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The Romanian Media in Transition

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

THE ROMANIAN MEDIA IN TRANSITION

BY

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A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of History
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded:
Spring Semester, 2004

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To my wife Gabriela and my parents Marilyn and Dimitri Basil

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my committee, Professors Michael Creswell, Matt Childs, Nathan Stoltzfus, and Patrick O'Sullivan. Dr. Jonathon Grant, the dissertation director, was especially helpful in providing focus, organizational suggestions, and the inspiration to finish in three years.

Mihaela Almaselu of the American Embassy in Bucharest made numerous contacts for me and research assistants Adriana Bulz and Oana Guth helped with the logistics of maneuvering in the capital.

Brigadier General Carl Reddel, USAF (Ret) and his successor Colonel Mark Wells, USAF, of the United States Air Force Academy selected and supported me for this venture and for that I am very grateful.

To my wife Gabriela and son Dimitri, thanks for your patience and love during the blitz.

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ABSTRACT

The Romanian media has progressed in only a decade and a half since the fall of Communism. Reporters discuss themes about political reform, the elections, corruption, and even political protest. They critically analyze stories asking the basic questions while frequently providing follow-up. The press has liberalized, reflecting pluralistic domestic and international information sources as opposed to the State-controlled media before 1990. The media, along with free elections, transparency of law and government, and a civil society, are important benchmarks for a society that strives to compare favorably with the West, and for that reason deserves examination.

Serious problems exist however. A weak economy makes the media susceptible to government manipulation. Legal challenges by the government and businessmen against journalists as defendants, impose hefty fines over libel and slander challenges. Control of state broadcast media by ex-Communist ruling Social Democrats prevents the mass media from contributing to the public dialogue. Social attitudes developed in the twentieth century, negatively shape the reporting of national minority groups which are substantial in Romania and the Balkans. Finally, an authoritarian tradition based on imperial, fascist, and communist rule, has manifested itself in violence towards journalists.

The dissertation examines the media within the Communist tradition from 1945-1989 and followed with a survey of the post-Communist media. A brief history of the national minorities question provides perspective on present day attitudes in the media towards these groups. A survey of NGO's and other institutions examined progress towards a civil society. In the international context, a comparison of the situation in Romania with countries in Eastern Europe and Latin America revealed similar problems.

The media has diversified greatly considering the short time frame of this study in post-Communist Romania. Election choices, international structures and non-governmental agencies will continue to influence and change the political and media culture while a weak economy and authoritarian mentality in the government and legal system offer challenges to a developing free press and young democracy in Romania.

CHAPTER I

Overview of the Romanian Media in Transition

The Romanian media, once part of the most totalitarian government in Eastern Europe, have changed and liberalized dramatically compared to their 1989 antecedents.¹ This study discusses the evolution of the mass media and press freedom from the Communist period to 2004, in the democratic transition. After the failure of Communism and its loss of control of the belief system through terror, political liberalism appeared as a possible path, perhaps the best way, for a country that removed the “socialist” from the Republic of Romania.

The country has adopted aspects of political liberalism, with its emphasis on individual rights or freedoms from government control. It claims that it maintains property rights, religious freedom, and freedom of the press.² As Francis Fukuyama points out, this ideology supports the right of all citizens to have a share of political power in what has emerged as the surviving ideology of the twentieth century. Rightist authoritarianism and Leftist totalitarianism failed to meet the economic needs, political legitimacy or even provide status to the citizens of these countries leaving democracy and the free market as the best and perhaps only alternatives. As Romania emerged from its totalitarian past, it began its transition towards liberalism, a free market economy, and an open media.

The Romanian press today is a partially free press that is still constrained by economic, political, and social barriers within a country in transition. Its economic diversification from a state-run command economy to a mixed economy began in the early 1990’s and has had a beneficial effect on the media. The legal code regarding

¹ Totalitarian in the sense of the State’s total control of all aspects of human life through the use of police power, mass political parties, and radical ideologies. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 5-6.

media law is still evolving away from its Communist past which emphasized the primacy of the state but does not yet reflect pluralistic, democratic values based in the sovereignty of the people. The mass media is still very much in transition.

By way of comparison, the best of the Western European, British and American press reflect biases, make journalistic mistakes, and do not always “get it right.” In general however, there is a greater sense of journalistic integrity that supports open inquiry and admission of error. For example, when the Iraq War of 2003 began, many journalists allowed their governments to influence them regarding the existence of mass weapons of destruction. When the media failed to get proper evidence over time, it began to confront the governments in Great Britain and the United States for proof. While the press from *Le Monde*, *The Guardian*, and the *New York Times* makes mistakes, editors do make clarifications and admit their errors. Though not perfect in any sense, this approach represents responsible journalism and a standard against which Romanian journalists increasingly compare themselves. It is notable that Romanian journalists desire further training from international experts and hold the Western European, British and American press as their standards.

In this historical study, the dissertation examined the role and direction of the media in a nascent or transitional democracy. The factors that liberalized the media were the commercialization of the press, steady political support by the liberal opposition for an open media, and a combination of inducements and education by international structures and non-governmental organizations that have worked to create a civic culture supportive of a free press. In the private sector, foreign and domestic corporations have penetrated all sectors of the media and created new markets to provide a pluralism of programming and ideas. Privatization of the media and its commercial integration with international media groups in Europe and the United States have been successful.

Politically, the centrist Liberals and Democrats and even the Leftist Social Democrats, encouraged the privatization of the media, which brought tremendous programming diversity to the public. The government has also legislated the repeal of restrictive media laws, removing some of the media-related penal codes that resulted in the imprisonment of journalists. The current Social Democratic government however,

² Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, 42.

has ignored or at best been ambivalent about other important laws, such as the Freedom of Access to Public Information, but the trend has been toward a freer press. Media legislation is now less oppressive than in the past with regards to the penal code. Self-interest and the inducement to join NATO and the European Union by these organizations, along with pressures and education from free-speech and democracy-building oriented NGO's, have influenced the Romanian leadership and media organizations to further a more pluralistic media.

At the same time, several factors, including a weak economy, a neo-nomenklatura mentality, a socially fragmented society, and an authoritarian past and traditions, have prevented the formation of a free mass media bold enough or properly trained to investigate and report the news, especially "hard" news stories that may reveal nepotism, corruption, or inefficiency in government or by powerful business leaders. A weak economy has slowed the transition and realization of press freedoms and has made the media more dependent on government advertising. Corporate advertising may also affect editorial decisions when there are conflicts of interest between the client and the media. Tax "forgiveness" of state taxes by the government has rendered commercial television susceptible to state interference and has endangered its newsworthiness.

Political factors such as a neo-nomenklatura mentality has manifested itself since the Revolution of 1989 through the authority of the National Salvation Front and its offspring the Social Democratic Party (PSD) that has virtually dominated political life even when it was out of power for a short period. The PSD has exerted its control at the national level through fiscal policy creating a submissive commercial television medium, and politically, through appointments of loyal employees at the state television and state radio media. At the local level, bossism by local politicians and businessmen connected to the PSD, has resulted in the legal shackling of journalists by the courts, and worse, physical intimidation or beatings by hoodlums who try to stop investigative journalists. Strangely, none of the attackers has ever been caught. More common than the beatings are the civil damage lawsuits for thousands of dollars for libel and slander against journalists who do not have the resources available to compete fairly in court cases.

A chauvinistic nationalism has hindered the free press and accurate reporting. Reactionary ethnic and xenophobic nationalism advocated by a core extremist group,

while permissible in a democracy, has led to irresponsible journalism and distortions of the truth. In recent times, the media from the ultra-nationalists have affected minorities' reporting in a country where the national minorities, Jews, Magyars, and Roma, comprise important and large segments of the population. A history of distrust and misunderstanding among Romanians and national minorities has affected the news in profound ways. A review of recent social policy and its effect on minority reporting will illuminate this contentious issue.

Lastly, a lack of historical memory of liberal democratic values as found in Western Europe or the United States, makes implementing a free press difficult. Whereas England's John Locke spoke of individual rights, there was no such experiment in Romania. Thomas Jefferson and the American Founding Father elites discussed grafting the branch of liberty onto a colonial American vine whereas only ancient Greece with its small city-states also discussed democracy. Admittedly the American experiment was flawed where few initially, except for propertied white males, enjoyed full liberties, but the ideas were in place for later realization.

The trend of the transition has haltingly been toward a more professional and commercial media. International media groups, Euro-Atlantic political and economic structures, and international and Romanian non-governmental organizations dedicated to freedom of speech and democratic development, have influenced the media during the country's democratic transition. Private print and broadcast media have emerged to provide incredible diversity in news and programming while the government has revised once restrictive media laws. Even the formerly state-controlled broadcast media has tried to broaden its appeal and offer mainstream programming though the news content is decidedly pro-government.

