Warsaw. It is also worth noting the appearance of East-European versions of popular Western publications, such as a Hungarian, Polish, Czech and Russian *Mickey Mouse*, and for a somewhat older and presumably more mature audience, editions of *Playboy* originating in Warsaw, Budapest and Moscow. Finally, for those somewhat older still there are now national versions of the *Reader's Digest* in Hungary, Poland and Russia.

To be sure, the concentration of the press is a worldwide phenomenon. In Great Britain, the four largest conglomerates control 84 percent of the press, the Murdoch and Maxwell groups alone 53 percent. We need to be aware that the same thing is happening, even more rapidly, in Eastern Europe, where the press has routinely gone directly from the hands of the local Communist elite to those of foreign media giants. We ought to realize as well that this is not likely to be a transitional phenomenon. If and when the fledging economies of Eastern Europe mature and a more ample supply of indigenous capital becomes available, the dominating market share held by foreigners will be too well-entrenched to alter.[15]

For now the harsh reality is that many Eastern European editors are waiting, indeed praying, that their publications will be bought by Westerners. As the Hungarian journalist Miklos Vamos has observed: "All the socialist papers publicized for many years the famous Marxist slogan 'Workers of the World, unite!' None of them adhere to this idea any longer. The new slogan should be: 'Capitalists of the World, invest (in our paper)!' "[16] Petr Masopust, business manager of the best Czech paper, *Lidove Noviny*, whose circulation has fallen from 460,000 to 125,000, admitted a year before the actual sale of his publication to the Swiss Ringier: "There's no choice but to sell this paper to foreigners and it had better happen as soon as possible."[17]

THE SINS OF THE PAST: THE LACK OF PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

There are ten to twelve thousand journalists in Poland. Less than half of them have university degrees, and 75 percent of them admit candidly that they are not adequately prepared for their job.[18] Newspapers routinely contain factual mistakes. The back pages of even the relatively interesting papers, like *Gazeta Wyborcza*, are filled daily with corrections of the most basic sort (a sentence was quoted improperly, spoken by somebody else, somewhere else and at another time, for example).

Occasionally the failings of Eastern Europe's press take a tragicomic turn. When a member of the Prime Minister's Agrarian Party, a fellow named Soska, complained in the Polish Parliament in late 1993 that: "four years of Solidarity rule have brought about more devastation among the pig population than Nazi occupation." Poland's leading daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, omitted the words "among the pig population" from its quote.[19] With this sort of creative editing, the prospects for political commentary are vastly enlarged.

The same weakness in training and standards shows up in the structural organization of the media. During the second half of 1991 Agence France Presse, under a grant from the French Foreign Ministry, tried to help reorganize the Polish Press Agency, PAP. They entrusted the task to Michel Viatteau, the former correspondent of the agency in Warsaw. Viatteau's version of what he discovered makes for fascinating reading. Awarded the office—literally—of PAP's former vice-chairman, he toiled at the heart of the agency. He writes that:

> At the beginning of May 1991, when Warsaw was in the euphoria of democratization, it was very difficult to understand to what extent the

> heritage of Communism was present in the minds of the journalists. But this was going to be, in spite of obvious good will, the major obstacle on the road to modernization of the agency.[20]

"The main obstacle," no doubt, but hardly the only one: Viatteau was astonished to discover that nine hundred people were working at PAP. By contrast, UPI has five hundred. The ratio of journalists to non-journalists at PAP was 1-2; at the AFP it is 1-1. His astonishment grew as he learned that PAP was broadcasting in English to North America and South America at considerable cost, although no one could identify a single listener to the programs. Viatteau strongly suggested the obvious: that the programming be canceled, which eventually it was. He was dismayed to find that journalists were paid by the number of lines they wrote. The predictable result was long, dull dispatches, even about unimportant events. By this point Viatteau must have felt his capacity for astonishment diminishing, but he still had yet another surprise in store: nobody at the agency knew anything about flashes, slugs or leads, which therefore were simply never used.[21]

THE POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL LEGACY

It will take time to train a new generation of Eastern European journalists. Old journalism schools, at the University of Warsaw or in Budapest, for example, exist and are trying hard to rejuvenate themselves. New schools in Prague, Budapest or Lublin are only starting their activity.[22]

Most current Eastern European journalists worked in—indeed many worked for—the previous regimes. In Poland, roughly two-thirds of those currently working were once employed by the Communist-controlled media, while about a quarter were active in the underground press. One residue of that history is a very strong leftist orientation in the media. According to the Warsaw Institute of Journalism, 45 percent of the journalists consider themselves "leftist", 28 moderate and only 27 "right of the center." As Anna Sabbat-Swidlicka has observed,

> The majority of titles today, including the two major independent dailies, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*, have a definite left-of-center slant, making for a one-sided view of the country's political development. The three most popular and influential weeklies—*Polityka*, *Wprost* and the scandal-mongering, sensationalist *Nie*—are all edited and owned by former Communists and have a left-wing orientation.[23]

The problem of left-wing bias is, of course, far from exclusively a Polish problem. Indeed it would be fairer to describe the Polish case as a moderate example, not an extreme one. In fact, there is no tradition anywhere in Eastern Europe of informative journalism, which helps to explain the bitterness and resignation in a comment made by the Czech Ambassador to the US, Michael Zantovski. "We have," he said, "more and more a press without news."[24]

One of the more regrettable methods for compensating for the dearth of information is to stir the political pot with controversy by sensationalizing reports of speeches and actions. Sabbat-Swiedlicka is right on the mark when she asserts that insinuation and slander have become the norm: "Off-the-cuff interviews are preferred to analysis of the issues. Overstatement and a tendency to discredit those who think differently have all but replaced serious, reflective journalism."

Indeed, personal attacks of all sort, unproved accusations, calumnious denunciations appear everywhere. In one sad example the now-defunct rightist paper *Nowy Swiat* printed an article entitled: "Maciej Jankowski: *Gazeta Wyborcza* lies" in which the Solidarity leader of Warsaw showed how "Solidarity's newspaper" had falsely presented his views. Worse, the media often attack leading politicians without any proof or consequences. President Walesa, the hero of Solidarity, has been accused of having once worked for the SB, the infamous security apparatus, under the code name of "Bolek." Nothing was ever proved nor even submitted to a court, nor have the journalists spreading the "news" been sued for libel.

Jacek Kozlowski, then director of the Prime Minister's press office, summarized the situation in an interview: "We have a press jungle. Everybody can say anything, attack anybody and without any consequences."[25] Similarly, Maciej Ilowiecki, the former chairman of the independent Association of Polish Journalists, glumly concludes that this pervasive irresponsibility represents "the post-mortem victory of Communism."[26]

These morally ambiguous methods of reporting leave those who fought so hard under Communism for truthful discourse feeling betrayed.

Petruska Sustrova, one of the prominent defenders of human rights in Prague when such outspokenness took considerable courage, points out that major ethical lapses now occur across the press spectrum, from tabloids to the most purportedly serious publications.[27]

Indeed such criticism has been voiced by Eastern Europe's most important source of ethical thinking. During his fourth pilgrimage to his homeland in June, 1991 Pope John Paul II, who played a decisive role in the region's victory over Communism, felt compelled to criticize the new media in "democratic" Poland:

> Isn't it so that the fundamental principles of morality have been taken out of our soil by the Evil, which has different appearances? Have they not been "eaten" by the noisy birds of all kind of propaganda, publications, spectacles, programs, which are playing with human weakness?

No wonder that the Pope's demanding message, urging people just freed from Communist materialism not to be lured by materialism capitalist or consumerism, was not too well received by many, and certainly not by the majority of the media. The Vatican even protested during the visit itself, issuing an unusual communiqué complaining that "the daily [Polish] press... is giving a false image of the Pope's visit by ignoring the most important words of the [Pope's] speeches, by a selective choice of quotes, titles and commentaries not reflecting what was actually said and done." In fact, the Vatican went so far as to argue that this was the result of a conscious policy. Three months later, the Polish Episcopate wrote that "the media could play their role in society only after undergoing big changes."[28] The Episcopate went on to note that such changes remain nowhere in view.

Given the leftist orientation of Poland's press, the widening rift between the media and the Church can hardly be termed surprising. For example, Poland's broadcasting laws call for "respect of Christian values" is perceived by many as ill-placed in an allegedly secular state. Yet, according to many Catholic journalists, in an allegedly free society it is becoming more and more difficult to produce TV programs influenced by those very Christian values. Jan Maria Jackowski, one of Poland's brightest young journalists, complains that nowadays "it is more difficult for me to present on television not only Catholic programs, but programs about, for example, family values, than it was under Communism!"

Petruska Sustrova has called attention to the fact that relevance is a growing problem for the press (much more serious even than financial difficulties): "State institutions", she argues, "are not responsive to information revealed in the media. Scandals rarely cause a stir in the Czech Republic." Sustrova goes on to warn that this inattention undermines public confidence in the importance of a democratic press. "People have lost the initiative to get involved in public matters, and have come to believe that nothing has changed and that 'those on top are doing what they like anyway.'"[29] Sustrova's bleak words suggest again how the failure of the media not only reflects the problems of democracy, but also make it much more difficult to build a true civil society.

Michel Viatteau reinforces the point when he observes that Polish journalists still feel "employed by the government" and have a natural tendency to "try to please the political leaders." We may term this phenomenon "the cuckoo's nest syndrome": the cage is open at last, but the former inmates are so depressed and depraved they don't really want to leave. The result is that when you try, as Viatteau did, to rebuild a press agency in a modern, competitive form, you have to deal with people who still wait for orders, show a disturbing lack of initiative, even no dynamism at all. So what are foreign media tycoons getting for their money? In the words of Miklos Vamos, they get "old-fashioned staff writers who serve the new owners as obediently as they did their Communist masters."[30]

For their part, politicians of the new order seem as determined as their Communist predecessors to make the press toe their line. Consider the situation in the Czech republic where, in the words of one analyst, "even in fashionable Prague, Prime Minister Vaclav Klaus appears to be more interested in free markets than freedom of information."[31] In the fall of 1993, Klaus complained that the refusal of Czech TV to televise one of his speeches was a "malicious and deliberate act." Earlier that year, Ivan Mejstrich, the Director of Czech Radio, had resigned because of what he termed constant interference by the Board for Radio and Television Broadcasting.

The same Board started a storm by giving a license in January, 1993 to *CET 21*.[32] Prominent political leaders such as Petr Cermak, deputy chairman of the Civic Democratic Party, protested the decision, arguing that *CET 21* was controlled by Westerners and, even worse, Slovaks.[33]

In Hungary, the fight over who would chair public radio and TV produced what has been

called "the media war" between the government and the opposition. The chief antagonists were President Goncz, a former member of the largest opposition party, the Alliance of Free Democrats, and the late Prime Minister Jozsef Antall. Against the will of the President, the government forced TV's supposedly independent chairman, Elemer Hankiss, and radio's equally forthright head, Csaba Gombar, to offer their resignation in early January, 1993.