Under the layers of media diversification and new programming, however, has been a fear by journalists to portray the government negatively, especially in the influential television sector, which has resulted in their avoiding sensitive issues. Reporters who tackled thorny political problems received warnings from their bosses or beatings from hooligans. From a Western perspective, this is an unhealthy and unacceptable situation that separates Romanian behavior from that of typical European Union members, which the Romanian government has repeatedly and strongly stated that

it desires to join. The press is still in transition towards a greater openness and achieving professional standards and acceptance.

National elections in 2004 may bring to power either the opposition party of the Right composed of the Liberal and Democrat Parties, which is generally more committed to media liberalization. Another possibility is rule by the Greater Romania Party which promotes national symbols and past greatness, but not a greater emphasis on a free press because of its perceptions of national minorities. The ruling Social Democrats may also remain in power and if so, would continue a contentious relationship with the press if history is a guide. Their mindset comes from a history based on five decades of a media controlled by the state for its own purposes.

The current rulers have close ties to the Communist regime that controlled politics, economics, society, and information for forty-five years following the Soviet invasion in 1944. Abruptly, in 1989, a new, non-communist elite replaced the old guard. The Romanian Revolution, unlike the genuinely popular movements of Poland and Czechoslovakia, had dual origins emerging from both a conservative, ex-Communist oligarchy headed by Ion Iliescu and his National Salvation Front, and a more liberal people's movement of inexperienced students and dissidents who organized their revolution with little pre-1989 experience. Since 1989, the Romanian media, like the political and economic systems, evolved slowly at first, caught between the leftist, old-Guard mentalité, and the more liberal, pro-Western, and free-market opposition, epitomized by the Democratic Convention Party.

By comparison, Timothy Garton Ash writes in *The Magic Lantern*³, that Czechoslovak dissidents planned their revolution out of the cellar-bar The Magic Lantern and placed Vaclav Havel, a political reformer in power. The Romanian reformers in Bucharest created *Revista 22*, an intellectual dissident paper, in the same building as their cellar jazz-club Green Hours, but unlike the Czechs, lost the political leadership to the better organized National Salvation Front, composed of politicians and military members who overthrew Ceausescu and planned a power grab for themselves. This tension between insider bureaucrats competing with neophyte opposition dissidents,

³ Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

characterized Romanian developments, including the press evolution, in the tumultuous years following 22 December 1989. Subsequently, international investors and other forces emerged on the scene and the media began to show true diversity. Most recently, the government passed liberal media laws in 2002 repealing restrictions that had constrained journalists and more closely aligned the country with Western European legal standards.

Since the end of the Ceausescu regime, Romania has adopted democratic structures and successfully held three national elections and like other former socialist bloc countries is in transition towards democracy. In these elections diverse political parties have competed, with one opposition victory in 1996, which demonstrates that the electoral process is on its way. Romania joined NATO and is waiting for the European Union to certify that it has made enough progress towards a liberal democracy so it can enter this institution in future expansion. The economy, another marker in the transition towards a liberal democracy, is mixed, with a large state presence but growing private sector, that lacks however, much foreign investment.

The evolution of the media in Romania is this work's focus which is of interest because an independent and accurate media provide people with comprehensive news to make informed choices so important in a democratic society. An open press is important to Romania's continued evolution towards an active civil society if it is to continue in that direction, and away from the dependent mentality that statism encourages.

The dissertation examined multiple facets of the media and society and found that the Romanian press while more free than it was in 1989, lacked professionalism in the 1990's that diminished the quality of journalism. In the early years of transition following 1989, and again since 2000 with the return of the Social Democrats, commercial and official pressures have continued to affect the choice of subjects, press laws inhibit journalists' coverage of certain topics, especially in investigative journalism, while an authoritarian mentalité has continued especially among the older generation of news executives in the state sector.

While it is difficult measure the degree of openness in the mass media and its effect on democracy, certain factors can provide perspective on the question of press freedom, such as the quality and focus of reporting in the mass media, treatment of

minorities in the press, the growth of civil society, media law, the treatment of journalists, and a comparative look at the Romanian press with other transitioning countries.

The study begins with a brief review of the Communist period that sets the stage for the Revolution and post-1989 period, emphasizing the social control and other issues that created a totalitarian mindset in the media and carried on into the post-Revolutionary period. The problem over the absence of any historical memory in democracy becomes apparent in the review of twentieth century history. Institutions emerging from this past, including the media began post-revolutionary life with a background of authoritarian experiences.

After the short history, the dissertation discussed selected news stories from leading journals beginning in 1989 to show the evolution of print journalism. The emergence of a private sector print media was one of the “success stories” that has propelled newspaper journalism rapidly along the path to a free press. At the same time, an unstable economy and financially fragile media showed susceptibility to government control and “bossism” or a fiefdom mentality from businessmen and politicians who objected to unfavorable reporting. The research in these commercial newspapers included issues that came directly from journals such as *Romania Libera*, *Evenimentul Zilei*, *Adevarul*, *National*, *Ziua*, *Romania Mare*, and *Revista 22* among others, representing diverse themes and spanning the period from the beginning of post-Communist Romania to 2004. Stories included coverage of the Revolution, three national elections, a widespread and far-ranging corruption story, the repression of dissidents in Bucharest by coal miners brought in by the Provisional Government, and the subsequent return of the coal miners to the capital demanding improved conditions. Other historical research examined the country’s wait for NATO admission, and the story about the freedom of information law and attempts to gain release of records for personal use and for military members needing new, NATO clearances, from the Interior Ministry files established during the Communist period.

The choice of topics, follow-up, and quality of reporting revealed much about the changing state of the print media since the Revolution. The diversity of subjects covered by the press, its willingness to challenge the government, and increasing professionalism, all indicated that the print media was more pluralistic than ever before and was an

important aspect of a culture in change. A key factor in the increasing openness and professionalization of the print media has been the influence of both younger management replacing the “Old Guard” and the increasing penetration of Western European ownership in this sector, especially from German and Swiss media groups.

The study devoted considerable time to print news stories because unlike most radio and television news, the articles exist in archives and are primary source documents that give a sense of the times and the evolution of their maturity as the journalistic quality improved. Additionally, these reports told news not only of events but also showed the editor’s biases towards their subjects, and revealed the reporter’s perspective which together represented a systemic approach to news making. This chapter focused on discussion of news through various electronic media and how it has opened up the “information highway” in the country.

Commercial television offered examples of a media that provided diverse international and domestic programming but where the most watched station, PRO TV, and the others too, routinely shunned news stories that negatively portrayed the government. Always powerful with its recorded and live images, it reaches many households, and is sensitive to public viewing patterns and government controls. This study analyzed how broadcast news changed since the Communist period and assessed the regulatory issues of concern to the regulatory body, the National Audio-Visual Council (CNA). The privatization of television has brought Western European, American programs, highly popular Latin American soap operas, and even Australian series into Romanian living rooms offering an array of news, sports, and series. Financial pressures, however, have affected sensitive political coverage even in the commercial television sector which does not have the freedom to broadcast a truly open newscast.

State television and radio, a purely Romanian government domain, has always struggled with the continual oversight and political control by the government. Radio, while not as influential, still has a large audience and also merits discussion. The work investigated how programming of state and commercial radio broadcasts compared to the Communist period. It also discussed what effect the internet, a truly global medium, had on Romania, one of the poorest countries in Europe. The computer, through telephone

modem, cable modem, and soon mobile internet, has brought news and information to Romania.

While technology provides the means to carry the message, history and culture shape the approach of the newsmaker and receptivity of the audience. The persistence of national chauvinism has slowed the transition to democracy and a free press. The media has faced a tough challenge in the area of minorities because the nationalities issue is problematic and part of East European history. Nowhere is this more clear than in the charged and often controversial area of minority reporting. It is highly visible and the object of attention at the individual, and government, and international levels. The dissertation provides a short history of official minority doctrine during the Communist period, and before, in the case of Romanian Jews, back to the 1920's, to better address recent controversies over the Holocaust in the press. Minority coverage reveals much about the state of the press because these groups are by definition considered somehow apart from mainstream society by nature of their national origin, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, which has resulted in biased and unfair reporting. This paper examined media documents and discussed the reporting of minorities in the mass media with representatives of these groups, specifically the Magyar, Rroma (Gypsies), Jews, and LGBT or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transsexuals. It also noted efforts by international human rights groups and NGO's that have helped to train reporters to look at their coverage more objectively.

If culture and history have negatively affected the reporting on minorities, media law limited freedom of the press, restricting journalists and the scope of their investigations but has recently begun to change. Until recently, these laws directly influenced the press, especially journalists, and intimidated media agencies and reporters with the threat of criminal penalties. A short and straightforward history of relevant laws and legal issues provides perspective on the government's changing and increasingly open attitude towards the press. While the governments (1992 and 2000) of President Ion Iliescu's leftist Social Democrats have until recently obstructed freedom of the press or at best been halting in its efforts to ease press restrictions, politicians from the Right as well as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), have fought to ease press restrictions and instill liberal-democratic values in the society since the early 1990's.