Since then, Hungarian TV and radio have been run by their respective vice chairmen, Gabor Nahlik and Laszlo Csucs, who, at the end of October, nominated new chief editors. Soon thereafter tens of thousands of people took to the streets of Budapest, to demonstrate their opposition. By the second week of November Gyula Horn, leader of the Hungarian Socialist Party, had started a campaign to collect the needed 50,000 signatures to force a debate in the Parliament on radio and TV.[34] With exquisite timing, the government dismissed the managing editor of the Hungarian News Agency and designated a political friend of the Prime Minister. Of course, the Hungarian government has hardly been subtle all along in its dealing with the press, having decided as early as 1991 that the best approach was to start a newspaper of its very own, *Magyaorszag*. Journalist Miklos Vamos sums up Hungary's "before and after" this way: while Kadar's attitude during the last two decades of Communism may be accurately described as "whoever is not against us is with us," the new "democratic" leaders presumably think "whoever is not with us is against us."[35]

And then there is Poland: five governments in four years, with the head of national TV replaced immediately after every change of government. When he was replaced in November, 1993 Janusz Zaorski did not mind too much, having complained on more than one occasion about the impossible nature of his job, having to reconcile various political pressures, pressures which are often conflicting, since the President and the Prime Minister often like to express completely different "wishes."[36]

The problem is not limited to television: 88 percent of all Polish journalists complain about "political pressures on the job." Under Communism, journalists had to publish lies, biased commentaries, vicious attacks, follow the orders of the political leadership and serve a so-called 'ideological' cause. Are they free now? At the very least journalists are forced to work under conditions which must make efforts to report impartially seem quixotic.[37]

One of the reasons is that a newspaper is regarded now as only a product to be sold; selling any product, however, in an impoverished economy passing through a difficult period of transition is far from simple.[38] Huge sectors of Eastern European economies are still functioning according to the old rules, and in those sectors where the new rules are beginning to take hold there remains a paucity of capital. Indeed throughout Eastern Europe a substantial portion of the population—in Poland 40 percent—is below the poverty level.

THE NEW PROBLEMS

You can get a sense of how this economic dislocation affects the ongoing life of the media by thinking for a moment about that crucial source of revenue, advertising. The advertising market boomed in Warsaw in 1990 and 1991. It has since stabilized, if not moved backwards. Now businesses openly question the worth of placing ads since it has very limited impact on sales. These are impoverished societies where more and more people lack money to buy food or to pay rent or utility bills. Advertisements can do very little to influence discretionary spending when there is little discretion to spending. Moreover, buying space in a newspaper must seem like less of a bargain, as readership in this part of the world continues to fall. Fewer people (the drop is from 45 to 37 percent) read newspapers in Hungary now than was the case under Communist censorship. And there is yet one more depressing element to factor in: there are too many newspapers chasing these too few readers. Budapest, a city of two million people, has eleven daily newspapers. In Prague, Ladislaw Koppl, director of Opinion Window, a media consulting company, predicts a drastic pruning soon. Prague has fifteen dailies; Koppl thinks the number will be no more than four in less than four years.

One key way these converging deflationary forces have affected impartial news reporting is that owners, feeling squeezed, are pressuring journalists to opt for sensationalism. And this is why, as we have seen, roughly 80 percent of newspeople in Poland admit that the owners of the papers try at least "sometimes" to impose their views. The same survey brought to light the fact that over 60 percent of those interviewed feel threatened by their economic dependence. The use of financial incentives in a variety of ways is viewed by 77 percent of the journalists as

"limiting their objectivity." All this leaves one with the sense that a question which should be no more than rhetorical—"Is freedom of the press possible without freedom of journalists?" —is, in the Eastern European context, a very real and serious issue.[39]

THE DROP IN QUALITY OF THE MEDIA, AND ITS IMPACT UPON NASCENT DEMOCRACIES

With commercial success and serious journalism increasingly at odds, free market competition has brought a lowering of standards, and not the opposite, as might have been hoped. According to Marcin Frybes, "the savage competition on the media market in Central Europe is bringing about, in general, a serious drop of quality of the press."[40] So while many serious magazines find themselves on the brink of extinction, not just the tabloid press but openly pornographic publications, frequently financed with foreign money, have much less difficulty in finding investors. As Jiri Pehe has noted, this sort of "press freedom" has even gone beyond sensationalism and the proliferation of pornography to the emergence of papers calling for racial hatred and anti-Semitism. The most notorious example may be the Czech magazine *Politika*, which was finally banned after publishing in 1992 a series of anti-Semitic articles. But its disappearance has done little to stem the tide: The sensationalist daily *Blesk* is the most widely read in the Czech Republic. In Poland, as pointed out, the nasty, pornographic, anti-intellectual weekly *Nie* has been a tremendous success. It is worth noting again that *Nie*'s leading voice is Jerzy Urban, who, as Jaruzelski's former spokesman, so ably and cynically defended martial law.[41] Such media involvement by the pillars of Communist society is far from exceptional. The Czech tabloids *Expres* and *Spigl* may owe that start-up funding in 1990 to the outgoing Communist regime; what is more certain, as Petruska Suskova points out, is that "their staffs are full of former secret policemen and their attacks are usually directed at public representatives who support economic and political reforms."[42]

At the same time, the professional and specialized press is in serious trouble. A dramatic report sent by the Association of Czech Publishers to then Finance Minister Vaclav Klaus failed to produce a dramatic response. Some forty-nine important titles have already disappeared, including the prestigious *Journal of the Physicians*, founded in the nineteenth century and part of Czech history. Poland's *Literatura na Swiecie* ("Literature in the World") and *Dialog*, an excellent drama review, have had to stop publication, while *Tworczosc*, a literary magazine, is endangered, without the subventions it used to receive from the Ministry of Culture during the previous regime. Communism, at least, found it necessary to calm the hostility of the intellectuals; capitalism clearly does not. In Hungary, the famous literary review *Elet Es Irodalom*, which under Kadar had a circulation of 100,000, finds itself in dire straits, in spite of support from the Soros Foundation. Thus when Marcin Frybes asserts that "the adaptation of the Eastern European media to the rules of the market's economy constitutes a terrible threat to the culture of these countries, a threat maybe greater that the one once represented by the Communist power," he is making explicit an uncomfortable truth our market-driven culture would just as soon ignore.

If the threat to indigenous culture is real, so is the threat to a democratic ethos which, after all, needs to be carefully nurtured if it is to take root and grow after Eastern Europe's long exposure to totalitarianism. If we assume that journalists should be prized by society for their role in helping citizens make informed choices, we should be dismayed by how little journalists are valued. According to a public opinion poll taken in 1993, less than one fifth of all Poles, for example, have a positive opinion of journalists, and it is small consolation that journalists are, even with such a low approval rating, substantially better regarded than members of the core institution of Polish democracy, the parliament, whose members have won the respect of a paltry 7 percent of the population. And if Professor Wieslaw Sonczyk, from Warsaw University, is right, this minimal level of respect for journalists in Poland is falling, not rising. "The people of this country," he asserts, "are more and more convinced that journalists are dishonest persons, not professional on the job, incompetent, not serious, and prone to follow the influence of political forces of the day or business circles."[43]

For their part, journalists hardly have a much higher opinion of themselves. Fueling already very low morale is a growing sense that they are an endangered species; there is already a 20 percent unemployment rate among Polish journalists. Not surprisingly, they have serious difficulties coping with a situation in which they have only limited prestige but see the basic functions of their profession completely

changed.

Given such feelings of frustration, no wonder that the corruption among journalists seems to be as high as in other segments of the society. It is so hard to find a notion, any notion, of journalistic ethics that the term is beginning to become something of an oxymoron. Consider that roughly half the Polish press, according to a study by the Warsaw Institute of Journalism, do not see anything improper about working as a journalist while holding an elective office, or even while serving on the board of a corporation. But what is most disturbing is that such attitudes are only likely to be exacerbated by a standard of living which will probably continue to stagnate in the short term, and will surely not rise to meet Western standards any time in the near future. There will, then, be neither a sufficiently affluent section of society to demand and support a diversified serious press, nor will there be a sufficiently trained and motivated portion of the journalism profession to respond.

So we may well see one of the most troubling trends in Western journalism, a disappearance of the "medium-ground" publications, as part of an on-going polarization of the press. In Great Britain, advertisers target the 20 percent of the population who can afford to buy luxury goods, especially the 3 percent who represent the truly affluent, corporate buyers. Advertising revenue has become so important that elite newspapers are faced with the counterintuitive proposition that by increasing their circulation they are losing money. For this reason sales barriers are introduced in the form of a much higher price per copy. Thus *The Financial Times* costs 220 percent more than *The Sun*. By contrast, British tabloids are in a completely different situation. They have to increase circulation by all means, whether by sensationalism, sex or violence.

This ongoing phenomenon poses a threat to democracy, East or West. It is a phenomenon to which Western scholars are increasingly devoting attention. One such expert, Professor Colin Sparks, has reached the following unhappy conclusion about the widening rift among press publications:

> This necessary structure of the market-led press is one that inevitably excludes the bulk of the population from the kinds of public information essential for the exercise of the role of a citizen and is fundamentally antidemocratic.... No one with a serious commitment to democracy can consider the future probable development of the press in Eastern Europe with any enthusiasm. To be sure, there are many—certainly in the West and probably in the East—who regard the main gain of 1989 as the opportunity for them to make some quick cash, and would not care less whether this takes place under a democratic or despotic government.[44]

COLLISION OR COLLUSION? THE STRANGE TRIANGLE OF OLD NOMENKLATURA, NEW NOMENKLATURA AND WESTERN MONEY

As we have seen, various Western press organizations already have penetrated the media market in Poland, the Czech Republic and particularly Hungary, where almost 90 percent of the national and 40 percent of the regional press is under Western control. At the same time the old Communist media have done very well; they have not only survived but prospered. The media seems divided almost amiably between the former nomenklatura and Western investors. The weeklies *Polityka*, *Wprost* and *Nie* in Poland, all former socialist papers or created by the people of yesterday's establishment, mirror the Czech tabloids *Expres* and *Spigl*. In Budapest, Carl Bertelsmann, Germany's media giant, owns 50 percent of the former Communist Party paper *Nepszabadsag*, still the number one daily in the country.