The recent and positive role of NGO's in creating a pluralistic and more professional press continues to be considerable in opening up the mass media to new ways of working in the media. This work highlighted the activities of several groups that fought for press liberties and a review of these NGO's shows their relationship to the evolution of civil society which has contributed to freedom of the press. The realization of NATO membership and possibility of European Union inclusion has also influenced the ruling party, once very conservative, as recently as 2002, to change media laws to more progressive legislation in line Western European standards.

To place Romania in a world historical context, the dissertation looked at other media in transition. Hungary and Poland, also part of the former East European Communist Bloc countries but with important pre-Revolutionary differences, offered interesting and strikingly similar comparisons. Likewise, Argentina emerging from a military dictatorship in the 1980's, Mexico, finally breaking with its one party rule of eighty years, and Cuba which still has the hemisphere's only socialist government, offer unique points of comparison with the Romanian media, all sharing economic hardship while the Latin American countries are politically more sensitive to a geographically closer and powerful media from the United States. The study then concludes with a summary and future prospects.

Relevance and place in the historic literature

While material exists on post-Communist Romania and the media in post-Communist Eastern Europe, there is limited literature on the history of the Romanian media. Ideologically, the transition literature following the 1989 collapse of Communism, follows the pattern of continuity or change with the past or some combination of the two. Organizationally, the dissertation provides stories from the print media which this work examined in depth and over time from the end of the Communist period to present. Interviews with media professionals from the print media, television industry, and radio, also appear with their comments on the history of mass media from a personal perspective. Organizationally, this work provides a history of the media during the Communist period, emphasizing political and social determinants examining political

leadership, post-Communist elections, and social groups especially national minorities in history. A review of post-Communist print media stories and the history of broadcast media ensues. The portrayal of national minorities in the media, the effects of Non-Governmental Organizations on civil society, and a comparative look at the international media, complete the study.

The dissertation begins with a survey of the history of pre-1989 scholarship incorporating the overarching themes of the Communist past relevant to this study, such as political organization, Soviet influence, domestic security forces and information control. Histories consulted discuss the milieu in which the media existed, namely a post-war provisional Communist government backed by the Soviet Army which occupied Romania from 1944-1958. The Communists initially were small in numbers and had to reach out to Romanian minorities to increase their numbers, while the media, principally the daily newspaper, *Scinteia*, (Spark) promoted the new socialist system. The dissertation examines the period from both the European and more Romanian perspectives, with emphasis on domestic changes under the socialist consolidation of politics, economics, propaganda, and culture. A review of Nicolae Ceausescu's programs, the second and last President under the socialist system, illuminates his policies towards minorities and the media from 1965-1989 until his execution. The dissertation also references literature on the Securitate (Domestic Intelligence) because of the powerful hold it exerted over the populace through control of information from official sources and from a climate of fear over foreign contacts or from the listening to foreign radio broadcasts.

Works which explain the Revolution and its effect on the mass media include a commentary from a Provisional Government elite, Silviu Brucan, in his *The Wasted Generation: Memoirs of the Romanian Journey from Capitalism to Socialism and Back*, who was also an editor under the Communists, and other scholarship, especially from Nestor Ratesh's *Romania: The Entangled Revolution*, that addresses the nature of the Revolution. For years, there has been debate on whether the Romanian Revolution was a spontaneous and true change in power and ideals or whether it was a pre-planned coup by professional Communists who wanted power for themselves. Ratesh proposes several theories but ultimately favors the idea that there was no revolution, just a change or

continuation of power at the top. The author's supports this view that the Leftists, currently in power (2004) and the same group that toppled the dictator, have long controlled the government and press with a neo-Communist mentality.

Andrew K. Milton's *The Rational Politician: Exploiting the Media in New Democracies*, provides the strongest argument for the "Leninist culture" or continuity perspective, focusing on post-Communist government control of the media in East Central European countries. Milton presents the "institutional" argument that groups can establish democracies in a relatively short period. He then points out that the institutional (also transitions) perspective ignores existing institutions and the designs of politicians interested in exploiting these institutions. The book proceeds to actual studies of the Polish and Hungarian media, specifically in the area of state television and radio which have always been focal points between those who would control the media and advocates for a free press. The dissertation recognizes the reality of the state's interest in the broadcast media for political control but clearly the press includes the print media, internet news, and other sources which are emerging from government control. Milton's argument is valid for the areas it covers but the print media is an exception.

Other scholarship on the transition included the perspective of the "Leninist culture" which emphasized the lasting effects of history, the developed culture of a socialist state and its effect on the post-Revolutionary life and media to promote continuity. Jerome Aumente, editor of *Eastern European Journalism: Before, During, and After the Communists* examined several East Central European countries' political and media systems before and after 1989, revealing openings in the press even under the Communists, which led to a partially free press soon after 1989. However, the contributors to this work emphasized that the "Leninist" (or perhaps Stalinist!) legacy tempered gains made after their revolutions and continued to pose challenges to a free press. The dissertation adds the geographically distinct dimension of southeastern Europe with Romania and reaches similar conclusions especially for the initial years following the revolution. Within a relatively short period after the fall of Communism, the countries achieved some aspects of a free press while also displaying elements of continuity with their Communist past, especially in the state-controlled television and radio. These sources help to explain the tenacity of socialist culture and why the

government broadcast media certain remained uncritical of the ruling party in its news reporting.

Important transition literature which emphasizes “change” because of its focus on the revolutions, is Timothy Garton Ash’s *The Magic Lantern*. He discusses the change of power in Poland, and Hungary in 1989, and calls the movement a “refolution” suggesting that each country witnessed some combination of reform from above and revolution from below. Garton, an eyewitness to the changes around Eastern Europe in 1989, provides an account that includes the concepts of continuity and change depending on the country and its unique historical experience. Poland, he states, had a very strong swell of support from the people who carried out strikes and protests making that movement very much a popular revolution. Hungary’s revolution was initiated more from above, carried out in committee meetings and brokered by politicians. While Ash does not discuss the Romanian Revolution, his concept of looking at the 1989 revolutions as differing combinations of reform and revolution also applied to Romania which was definitely top-down, with emphasis on continuity in 1989. Romania’s revolution probably was the least popular, in the sense that professional politicians took over the revolution at the most critical juncture and controlled it from that point. The most plausible theory is that the Revolution contained seeds of a spontaneous uprising that was later manipulated by the “Revolutionary” nomenklatura, or National Salvation Front, to its advantage. This political party and its descendants (Social Democrats) attempted to keep tight control on the media through restrictive media laws, and physical intimidation of journalists in the early years of the transition. Eventually, however, domestic opposition forces organized themselves and international media corporations moved into Romania not to dismantle the pro-administration public mass media but to offer alternatives through private television, privatized print media, and the internet.

Discussion of civil society and its relation to the new media benefited from the work of Peter Gross who discussed the destruction of civil society and the regeneration of political development and the media in Eastern Europe after 1989 in his book *Entangled Evolutions*, which, like Ash, focused on change from past history. He studied the relationship between the media and political democracy, examining countries individually and comparatively over recent decades. Originally quite pessimistic about

the legacy of the Romanian nomenklatura in his earlier work, *Mass Media in Revolution and National Development: The Romanian Laboratory*, he saw the beginnings of civil society and steady change towards a more open media by the late 1990's. The dissertation essentially concurred with his findings except that by 2002-2003, the problem of television debt and the attacks on journalists negated some of the earlier optimism based on valid conclusions made at the time, concerning the rise of an open press. The position of the media by 2003 was one of partial freedom, showing strong signs of change but with an unfortunate and heavy legacy of state control still present in the media.

Internet sources provided up to date and in-depth information on media laws and reforms both from a liberal Romanian and Western activist perspective. Romanian laws affecting the press have evolved since then, slowly but steadily reducing legislation on libel and calumny that restricted and led to the imprisonment of journalists who challenged authorities. The NGO media law sources also depicted a government that enacted laws granting public access to information in an American style freedom of information act (FOIA) and then ignored them.

The dissertation reviewed findings from reports as well as the NGO websites that discuss journalistic and governmental practices in the region. These sources highlighted the problems of restrictive government laws, censorship, lack of professionalism, and other issues which are valid but tend to obscure the progress made in just over a decade of time from the totalitarian rule of the Ceausescu's and his ruling Romanian Communist Party.

The research used existing scholarship to compare the Romanian media alongside the media in Hungary and Poland of East Central Europe, and several Latin American countries. Positives from privatization and political support for a Western-style media were apparent as were influences from NGO's and international influences. The media also faced political resistance from the Old Guard that wanted more state control over the press. The scholarship indicated that though the East Central European countries had developed civil societies before the Revolution, they faced similar problems after 1989 based on intense market pressures, competition and investment from Western media groups, and the collapse of state subsidies. They shared the common financial

challenges, political pressures, and media law issues. In some areas Romania has liberalized faster than these countries.