Sometimes the people of the past and the new elites do indeed work together: *Rzeczpospolita*, the former Polish government paper, marches on, staffed with many of the same journalists of yesteryear and fortified with the money of French tycoon Robert Hersant. BGW is by far the largest publishing house in Poland. While it is controlled by the former party nomenklatura, BGW has contracts with the French publishing house Larousse and an Italian publisher as well. To complete the circle, BGW frequently brings to market the books of Solidarity's "heroes" such as Jacek Kuron and Zbigniew Bujak. Recently, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, edited by Adam Michnik and supported by the French leftist newspaper *Liberation*, concluded a cooperation agreement with *The Wall Street Journal*. Was Michnik trying to show that he is not, after all, such an ideological leftist or giving another proof that "pecunia non olet"?

Just how hopelessly entangled and confusing is the state of media affairs is demonstrated by the strange case of the *National Daily*. The Polish-American Business Foundation decided to support the creation of a newspaper based in

Warsaw. The Foundation, of course, is hardly a front for Communist subversion, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, who plays an important role on its board, is certainly not a Communist fellow traveler. Moreover, *The National Daily* was to have as its editor-in-chief Adam Kinaszewski. It seemed to be a safe choice: wasn't Kinaszewski, after all, the former secretary of Lech Walesa? The only problem was that, in putting together an editorial board, Kinaszewski chose many members of the old nomenklatura's finest, who were in fact closer to him, apparently, than Walesa was. There was a former department head of the party's central committee, and an erstwhile vice-minister of finances. Kinaszewski sought local funding from a Polish bank top-heavy with former Communist officials. Eventually this curious collaboration was abandoned, but not until 18 months had passed, and more than $1.5 million had changed hands.[45]

These sorts of scandals anger the average Czech or Pole. It is hard indeed to watch quietly the proliferation of such joint ventures (not mainly in the media business, of course) linking well-known former Party leaders, even officers of the old security services, with the new nomenklatura composed of people who were once loyal to Solidarity but now are loyal to a very different set of values. Furthermore, to see Western money facilitating such collusion feeds the anger with the corrosive fuel of cynicism. In a very sad paradox, many now wonder if the situation is not in some ways worse than it was a decade ago. To comprehend just how bleak such a viewpoint is, one needs to remember that ten years ago Polish society was fighting against the feelings of cynicism and hopelessness produced by martial law. The words of Jerzy Mikke, spoken in Parliament at a time, 1992, when the euphoria of overturning the old order should still have been fresh, have a haunting quality about them: "We are getting back our independence but we are losing our identity!"[46]

CONCLUSION

Is it inevitable that Central Europe, finally liberated from the political, ideological, military and economic oppression of the East, will simply fall under the cultural and economic domination of the West? Socialist realism failed because it was externally imposed, totally alien, and inadequate to the cultural traditions of Central Europe. Will "capitalist realism" therefore experience the same fate, or will it in the end efface Eastern Europe's astonishing cultural richness—what Czech writer Milan Kundera once termed, "the greatest possible diversity in the least possible space"?

And will the region's great moral rebellion against the all-dictating, all-censoring state, what Vaclav Havel called "the power of the powerless," have no lasting consequences? Will the impersonal forces of the marketplace now take their turn dictating what constitutes a just and equitable society? There once was a time when the Solidarity slogan "*nie ma wolnosci bez Solidarnosci*" was a source of pride, inspiration, and hope. Its rhyme and rhythm are untranslatable, but at least some of the punning meaning may be conveyed: it is that freedom without solidarity—that is, freedom without the ethos of shared commitment and a commitment incarnated in work, isn't freedom at all. But now with Solidarity's fragmentation that slogan rings hollow, for how can there be Solidarity without solidarity? And what has become of the moral force of a Slavic Pope, whose repeated use of the term "solidarity" during his first pilgrimage to Poland helped forge the ethos of shared commitment? Where is the rejection, under his influence, of all materialism, not just the dialectic materialism of Communism, but the consumerist materialism of capitalism? Where is the call for morality, spiritual affirmation, and even a "civilization of love," made in the not-so-distant past by the Churches (Catholic in Poland and Czechoslovakia, Protestant in Eastern Germany, Orthodox in Rumania), and by individuals whose intellectual roots spring from their Jewish ancestry, such as Boleslaw Geremek or Adam Michnik? And finally, where is the proud humanist tradition of Central Eastern Europe, reaching from Kochanowski in the Renaissance and Comenius in the Reformation to Vaclav Havel today?

At the start of this decade, there were unrealistically high expectations in many parts of Eastern Europe which were, to some extent, mirrored in the West. Because the disintegration of the Soviet empire happened so quickly, and because such a collapse had been wished for so fervently, it seemed for a moment that all things improbable were possible. But as the more sober-minded were warning, the toxic residue of Soviet occupation was far more pervasive than the obvious ecological harm, and this damage had profoundly rotted the very roots from which a shared social consciousness forms. By mid-1990, Ralf Dahrendorf was warning that it could take sixty years to build a civil society.[47] How much

longer might it take if Eastern Europe's new media end up like the old, a centrifugal rather than centripetal force? At the end of this journey through the media landscape of Eastern Europe, it's hard to get carried away by the feeling that with the impossible accomplished, the improbable will take only a bit longer. Indeed it's difficult to generate much enthusiasm at all about the short-term prospects for the varied media and the region they inform.

Of course, valuable reforms and impressive improvements have been achieved in the new democracies of Eastern Europe, and in the media too. The variety of media is now extensive. There are no taboos anymore, and both the print press and TV programs of the world are readily available. But we are still far away from what Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians—indeed all the peoples of this diverse region—had dreamed about at the dawn of their new freedom, at the dawn of this decade. For many in the press who, like myself, spent exhilarating days and nights seeking out that dawn in the shipyards of Gdansk, nearly fifteen years ago, alongside the workers on strike, the disappointment is especially strong.

So, what is to be done? The media of Eastern Europe now need solidarity with their Western counterparts, but solidarity as Solidarity once meant, based upon mutual respect and concern, a sense of civic and international responsibility. Cooperative engagement could, in the end, do more good than the money of the media tycoons. The journalists of Eastern Europe have a very limited idea of what a modern press is. Jacek Kozlowski during his tenure as director of the Prime Minister's press office, admitted that while Polish journalists like to think they've adopted Western-style journalism, the truth is they know little about what they are trying to imitate.[48]

So, should we "help" our colleagues in the East? But who are we to offer our assistance? Are not our own media in a critical state too? Consider American television: for all its enormous power and resources, can it really be held up credibly as a model? Where in the West is the sense that the press has a "mission" as a public service to perform?

We must then be more modest. We are not in a position to "teach" anybody. On the contrary, in cooperating with our colleagues in the East, we could learn as much as they. At the very least we should refrain from bringing them the worst we have in ourselves, while making them forget the best they have in themselves—the values for which Eastern Europe in the 1980s became an example and an inspiration.

Solidarity and cooperation are necessary if we want to help Eastern Europe build serious media and, ultimately, a civil society and true democracy. And it just may be that in the process we will rejuvenate our own media. There are already examples of solidarity to emulate: the Soros Foundation has distinguished itself in many ways, among them, by its financial support of a new school of journalism in Budapest; Rutgers University has established a media center in Warsaw, Columbia University, one in Prague.

Columbia Professor Daniel Shanor, in describing the efforts he and colleagues have made to teach at their new school of journalism in the Czech capital, emphasizes how necessary it is to return to the oldest, most enduring principles of journalism: "accuracy, careful use of sources, objectivity, fairness, ethical concerns, persistence, recognition of the newsworthy and of the spurious." Shanor did not think it old-fashioned to remind the journalists of tomorrow that "skepticism about official statements is healthy, not disloyal" and that "quotes and facts cannot be made up." Graduates of this Columbia-sponsored school of journalism find it difficult to fit in the current media landscape of Prague. As an example, Shanor pointed to the case of a young woman graduate who "even quit her new radio job because its sensation-hungry editors fell short of the ethical standards she'd adopted."[49] We can only hope she would find her standards met in New York or Paris.

Enduring collaboration will surely not be easy to arrange. The Cold War may have passed, but East-West dialogue remains difficult to achieve. One more remainder came at a four-day seminar organized in Warsaw in October, 1993 under the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and devoted to the freedom of media. According to observers, the seminar was a fiasco.

A delegate from Uzbekistan, annoyed by what he considered excessive discussion of legal, economic and ethical issues by his Western colleagues, exploded suddenly: "Damn it! Stop talking about press freedom! I don't know if my newspaper can appear on the first of January. I don't have a computer. I don't have any newsprint."[50] Even among the delegates from Eastern Europe proper, representatives from the West found it hard to create a common language. Polish journalists, invariably talkative, remained conspicuously silent most of the time, too discouraged by the situation to believe that talk

could improve anything. To make matters worse, academics and governmental officials also took part, a classic recipe for failure, since it meant the conference included two more professions with their own agendas. The Polish media expert Karol Jakubowicz summed it up this way: "Three groups of people spoke three types of languages and expected three types of results."

No matter how difficult the process of creating a dialogue, it has to be continued. The future of the media in Eastern Europe, and perhaps in the West, is at stake. And beyond dialogue, should we be providing financial assistance, and if so, what kind? Surely it ought not to be the sort offered by Rupert Murdoch, Robert Hersant or Silvio Berlusconi.[51] Instead should not the development of democracy be our goal, rather than the maximization of profits? Five years after Communism's fall, many of us agree strongly with Professor Colin Sparks' assertion that we need to modify the free play of market forces in the interests of building a civic society.[52]

Sparks has discussed this proposition at some length. He anticipates some will claim that any interference with the market is wrong. But that, he says, "is crude ideology unenlightened by any acquaintance with the real world and should be dismissed as such." As he correctly points out, the advertising revenue of elite papers is nothing less than "a highly selective subsidy directed at information provision for richer readers." At a minimum, as Sparks suggests, it is only fitting that there be subsidies to correct the subsidies:

> Either subsidize the existing elite press for any losses it sustains as a result of increasing its circulation outside of its advertising-defined target audience or, more likely, subsidize newspapers that can show that they provide the same sort of material as the quality press but in a form and at a price that makes them attractive to a segment of the non-elite audience.

I agree with Sparks when he argues that these are modest and achievable aims. He is certainly right when he asserts they are necessary for the functioning of a democratic society, and do not entail social revolution. Alas, I am as pessimistic as he is about the prospects of their implementation in Eastern Europe.

Still another suggestion: creating local, community or university-based newspapers or broadcast services is extremely important for the building of grass-roots ties and, *ipso facto*, of democracy. There is almost nothing of this in Eastern Europe, yet it is an area in which Western experience could be very helpful. One of the few successes of this type has been the free paper *Pasmo*, published in Ursynow, a Warsaw working-class suburb. *Pasmo* has had a tremendously positive impact in energizing what had been a sleeping, stagnant community.

If finally we can't even do that much, we should at least not eliminate what subsidized media still exist, such as the U.S.-backed Radio Free Europe which enjoys an enormous prestige in Eastern Europe. Now broadcast from Warsaw and Budapest (something unthinkable a decade ago), it is a better example of public broadcasting than anything radio journalists in these countries actually know, or can even imagine.