Another important work on comparative transition in the media is editor Richard R. Coles' *Communication in Latin America: Journalism, Mass Media, and Society*. Cole demonstrated that real change was possible in Argentina after its emergence from an authoritarian military dictatorship in the 1970's, and even in Mexico, which finally shed its political domination by the PRI Party that ruled continuously since the 1920's until 2000. Cuba, still under Castro's socialist rule, does not have a free press and instead reflects the goals of its socialist leadership. The scholarship in this area also showed traditional societies caught up in their past but adjusting the pull of the "information highway" and the proximity of a powerful North American media. Sources discussed the Cuban media from a liberal-democratic perspective. Argentina and Mexico, also in transition but not from totalitarian rule, demonstrated a mixed record of freedom of the press because of their strong sense of continuity with their authoritarian past which is giving way to change through commercial media penetration from the United States.

Sources guided the project and made the product. Original research on the dissertation began with the Revolutionary phase and incorporated primary sources from major journals such as *Adevarul*, *Libertatea*, *Romania Libera*, and *Scinteia Poporului*. The papers reflected great diversity because they were managed or owned by Communists, ex-Communists, dissidents, and other groups. Newspaper editors Bogdan Ficeac, *Romania Libera*, Cornel Nistorescu, *Evenimentul Zilei*, contemporary historian Dan Pavel, and journalist-essayist Mircea Toma of *Academia Catavencu* gave interviews for oral histories of the period and represented diverse opinions on the subject. Romanian-American writer Andrei Codrescu and frequent contributor to the American National Public Radio brought his unique perspective to the situation when he, like Garton-Ash, showed up at the Revolution as an insightful observer from abroad.

Journals provided material for much of the political election coverage which showed greater maturity with time and got better with every election. Primary sources included the journals *Adevarul*, *Evenimentul Zilei*, *Romania Libera*, and *Romania Mare*. By 1996, the Romanian press had a true opposition party and some of the papers began to represent the new movement in a show of partisan journalism in line with West European

practices. Several of the papers had also changed ownership and management by this time and began to show journalistic independence. The openly contested political race emboldened the newspapers and the election marked a turning point in their coverage, which spared no one in power if suspected of corruption after 1996.

It is a truism that the press is only as good as its coverage of social minorities and for minorities' history and coverage, *Revista 22*, a weekly and intellectual magazine, offered poignant insights into the history of minority treatment during the rules of Presidents Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceausescu. Professor Mircea Martin from the University of Bucharest, author of several essays on minorities in *22*, provided personal accounts in his oral history on social issues. Martin spoke about the socialist programs from a domestic policy point of view while relating these to the international issues of de-Stalinization, the Hungarian Revolution, and Ceausescu's use of minorities to help him consolidate power.

The author also interviewed Aron Ballo from Transylvania, editor-in-chief of the largest Hungarian language newspaper in the country. Ballo, a journalist and ethnic Magyar, lives in Cluj-Napoca, an old university town that suffers from tensions between its large Magyar minority, and the Romanian majority, led by Mayor Gheorghe Funar, a politician who resents Hungarian symbolism wherever the Magyars display nationalist pride.

George Lacatush, a Rroma (Gypsy) journalist, provided his ideas, describing Rroma culture and commenting on how the media portrayed this large and increasingly organized minority. He has studied investigative journalism and writes on minority issues for the major daily *Curentul*. Also discussing minority issues were Jewish leaders Dr. Alexandru Elias, a psychiatrist and community leader in Bucharest, and Dr. John Serbanescu, historian and archivist. Both discussed their experiences of Jewish life under Communism, emigration, and the state of Jewish culture and its treatment in the media.

Members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual advocacy group ACCEPT, added their thoughts on the treatment of sexual minorities in the press, while commentator and writer Mircea Toma of *Academia Catavencu*, a prominent satirical weekly, gave his opinions. There are of course other minorities in Romania but these were important enough to discuss in this work because their treatment reflected a

documented history of exclusion that has divided the country. Nowadays, NGO's and the European Union are monitoring these behaviors and press coverage. Radu Toma, counselor to Senator Corneliu Vadim Tudor of the Greater Romania Party, also contributed his party's viewpoints to the discussion of minorities.

Other comments came from an interview with Member of Parliament, (MP) Deputy Mona Musca, who gave her opinions on the evolution of press laws and the importance of a free media. MP Musca is one of the most active lawmakers, who legislates media laws that are open, transparent, and encourage a free press, freedom of speech, and access to information. Also connected to media law and an important regulatory body, is political appointee, Ralu Filip, President of the Council of National Audiovisual Broadcasting. In an interview he spoke about the history of the media and the regulation of television and radio broadcasting. Filip spoke from the point of view of a regulator who limited questionable program content as defined by law and custom. In a sense his regulatory body limits freedom of speech, but not necessarily out of line with West European nation's standards which, along with the American government, also impose restrictions on their television and radio programs. Mihai Coman, former Dean of the University of Bucharest School of Journalism, in a separate interview, discussed the state of media law and school's efforts to teach professionalism.

Another aspect on the "canvas" of the media landscape is the development of civil society in post-Communist Romania. The media reflects the state of social transparency and furthers democracy through free speech and information flow. Working alongside and for a free media are non-governmental organizations that promote civil society by different methods. Ana Blandiana of the Civic Alliance, an NGO, and co-founder of the Democratic Convention Party gave an interview on the state of the opposition (to the ruling Social Democrats), and her NGO. Its greatest accomplishment is the Sighet Memorial, a renovated prison in northern Romania which re-opened the issue of totalitarian control, arrests, and deportations from 1945-1989. The revival of historical memory, many feel, is essential if Romanians are to grapple with their past and move forward with this understanding. Literature from the Memorial and its website provided additional information on this period. Not surprisingly, some opposed discussion of the Memorial and this paper recounts the strong government opposition to

the television series, “Sighet: The Memorial of Suffering” produced in the 1990’s and subsequently cancelled by the government network in a crude assault on free speech.

Other NGO’s which promote civil society and provided source material are ProDemocracy and the Soros Foundation website. An important NGO which has advocated professionalism in journalism is The Center for Independent Journalism (www.cji.ro) which trains journalists in independent and investigative reporting techniques through courses and seminars offered by foreign journalists. The director, Iona Avadani, made herself available for several interviews, as did Liviu Avram, an instructor at the Center who is also a reporter for *Adevarul* and recipient of a Columbia University journalism prize for investigative journalism.

The work reviews and analyzes history, journalism, political science, and legal issues, to provide a better understanding of the evolution of the media in Romania. Before discussing the transition however, it will serve the reader to review the media landscape in the Communist period which extended from 1944-1989, dominated all aspects of life, created a “Leninist culture,” and a state-run press that the leadership used to great effect during its tenure.

CHAPTER II

A Brief History of Communism and the Media since 1944

There was no historical memory of liberalism or democracy in Romania before 1989 and this has hindered the development of an open press. Several contemporary media problems have their roots in this period. The Communist state created subservient print media and broadcasting institutions and enacted repressive media laws, while the Interior Ministry established the precedent of physical attacks against journalists and these traditions have carried on to the present. This chapter will look at the political history of the near past from 1944 to 1989, and relate behaviors from that period to present day actions.

Western Europe, the United States and Canada as of 2004, have traditions of agreed upon rules, consensus, and a context for a free press. Romania does not but is not unique in this regard as the same is true of other countries in the region, such as Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and the Ukraine. In the Romanian experience, Romanian and Soviet Communists shaped the culture and intellectual dialogue from the end of the war until 1989 and after. Political scientist Vladimir Tismaneanu has noted that the authoritarian legacy of the 1930's also created a tradition of intolerance pre-dating Communism, contributing yet another factor to the legacy that journalists faced during the transition years after 1989.⁴

In the nation's history, Romania emerged from Ottoman domination in the 19th century. Following that, Transylvania united with Romania after the collapse of the Hapsburg Empire in World War One and the country became an independent and united kingdom. In the 1930's it was a kingdom with royalist leaders and strong fascist

⁴ "Romania Moving Toward NATO and the EU," CSCE Digest: United States Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 22 December 2003. www.csce.gov

elements present. After World War Two, the Red Army occupied the country while Romanian Communists consolidated power. The totalitarian system endured forty-five years and was in place at the end in 1989. For most of the second half of the twentieth century, Communist regimes managed the media's product, shaped the newsmaker's approach, and moderated public expectations. After the Revolution, the leaders of the National Salvation Front rhetorically distanced themselves from the absolute rule of deposed President Nicolae Ceausescu but the socialist past continued to influence their movement and the media especially in the first years of the transition. These next pages review some of the historical realities of the Communist period to provide perspective on the post-revolutionary media.

After the Red Army moved into Romania in 1944, the Communists consolidated their tight rule over Romanian life, including the media, through force, terror, and propaganda. Party Secretary Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej destroyed the potential counter-elites while Nicolae Ceausescu, his successor, enacted new press laws and created a cultural intelligentsia of writers, journalists, and artists, along with a repressive internal police to serve his and the Party's ends. From the beginning, the Romanian government exhibited more effective repression than that of any other Eastern European country. It practiced internal transfers and external deportation of its opponents, employed forced labor on the Danube-Black Sea Canal, and arrested or directly intimidated at least one million citizens.⁵ Authorities also neutralized dissent through placing dissidents in the gulag of prisons and by controlling the press.