ENDNOTES

This paper was written while I was a fellow at the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, during the Fall of 1993, and completed at the beginning of 1994. These few months have been for me a memorable experience. I deeply enjoyed the creative atmosphere of the Center.

I am indebted to the entire staff and to all the people working at the Center. But I would like to express my particular thanks to Prof. Marvin Kalb. It is hard, indeed, to imagine this Center without Marvin Kalb and his intellectual, moral and even spiritual leadership. I feel extremely privileged to have been with him for these few months.

I would like to thank Edith Holway, Jennifer Quinlan and Julie Felt, for all the charming and efficient help they gave to me. My particular gratitude goes to Prof. Marion Just, whose remarks, after the first draft of the paper, were extremely useful. I am also indebted to Prof. Fred Schauer for his advice.

My co-fellows, Adeyinka Adeyemi, Sanjoy Hazarika, Jorge Quiroga, Henry Morgenthau, and Carlin Romano, as well as Prof. Sonia Jarvis, constituted a very diversified and lively group of people. I won't forget their friendship. The closeness of the group was important to create a fruitful atmosphere.

I like to stress that, without Richard Parker, who tirelessly corrected all the drafts, from the beginning to the end, this paper would never have been written. Additionally, it gave me the opportunity to get closer not only to a brilliant mind, but also to a wonderful human being.

My very special gratitude goes to Prof. Mark O'Connor, Associate Director of the Honors Program at Boston College, who agreed to edit this paper. Mark is not only a remarkable professor of the humanities; he is also fascinated with Eastern Europe and Poland. He simply made this paper possible. It was a wonderful experience to work with him and I hope that's only the beginning of our cooperation. When one knows how difficult it is to edit the paper of a Frenchman with relatively limited command of English like myself, it is easy to appreciate the merits of Mark and Richard.

Last but not least, I thank my son Eryk for his help, especially on the computer.

1. "Les Médias d' Europe Centrale dans la transition vers une économie de marché", *MédiasPouvoirs*, (Spring 1992) pp. 120-126.

2. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 4, 1994.

3. Colin Sparks, Prof. in the School of Communication at the Polytechnic of Central London, presented this paper, "The Press, the Market and Democracy," at the Seminar on the Reconstruction of Public Communication in Eastern Europe, held in Budapest in June 1991. It was then published in *The Journal of Communication*, (Winter 1992) p. 43.

4. Mal Mallette, "The grim realities of journalism in Eastern Europe," *Editor and Publisher*, (September 28, 1991) p. 40.

5. Kazimierz Strzyczkowski, "Likwidacja RSW Prasa-Ksiazka-Ruch," part of a study by the Institute of Journalism of the University of Warsaw: "Polskie media w okresie przemian," published by Prof. Jerzy Oledzki, Warsaw, Osrodek Badan Spolecznych, 1991, p. 115.

6. See on this "Na lewo od prawdy," Piotr Jakucki, *Nowy Swiat*, (January 18, 1993).

7. NIK is a state agency that reports to the Parliament and that is supposed to investigate and forward to the courts any financial wrongdoings of official agencies or enterprises.

8. "The Media in Eastern Europe," *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, no. 19, (May 7, 1993) pp. 27-28.

9. Ibid., pp. 29-30.

10. This process however began during the last years of Communist rule, when it became fairly easy to get a permit to put a satellite dish in the garden, or on the balcony or the roof.

11. Debra Gersh, "The press in Eastern and Central Europe," *Editor and Publisher*, (September 7, 1992) p. 30.

12. As a matter of fact the first draft of any press law in the Soviet Union after 1917 was presented in the Spring of 1967 (!) by 125 scientists, writers, and artists to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

13. Berlusconi, Italy's leading media owner and the country's richest man, became Prime Minister in 1994.

14. As it was to be expected, this penetration causes many problems. In January, 1994 Jaromir Setina, the editor-in-chief of *Lidove Noviny*, resigned in protest over editorial interference from the new Swiss owner, endangering—according to him—the newspaper's independence.

15. Prof. Colin Sparks, "The Press, the Market, and Democracy," *The Journal of Communication*, (Winter 1992) pp. 36-51.

16. Miklos Vamos, "Eastern Europe's New Press Lords," *The Nation*, (September 30, 1991).

17. "High hopes fade at East European newspapers," Roger Cohen, *The New York Times*, (December 28, 1992).

18. Unpublished study done by the Institute of Journalism of the Warsaw University (1993) under the direction of Prof. Jerzy Oledzki and quoted here with his approval.

19. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, December 11, 1993.

20. Michel Viatteau: "Pologne: vers une agence moderne et indépendante," *MediasPouvoirs*, (Spring 1992), pp. 84-89.

21. Reporting from Budapest, Rick Brunner makes similar observations: "Journalists [in Eastern Europe] suffer from poor training in Western-style reporting, limiting their appreciation of what to do with new-found freedoms," *The Boston Globe*, (December 5, 1993).

22. A school of journalism was created on October, 1993 at the well-known Catholic University of Lublin (KUL), the only institution of higher learning in Eastern Europe which managed to preserve its independence during the Communist times.

23. "The Media in Eastern Europe," *RFE/RL Research Report* ,Vol. 2, no. 19, (May 7, 1993) p. 29.

24. Lecture at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, April 15, 1993.

25. *Zycie Warszawy*, (January 21, 1993).