The Party created the newspaper *Scinteia* (Spark) in 1944 to foment propaganda, agitate, and help the cadres organize.⁶ Silviu Brucan, its first editor, has described the paper's use of editorials as a propaganda tool. At the beginning of the factory shift, for example, work leaders read editorials to employees for about half an hour to indoctrinate the newly arrived workers. As a mark of the paper's importance, Brucan himself received a trip to Moscow in 1951 to meet with *Pravda* editors to ensure his paper was on the right track.

⁵ Vlad Georgescu, ed., *Romania: 40 Years 1944-1984* (New York: Praeger, 1985), 9.

⁶ Silviu Brucan, *The Wasted Generation: Memoirs of the Romanian Journey from Capitalism to Socialism and Back*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 36.

In 1947 the regime staged trials of top political opponents who subsequently faced long prison sentences or disappeared. The Petru Groza transitional government with Red Army backing, crushed the opposition National Peasant Party and the National Liberal Party, executing as many as 60,000 followers, imprisoning thousands and ending any chance for Western-style democracy.⁷ Many, like Corneliu Coposu, Secretary of the Peasant Party, paid for his non-Communist political affiliation with a long jail sentence that lasted until 1964, enduring years of interrogations and torture.⁸ The government dissolved the two parties in August 1947 and suppressed their newspapers to eliminate plurality in the press. Communist party leaders then forced King Mihai I to abdicate on 30 December 1947, bringing an end to the Kingdom of Romania.

The Communist leadership then established the Romanian Worker's Party in 1948, creating a new constitution and radically transforming Romanian judicial, educational, cultural, and religious institutions to reflect Marxist-Leninist principles in the neo-Stalinist, centralized system. The now dominant Romanian Communist Party or RCP, engineered changes to encourage socialist realism while establishing a one-party state with a National Assembly, presidium, and people's councils.

The government reshaped and dominated all aspects of life. In the economic sphere, the government nationalized industry, sending resources into industrialization and developing a centralized economic plan. The planners diverted resources away from consumer goods, agriculture, and housing while officials collectivized agriculture, destroyed the "kulaks" and attacked traditional values of family and religion in the countryside. The Party also directed intellectuals and artists to promote socialist realism in their work to coincide with the opening of new schools which educated party cadres while also reining in the religious community. The regime discouraged church attendance and outlawed the Greek-Catholic (Uniate) Church in 1948. The RCP then subordinated the Orthodox Church through the appointment of patriarchs sympathetic to the Communists, nationalized church property, purged undesirable elements of the clergy, and imprisoned spiritual leaders of the Jewish community. This led to a marginalization

⁷ Ghita Ionescu, *Communism in Romania 1944-1962* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 131

⁸ Doina Alexandru, *Corneliu Coposu Confessions: Dialogues with Doina Alexandru*, transl. Elena Popescu. (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1998).

of spiritual life and the disappearance of religious news, even after the Revolution with the exception of specialty journals or magazines.

The Party also influenced culture, art, and the writing of history. *Scinteia* was the official newspaper and the Party turned it against dissidents. Editorials in several issues of the paper in January 1948 attacked the poetry of Tudor Arghezi for his non-conformist views. "...nothing original...(he) represents...decadent bourgeois art."⁹ The government also created the Romanian Writers Union to control writers and poets, some of whom dared to complain about the lack of space in journals to express their opinions and for the awarding of literary prizes to obscure yet politically obedient writers.¹⁰ Presaging its nationalist stance against the Soviet Union, the nomenklatura even politicized historiography, directing historians to emphasize the country's ancient and indigenous Dacian origins, while portraying the Romans as unwelcome invaders, in a nuanced jab at their Soviet masters. The state also encouraged modern historians to write pro-nationalist histories of Transylvania and Bessarabia (Moldova) whose areas Romania diplomatically contested with Hungary and the Soviet Union, respectively.

To enforce its policies, the government increasingly became a police state supported by the Department of State Security, a function of the Interior Ministry, known as the *Securitate*. While sources are hard to find for this secretive organization, several writers have gained access to Interior Ministry archives to describe the department's mission and activities. As with other post-World War Two Eastern European countries, the RCP utilized police terror to consolidate its rule and maintain control.

In the 1950's Securitate eradicated the partisan movement, ran labor camps, enforced the construction of the Danube-Black Sea Canal, and maintained public order. It assisted the government in deporting some 40,000 people from the Banat area near Yugoslavia during tensions with that country, while imprisoning political opponents in the infamous Sighet prison, (among others in its gulag) to include Catholic and Uniate

⁹ Dennis Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1989* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 170.

¹⁰ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991), 190.

clergy.¹¹ Its official mission was to prevent sabotage, the undermining of the national economy, espionage, intelligence gathering on its military, and to protect government and Party leaders.¹²

Like the Soviet Union, the Securitate also institutionalized political opponents under Decree Law 12 “On the Medical Treatment of Dangerously Mentally Ill Persons,” imprisoning those arrested for up to five years in psychiatric hospitals. For anti-state propaganda, writings of a “fascist” nature, or for entering or leaving the country illegally without a passport, prisoners could be sent to Poiana Mare prison or Dr. Petru Groza prison in Blihor for treatment consisting of electric shock therapy, beatings, or chemical therapy.¹³

Later, in the 1970’s during the Ceausescu years, the Interior Ministry police clashed with people who resisted relocation under the government’s systematization plan that eradicated thousands of villages and replaced them with “modern” apartment blocs, which dominate the skyline of most medium to large cities today. Ethnic Hungarians of Szaslona, Transylvania, in one case refused to move and resisted the bulldozing of their village, which they believed would destroy their culture. The threatened evictions caused an exodus of refugees for which the government ordered a “shoot to kill” policy within five miles of the frontier at night. To improve border surveillance, authorities prohibited crops taller than three feet within fifty yards of the border.

Securitate controlled personal publications while the government spewed out paeans to the greatness of the Ceausescu’s. It controlled the few extant computers and registered all typewriters, making the publication of underground literature difficult. At the same time, bookstores were full of Ceausescu’s “visionary” works alongside his peasant, elementary school educated wife’s ghost-written scientific treatises on chemistry. The one state television station, broadcast for two to three hours a day and included its mandatory eulogies to the Great Leader. Good news was the official message of the day. Years later, Television Romania (TVR) and Radio Romania, still

¹¹ Dennis Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1945-1989* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 27.

¹² Deletant, *Ceausescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania*, 75.

¹³ Deletant., 99.

belonged to the state and many consider that they have continued to act as uncritical voices for the government, as indicated later in the discussion on broadcast media.

Reality was unwelcome and the Interior Ministry ensured that dissenters paid for their impunity. Securitate employed violence, arranging for the beating and murder of dissidents, especially those active in writing or broadcasting conditions about Romania from abroad. Domestically, Securitate controlled the populace by supervising citizen contacts with tourists, businessmen and diplomats. In each county, there were “R” units that monitored radio and ham radio communications, “S” units that intercepted mail, and “T” units that surveyed targets with hidden microphones.

Violence against journalists today, a problem recognized by the international journalistic community and human rights organizations, had its origins in the Communist past. The Securitate created a climate of violence against those who demonstrated independent thinking, especially when it clashed with official policy. This practice of intimidation has carried on to the present and Romania continues to receive international attention for human rights abuses, including loss of life, against journalists who typically have been involved in exposes of official corruption or uncovering illegal business activities.

External events, specifically the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, created a brief period of “thaw” from the censorship imposed from above. The literary review *Steaua* (Star) composed of Romanian and ethnic Hungarian writers began to question the system and published challenges to the Party. Hungarians in this group were familiar with the liberal Petofi Circle of Budapest that opposed aspects of Hungary’s system and its relationship to the Soviet Union. Alexander Jar, a Romanian writer for *Steaua*, openly criticized the Party. He demanded the right to discuss more liberal ideas in their literary review, denounced police measures against writers, and criticized the Party for “sterilizing thought.”¹⁴ *Scinteia* then attacked Jar in an editorial after which the Party expelled him.¹⁵

Students also took up the fight protesting the mandatory study of Russian and Marxist-Leninism. Workers agitated about “bread and liberty” while Transylvania

¹⁴ Ghita Ionescu, *Communism in Romania 1944-1962* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 263.

¹⁵ Ionescu, *Communism in Romania 1944-1962*, 264.

Magyars voiced solidarity with the revolutionaries in Budapest. Romanian officialdom didn't let the cultural protest go too far however. Agitprop, an institution that promoted official propaganda, engineered a new campaign through *Scinteia* to educate workers and artists in the "struggle against bourgeois ideology" and defined the dangers of cultural deviation. Authorities then removed western periodicals or journals that remained on newsstands.