26. Reported in Jan Maria Jackowski's book "Bitwa o Polske," *Inicjatywa Wydawnicza "ad astra"*, Warszawa, 1992. Daniel Webster remarks also that "many eastern European countries attempted to bring in a free press and independent broadcasting. But now they are slipping back,"*The Washington Post*, (January 31, 1993).

27. "Pitfalls of the independent press in the Czech Republic," *Uncaptive Minds*, (Summer 1993) pp. 97-101.

28. Letter of the Polish Episcopate, September 15, 1991.

29. "Pitfalls of the independent press in the Czech Republic," *Uncaptive Minds*, (Summer 1993) p. 100.

30. Miklos Vamos, "Eastern Europe's New Press Lords," *The Nation*, (September 30, 1991).

31. Daniel Webster, *The Washington Post*, (January 31, 1993).

32. The Czech company *CET 21* has strong U.S. financial backing through the Central European Development Corporation, whose leading figure, Mark Palmer, stirred a controversy by taking the unusual step of resigning from his post as U.S. Ambassador to Hungary to start this business venture.

33. The dispute, as remarked by Jiri Pehe, showed clearly "a lack of respect among some leading politicians and political parties for the independence of the media," "Czech Republic: Furor over Independent Radio and Television," *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, no. 15, (April 9, 1993), pp. 23-27.

34. It remains to be seen if and how the Hungarian Socialist Party will—after its success in the parliamentary elections of May, 1994—fulfill the promises made while in opposition.

35. Miklos Vamos, "Hungary's Media Apparatchiks," *The Nation*, (December 13, 1993).

36. When his successor, Wieslaw Walendziak, was designated, President Lech Walesa commented immediately afterwards: "This nomination is a big mistake." Walesa's observation was taken by many as yet another example of political meddling.

37. "Government intervention may be the worst of the media's problems [in Eastern Europe]", writes Rick Brunner from Budapest, "In Eastern Europe, freedom of the press far from reality," *The Boston Globe*, (December 5, 1993).

38. "The promised land of three years ago now looks unpromising to foreign investors," observes Roger Cohen, "High hopes fade at East European newspapers," *The New York Times*, (December 28, 1992).

39. Prof. Frederick Schauer and Prof. Virginia J. Wise, from Harvard University, observed similarly in Estonia that: "Freedom of the press in Estonia is commonly thought to reside more in journalists as individuals than in newspapers or magazines as institutions or entities, and thus a conception of the freedom of the journalist against his or her editor or publisher, as well as the freedom of the journalist, the editor and the publisher as against the state," "Press, press law and press freedom in Estonia," paper for the US Department of State, Fall 1992.

40. "Les Médias d' Europe Centrale dans la transition vers une économie de marché," *MediasPouvoirs*, (Spring 1992), p. 125.

41. Jerzy Urban, moreover, admitted by mid-1994 that *Nie* was initially backed by the Poznan firm Elektromis, a holdover enterprise from Communist times. Elektromis is suspected of highly questionable business practices, as reported in the E-mail newsletter *Donosy*, June 7, 1994.

42. "Pitfalls of the independent press in the Czech Republic," *Uncaptive Minds*, (Summer 1993) p. 100.

43. According to Wieslaw Sonczyk, the role of the journalist in Eastern Europe is now less to inform than "to represent the interests and to fulfill the wishes of the sponsors, the advertisers etc.," to the point that "about the orientation of the paper—or even the very existence of a publication, a radio or TV program—the journalists themselves have a less and less deciding voice," "Transformacja polskiego systemu prasowego-nadzieje i zagrozenia" "Polskie Media w okresie przemian," edited by Prof. Jerzy Oledzki,Warszawa, Osrodek Badan Spolecznych, 1991, pp. 119-145.

44. "The Press, the Market, and Democracy," *The Journal of Communication*, (Winter 1992) p. 46.

45. *Spotkania*, (November 25, 1992).

46. Erazym Kohak, professor of philosophy at Boston University and now also at the Charles University in Prague, expresses the same concern: "The consumerism that seems to have largely displaced the European cultural ideal is profoundly problematic for the men and women who pursued for so long the ideal of life in truth and who sacrificed Communism's few consumer comforts for its sake. They struggled and sacrificed for an ideal. To them, it would be tragic if Central Europe, so recently freed from the histrionics of 'real socialism', were simply to sink into the mindless consumerism of the Atlantic basin." "What is central to Central Europe," *Harper's Magazine*, (June 1990).

47. Ralf Dahrendorf, "Threats to civil society, East and West," *Harper's Magazine*, (July 1990) p. 25.

48. Interview in *Zycie Warszawy*, (January 22, 1993).

49. "Columbia and the Media in Eastern Europe," Daniel Shanor, *Columbia Journalism Review*, (Fall 1993) pp. 29-31.

50. *The Warsaw Voice*, (November 4, 1993).

51. Are the journalists in Eastern Europe condemned to "sell their souls to the big bosses of the international press and the world of money?", asks Marcin Frybes before adding: "Confronted brutally with the realities of the world capitalist economy, the old Communist societies have proved too weak, too passive and particularly too impoverished....The situation of the print media in Central Europe anticipates in a way the new destiny reserved to these societies. Freed after years of political slavery and 'brain washing' under totalitarian domination, they find themselves today on the way to becoming what we call dependent societies." "Les Médias d'Europe Centrale dans la transition vers une économie de marché," *MédiasPouvoirs*, (Spring 1992), pp. 124-126.

52. "The Press, the Market, and Democracy," *The Journal of Communication*, (Winter 1992) p. 50.