With Gheorghiu-Dej's death in 1965, Nicolae Ceausescu emerged to take control of the Party. In 1969, the leader reaffirmed that the press and *Scinteia* in particular, needed to continue defending Party priorities and promote the line of the Communist Party in culture, art, and all spheres of activity. In 1971, he stated that journalists must be Party activists and henceforth receive training at the Stefan Gheorghiu Party Academy rather than the University of Bucharest. The Party then established a union for all workers in the media.

In the same year, he established a cult of personality for himself after a visit to the Republic of China and North Korea. Kim Il Sung's Stalinist bastion of Communism especially impressed the Romanian leader who later made himself president as well as party boss, naming himself *Conducator* ("The Leader"). Ceausescu implemented a "Cultural Revolution" after publishing his July Theses which emphasized a return to Socialist Realism in the arts, greater control of intellectuals and the re-centralization of ideology. He undermined reformers, liberal intellectuals, and technocrats to further consolidate power and demanded that mass media promote "advanced principles and criticize unsound tendencies."¹⁶ While East Central European activists began to fight for human rights with the implementation of the Helsinki Accords in the mid-1970's, the Romanian leadership was moving in the opposite direction, modeling itself after Asian totalitarian rulers.

¹⁶ Dinu C. Giurescu and Stephen Fischer-Galati, eds., *Romania: A Historic Perspective* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1998), 126.

Apparently, the sound media practices advocated by The Leader, included fawning over the First Couple and lavishing platitudes to the leadership. In March 1974, when Nicolae Ceausescu was sworn in as President, *Scinteia* called him “this most brilliant son of the Romanian nation, the leader who crowns a succession of great statesmen...”¹⁷ On Elena’s sixtieth birthday in January 1979, one editorial gushed, “The first woman of the country...a star stands beside star in the eternal arch of heaven, beside the Great Man, she watches over Romania’s path to glory.”¹⁸

The Ceausescu government enacted restrictive media laws most of which survived if in altered form, until 2002. Press laws circumscribed the content of reporting to serve the Party’s ends. They defined the desired professional qualities of journalists, forbade attacks against the Party or its leaders, and prohibited the dissemination of information that could disturb public order, an obviously open-ended directive subject to interpretation. The post-1989 penal code included libel, slander, and calumny laws that came directly from this period.

The Central Committee simultaneously reduced the number Romanian journals and further limited the frequency of publishing ostensibly because of paper shortages. A newly created organization, the Committee for the Press and Printing, reported directly to the Central Committee. It prevented the publication or distribution of offensive material, ensured that all journalists were Party members, and registered all printing, typing, and copying equipment. These media laws were retained in the post-Revolution Constitution and laws governing criticism of public officials lasted well into the transition period with infractions such as defamation resulting in imprisonment for journalists convicted of such violations.

The Party controlled domestic events and the media but had little influence over international developments. Hard times hit Romania when the cost of energy skyrocketed in the late 1970’s. The Soviets, their supplier, ended the subsidized fuels program and forced the country to pay world market prices. When the foreign debt soared to around \$10 billion, Ceausescu decided to pay it off through the export of agricultural and industrial goods for hard currency. The regime depressed living

¹⁷ Giurescu, *Romania: A Historic Perspective*, 170.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

standards by exporting consumer goods and rationing foodstuffs to the public. Workers lacked necessities, lived in cold quarters, and endured frequent brown-outs and empty shelves in stores during the 1980's. Food shortages were endemic to the whole country by this time with rationing of even onions and salt while corn mush and lard became a staple diet for many. Food was available only with ration cards and after queuing since dawn for hours, many discovered that the shops had empty shelves. The black-market was the only sure source of food however and its prices were exorbitant.¹⁹ Ironically today, wages remain depressed and pensioners with monthly incomes of less than \$80, can only gaze at the cornucopia of goods imported from Western Europe and Asia that fill store shelves and cost Euro equivalent prices.

Opposition emerged from the many fronts against not only food scarcities, but political repression, religious control, and other issues. Following the signing of the Helsinki agreements that targeted respect for human rights in its charter, Paul Goma published an "open letter" on human rights abuses in 1977 that Radio Free Europe broadcast. He protested the cult of personality, was arrested and exiled. Religious leaders also voiced their opposition to the regime. Father Gheorghe Calciu of Bucharest questioned Marxism and the lack of religious freedom, in his sermons, for which the government sentenced him to ten years in prison in 1979. Some Protestant groups also demanded the right to emigrate while other religious dissidents went to prison.

Romanian elites, unlike the peasants, publicized their grievances abroad to focus international attention on internal problems. Senior Securitate official Ion Pachepa defected in 1978 and wrote a book about the terror his organization inflicted on the citizenry.²⁰ Doina Cornea, a Uniate and French professor at the University of Cluj, criticized the destruction of cultural traditions and the Systematization Program. Inside the country, some like Defense Minister General Ion Ionita and Army Chief of Staff General Ion Gheorghe took bold measures and attempted a military coup in 1983 that other generals betrayed to the authorities, who then executed twelve officers in reprisal.

¹⁹ "Supplies Crisis and Resistance in Romania are Mounting," *Vienna Kurrier*, 31 December 1987, Foreign Broadcast Information Source (FBIS) Dec 1987 Microfiche.

²⁰ Ion Pachepa, *Red Horizons: The Extraordinary Memoirs of a Communist Spy Chief* (London: Heinemann, 1988).

Workers did not always acquiesce either and protested their deteriorating conditions, sometimes violently, setting a precedent for their use by the government against dissidents in Bucharest in 1990 and 1991. Jiu Valley coal miners went on strike in 1972 and 1977. In the 1977 protest, the miners protested over low wages in front of Ceausescu who was visiting the site. After promising to deal with the problem, Ceausescu left. The two leaders of the protest both died in separate car accidents shortly thereafter.

In 1987, some 10,000 factory workers at Red Star Tractor Factor in Brasov protested pay cuts, chanted “down with Ceausescu,” “we want bread,” overturned a police car, and invaded the town on Election Day. They ransacked a local Communist party headquarters which had catered a feast of meats, cheeses and wines for the post-election victory. Workers unaccustomed to seeing such delicacies in times of famine, hurled portraits of the leader and his wife out of the building’s windows and burned party files in a street bonfire. The government reacted by detaining and torturing over two hundred workers.

Perhaps the most notable opposition to the regime, however, was the “Letter of Six” message to the President himself, written by six powerful Communists in 1989. The authors sent the letter to Ceausescu, with copies to the BBC, Radio Free Europe, and other international press agencies. They attacked systematization as a violation of the right to own personal property, the tapping of phones and censoring of mail as illegal, and criticized the decree forbidding Romanians contact with foreigners. The document also railed against the monstrous Civic Center in downtown Bucharest which had no official budget, and complained that the Securitate destroyed the right to free speech of workers, Party members and intellectuals. They stated that economic planning no longer worked because factories lacked raw materials, energy, and markets.

Their proclamation also demanded the immediate cessation of systematization, the curbing of food exports desperately needed for a starving nation, and requested that the government restore civil rights as guaranteed in the Constitution.²¹ The government responded by interviewing and intimidating the group of six with plainclothes police

²¹ Silviu Brucan, *The Wasted Generation: Memoirs of the Romanian Journey from Capitalism to Socialism and Back* (Westview Press: Boulder, 1993), 153.

surveillance. This protest shook the establishment and drew international attention because it involved high-ranking members of society. It should be noted that the “letter” was broadcast from abroad and began a pattern of foreign commentary on domestic issues resulting in reaction during the Communist period, and action or liberalizing responses after the Revolution. As a relatively small player in international events, Romania has proven susceptible international opinion, mostly the more progressive media practices of Western Europe.

During the Communist period however, domestic repression was an established instrument of the regime used to control the populace. The government required people to report contacts with foreigners, while it established a network of informants in the apartment blocs to report suspicious activities to the *Securitate*. In 2003, an elderly neighbor of the author, screamed at the owner of the rented apartment in Bucharest, that he needed my passport so he could register it with the local police precinct, to comply with an established policy that actually ended with the Revolution. The old man was still living in the past.

Police-state practices such as these led to the revocation of Most-Favored-Nation status with the United States, and isolation by both Britain and France by the mid-1980’s. The regime’s increasing repression came in stark contrast to the nascent liberalizing trends in Poland and Hungary which followed the lead of the Soviet Union which was implementing the glasnost policies advocated by General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev.

Gorbachev provided an interesting account of his encounter with the man at the helm of Romania who, he wrote, was grossly out of control by this time. He recounted meeting President Nicolae Ceausescu in the 1980’s and recalled that Ceausescu went out of his way, while visiting Moscow, to demonstrate the independence of his opinions to the point of brashness. The Soviet leader added that one could see his arrogance, excessive pretensions and delusions of grandeur. Gorbachev also referred to the observations of fellow Soviet Vitaly Vorotnikov who visited the Romanian Party Congress in November 1989, shortly before the end. In a scene reminiscent of Stalinist Russia, Vorotnikov exclaimed that he felt as if he had landed in the distant past. While attending a Party meeting, he noted that there was no dialogue just chants and eulogizing, with the audience getting to its feet forty-three times during Ceausescu’s speech shouting

praise and thundering applause.²² Asked if Romania would change to allow some amount of *glasnost* or openness, Ceausescu replied that Romania would change “when pears grew on poplar trees.”²³

The Romanian leadership felt secure in power. By 1989, Securitate employed 39,000 total personnel for a population of 23 million while the East German Stasi had 95,000 agents for 17 million. However, Securitate employed around 400,000 informants compared to 100,000 East German informants.²⁴ In spite of these internal controls, the regime collapsed rapidly and violently in late 1989. On 16 December 1989, anti-Ceausescu demonstrations erupted in Timisoara, which resulted in repression and the estimated killing of hundreds. Father Laszlo Tokes, a Lutheran pastor of Hungarian ethnicity, began the series of protests fatal to the government by voicing his opposition to the village demolition project in Transylvania, when he confronted Securitate forces at his home.

Journalists Petre Mihai Bacanu, Mihai Creanga, and Anton Uncu also protested conditions in 1989 and attempted to circulate a clandestine newspaper, *Romania*, but the authorities arrested them. Bacanu wrote in an editorial that his paper embraced glasnost. The West German League for the Defence of Human Rights in Romania protested their arrest but events soon overtook these incidents.

The resistance to authority shifted to Bucharest when on 21 December 1989, thousands gathered in Revolutionary Square, booing the leader and calling for him to step down. On 22 December, the army captured Ceausescu and his wife attempting to flee, quickly sentenced them to death in a military tribunal, and executed them by gunfire on 25 December 1989. The National Salvation Front (FSN), led by Ion Iliescu proclaimed democracy in Romania and an end to Communist rule.

On Christmas Day 1989, Nicolae Ceausescu, the “genius of the Carpathians” and his wife Elena lay crumpled, their bodies riddled with bullets fired by his own military in a frozen courtyard in Bucharest. The last of the Warsaw Pact nations washed away in a burst of bloodshed unprecedented in Eastern Europe.²⁵ Mircea Dinescu, a dissident poet,

²² Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 484.

²³ *New York Times*, 31 December 1989, p. 3.

²⁴ Deletant, xiv.

²⁵ Andrei Codrescu, *The Hole in the Flag* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 25.

stated that a dead dictator was more useful than a living dictator. At least “he could no longer provide food for the terrorist factory in Romania and that the imbeciles were at least temporarily out of government.”²⁶ Even Gorbachev and the Soviet leaders were glad to see the Ceausescus go.

The challenge to the press came overnight with the collapse of the dictatorship and its tightly controlled media. A new era approached in which the public, unaccustomed to choices, wanted to learn about the Revolution and everyday events.

²⁶ “Interview with Mircea Dinescu, Dissident Poet,” *Paris Liberation*, 3 January 1990, FBIS, January 1990 Microfiche.

CHAPTER III

A Survey of the Print Media Since 1989

The end of an era ushered in prospects for a new society similar to the experiences of the other countries of Eastern Europe earlier in 1989. After the fall of Communism, the transition began and print media benefited from the commercialization of news. Local and foreign capital, with new Romanian leadership bolstered by Western journalistic management and standards, combined to create a core of journals, mostly published in the capital, that provided diverse perspectives on news and editorials.

Following the capture and arrest of the Ceausescus on 22 December and their execution on 25 December, the print media reported the political changes beginning with exuberant editorials proclaiming the new dawn, exhorting the fighters to lay down their weapons, but was devoid of facts. News coverage of subsequent years showed a press moving steadily away from the socialist *Scinteia* model and years of totalitarian habits. Print journalism after the Revolution revealed increasing levels of professionalism within each newspaper, editorial preferences of subject, as well as the writers' approaches to their topics.

Shifts in print journalism occurred because of ownership policies and commercial pressures. This chapter highlights the changes in several major Bucharest dailies by examining their approaches and follow-up to major stories beginning with coverage of the Revolution. Other early transition history reveals stories of social violence against dissidents and national elections coverage. By the end of the 1990's, stories of official corruption, NATO admission, and the freedom of information act and access to records dominated the news. The theorizing and conspiracy mentality and theories, prevalent in the early 1990's, gave way to less speculative, more fact-based writing. Reporting showed follow-up and the use of better sources. The quality of journalism showed

improvement especially in the 1996 national elections coverage but still faced problems with the fundamental lack of training and high turnover by reporters.

The media, like society, experienced a revolution after 1989 with an explosion of dailies hitting the stands. Inevitably, many failed and eventually the financially stronger, major dailies dominated the market in print media. The number of dailies peaked in 1996 at 106, and came down to 95 as of 1998.²⁷ Some titles of major national dailies, all morning papers published in Bucharest, included *Adevarul*, *Evenimentul Zilei*, *Libertatea*, *Romania Libera*, *National*, *Ziua*, *Jurnalul National*, and *Romania Mare*. Specialty newspapers include the financial papers *Ziarul Financiar* and *Bursa*, sports papers *ProSport* and *Gazeta Sporturilor*, and the weeklies *Revista 22* and *Catavencu*. The major secondary cities, Brasov, Cluj, Timisoara, and Iasi, all have at least one or two dominant local papers which their readers support.

The quantity of dailies compared to the pre-1989 period is impressive but the quality of reporting and the evolution of journalistic writing is perhaps a more central question. This work examines print news stories because unlike most radio and television stories, the articles exist in archives, are primary source documents, they demonstrate how media organizations reported news and show what the public had as an available news source. Additionally, these reports tell stories not only of events but also indicate the writer's (and editor's) biases towards a subject, revealing perspectives which represent a systemic and cultural approach to news making.

The topics here represent diverse themes and span the range of time from the beginning of post-Communist Romania to 2003. They include political coverage, social unrest, corruption, foreign policy, and reform. In political coverage, three national elections of 1992, 1996, and 2000, show a sure progression in coverage of a similar subject over time. The repression of dissidents by coal miners in 1990 and the subsequent return of the coal miners to the capital demanding improved working conditions in 1991, represented a story of violence against dissidents by the Provisional Government and an interesting use of coal miners by a terrified young government. The miners were a loyal and conservative group willing to travel some distance by train to

²⁷ Alex Ulmanu, "European Media Landscape: The Romanian Media Landscape," European Journalism Center On-Line, p. 1, www.ejc.nl/jr/emland/romania.html Cited 1 January 2004.

defend a Revolution they believed was under attack by anti-revolutionary elements who were actually students and others who believed the Revolution hadn't gone far enough.

A corruption story that touched high-ranking officials in many branches of government gave insights into a major social problem and a willingness by the press to implicate the government. While the corruption story tarred the government, the NATO inclusion of Romania in 2002, was a positive story for all the papers with a few exceptions. A reform story of 2003 made headlines with the attempt by opposition leaders to release personal records from the Interior Ministry files established during the Communist period. This drew coverage mostly in the more intellectual weeklies which had the resources and readership to examine the complex and emotional subject of getting access to personal dossiers created and maintained by the security services.

None of the papers mentioned the origins of the Revolution which began with popular protests in Timisoara over an incident between the ethnic Hungarian priest, Father Laszlo Tokes, and the Romanian Security forces. Violent rebellions followed in Timisoara and Bucharest, leading to the dictator's abdication, capture, and execution, proceeded by the rise of the National Salvation Front. The daily newspaper reporting neglected any meaningful coverage of the events in Timisoara or Bucharest.

Commentators such as Dan Pavel, an historian, believe that the NSF hijacked the spontaneous uprising from the protesters and then, following Iliescu's instructions, elements of Securitate, the Army, and even Arabs who trained in Romanian military camps, became NSF-sponsored shooters, known as "terrorists" to give the illusion of a real revolution.²⁸ Iliescu, according to this popular theory, emerged as the national hero appearing as a savior in the nation's moment of crisis. Mircea Toma, editor at the weekly satirical journal *Catavencu* and Air Force psychologist for pilot fitness, concurred with this hypothesis and added that technicians even inserted simulated programs into the military radar screens to give the appearance of an attack by foreign air forces. The Revolution, according to this theory, was a grand illusion to legitimize the NSF, at the cost of lives, including students, which resulted in needless destruction and suffering.

Nestor Ratesh, Radio Free Europe correspondent for Romania, presented various theories including the idea of a Soviet plot to replace the regime with one more favorable

²⁸ Dan Pavel, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 1 October 2003.

to glasnost and perestroika.²⁹ Silviu Brucan and General Nicolae Militaru spoke about the plotters (NSF) taking the Revolution away from the popular movement. Ratesh queried these two who were initially in the inner group of the NSF, and suggested that the NSF leadership had met before 22 December but had no proof. Also, he posed the question of whether the intent of the NSF was to change the political system or merely remove the Ceausescu's, replace the leadership, and leave the system intact.

After forty-five years of state-run media, the Revolution of December 1989 represented the first news event for a press that suddenly found itself free of a Stalinist-type information control. *Romania Libera*, (Free Romania) the country's oldest paper and established in 1877, was one of several journals that covered the Revolution. The "R" Group, comprised of domestic businessmen and journalists, own the paper which is a partisan, Right-wing (liberal-democratic) paper. As of February 2001 it had a readership of 279,000 readers per day, according to the Pro Institute. It is a broadsheet paper, whose slogan is "Tomorrow Begins Today," and is aligned with the right-wing political coalition. Its first experience as a free press began when it published its first post-Communist editions during the Revolution in late December 1989.

On 22 December 1989, the Provisional Government arrested the Ceausescus. People were anxious about the collapse of the government and gunmen were terrorizing civilians in urban areas throughout the country. *Romania Libera* reported that Securitate, the Army and police had joined the Revolution and issued a call to arms. This edition was "written not with a pen but with a gun" but included few specifics about events. The tone of the reporting was exuberant and patriotic, with frequent references to the bravery and heroism of citizens. Before the dictator was even deposed, one editorial expounded the political platform of the newly formed National Salvation Front of Ion Iliescu. The group proposed abandoning the single party monopoly of power, implementing free elections in April, creating a government with separation of powers, a new constitution, and restructuring the economy, as the top priorities. The transitional government's stated goal was to promote the liberty and dignity of the Romanian people.

²⁹ Nestor Ratesh, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 82.

The reporters, accustomed to a servile Communist journalistic style, did not ask the most basic questions during a critical phase of the Revolution. On 24 December, *Romania Libera's* Emil Munteanu supplied the following, "The assassins are shooting at the people; the Army is trying to protect the people; were those shooting into the people slaves of the dictator?"³⁰ The article also tersely reported the surrender of two important Generals, Tudor Postelnicu and Ion Dinca. The writer, however, did not ask who was doing the shooting or why. Reporter Ion Marcovici said that there were young victims and much blood but did not say how many and where. Reporter P. Dumitru offered that terrorists shot people from cars, cemeteries and roofs but nothing more specific and no "who or why." A probable explanation is that they had not received training to investigate situations as Western reporters do and their paper had gone from propaganda tool to "free press" literally overnight.

British writer Dennis Deletant believed that the "terrorists" who fired on crowds were elements of Securitate, the Army, and Ministry of Interior troops who resisted the new government in order to restore Ceausescu. Silviu Brucan, in the National Salvation Front leadership at the time, said that the Front decided to execute the Ceausescu's on 25 December to remove any reason for the Securitate to continue fighting.³¹

The press behaved passively, likely awaiting approved releases from officials that never came, or possibly the paper had no access to information because it was accustomed to other sources which no longer existed. In either case, the news they wrote was inadequate by Western standards. On 26 December *Romania Libera* reported Ceausescu's death and no other facts. After twenty-four years of absolute rule this newspaper provided no commentary on his death. In ordinary or extraordinary times, the death of a country's leader deserves discussion on the causes of death, ramifications, and successor issues.

The newspaper continued to write stories and editorials full of conjecture and unsubstantiated claims. On 28 December, Brucan ventured in a column that Securitate was responsible for the random shootings but offered no proof. Reporter C. Vranceanu asked rhetorically on 29 December why the Ceausescu's were not judged in the courts,

³⁰ Emil Munteanu, *Romania Libera*, 24 December 1989.

³¹ Deletant, p. 372.

answering that the Ceausescus' execution was legal because the network aired the tape on television and therefore was a public process!³² On 4 January 1990, Ion Iliescu of the National Salvation Front, declared that the Revolution was a spontaneous movement and that his group would not become a party, which it did later anyway. Coverage of the event dropped dramatically after 8 January. Only three years later in 1993, did *Romania Libera* editor Petre Mihai Bacanu accuse Iliescu of hiding the truth about the Revolution, and having the mentality of a Communist activist.³³

Bogdan Ficeac, Editor-in-Chief of *Romania Libera* in 2002 and a reporter back in 1989, related a personal story that illustrated the confusion of the times. During the revolutionary days, colleagues in his office proffered him a rifle as the youngest and most recently discharged Army veteran, asking him to kill a “terrorist” who was crouching on the nearby Exposition Center roof-top across from the Press Agency building. He brought the terrorist into his sights but didn't fire because he wasn't sure who the man was. Days later, he met the man, an Army conscript, who said he was trying to take down the national flag to cut out the socialist logo in its center. Ficeac was relieved he hadn't shot the man.³⁴

Following the bloody days of December, peace returned temporarily to the streets of Romania though none of the terrorists was ever brought to justice. Pavel speculated that the new regime protected the local shooters while whisking the foreign participants out of the country. The Romanian press, on site and living through these events, never discussed the main issues. One could argue that they were not trained to ask the right questions. The new leadership, composed of ex-Communist nomenklatura themselves, would not have encouraged investigative reporting out of habit, as well. A few months later, the events of June 1990 provided the first glimpse of the NSF's attitude towards the press and dissidents who challenged their rule.

In the spring of 1990, protestors occupied University Square, demonstrating for the government to observe the “Proclamation of Timisoara” which called for former

³² C. Vranceanu, *Romania Libera*, 29 December 1989.

³³ Roxana Iordache, “Puiterea Nu Doreste Adevarul Despre Revolutie,” *Romania Libera*, 23 February 1993.

³⁴ Bogdan Ficeac, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 4 June 2002.

Communist nomenclatura to not hold political office for ten years. This finally became a national issue after Romania entered NATO and NATO declared that military members needed background checks to receive their new security clearances. These dissidents clearly did not have that kind of influence. The protestors also wanted the government to abrogate legislation subordinating the one television station to the political leadership, and they wanted to postpone elections scheduled for May, to give the opposition time to organize a meaningful challenge to the NSF.³⁵ Again, the objectivity of state-run television is an issue today but the NSF also successfully resisted their appeals.

On 13 June, police attacked the demonstrators beating and injuring those they caught. On 14 June, 10-12,000 coal miners from the Jiu Valley arrived and proceeded to brutalize the protestors, destroying press offices and university buildings for several days. *Romania Libera* reported the violence and asked tough questions, emerging from this incident as an independent paper unafraid of challenging the government. On 31 May, the daily reported that students at University Square were protesting, openly speaking against communism, fraudulent elections, and the violence that continued to simmer after the Revolution.³⁶ Days later, reporters found students conducting a “sit-in” asking soldiers in the Square who they were protecting while continuing to protest the newly elected government.³⁷ Then on 13 June the number of “soldiers” increased dramatically.

The National Salvation Front then attacked the strikers and the press through its proxies, the miners. Reports emerged that police commenced attacks against students on 14 June, beating hunger strikers and battling students near the center of the city. *Romania Libera* boldly stated that the authorities preferred violence to dialogue. The attackers, it turned out, were not police, or even metro workers as later reported but coal miners. From 15-18 June, *Romania Libera* failed to appear on the stands because the miners sacked its offices and beat the employees, which by association was an attack on the press by the government. Finally, on 19 June, the paper printed a story that the government had targeted youth and directed the “workers” against students, the School of

³⁵ Ramesh, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution*, 133.

³⁶ “Piata Universitatii: politistii s-au retras,” *Romania Libera*, 31 May 1990.

³⁷ Libertate Te Iubim,” *Romania Libera*, 7 June 1990.

Architecture, and a television station. The workers continued their rampage even injuring women and children in the capital and terrorizing people caught in the wrong place.³⁸

Anton Uncu of *Romania Libera* recalled the events of 13 June 1990 and how they affected that newspaper. He stated that hunger strikers and students were in University Square in Bucharest on that day and events were fairly calm until the miners arrived. They went to the political headquarters of known opponents of the Iliescu regime, and attacked Romanian Television headquarters, the Faculty of Architecture and several political parties. On the morning of 14 June, they occupied offices of several newspapers including *Romania Libera*. Led by miner's leader Nicolae Camarasan, they beat people with crowbars and axes, closing the offices for several days.³⁹ Uncu later detailed an episode concerning television coverage where a government spokesman criticized Romanian Television for broadcasting daily events while not responding to reports of an Army commander in Alba Iulia who was ready to fire on its citizens.⁴⁰

Romania Libera understandably reacted strongly, vigorously denouncing the attacks on its offices and people. It identified the workers as miners and called them thugs who vandalized buildings, hurt people, and destroyed property. It demanded that the guilty face justice and emphasized that this type of activism was no replacement for democratic institutions.⁴¹ The United States Department of State accused President Iliescu and his government of authorizing attacks against the people and attempting to control opposition parties and the press by invoking authoritarian policies of the past. The State Department recommended that President Iliescu begin a dialogue with the opposition parties and stated firmly that all economic aid to Romania would be withheld until the situation clarified.⁴² Cristian Topan, a reporter, said that he was a victim, attacked by the miners. He wrote that he watched President Iliescu on television later that day thanking the miners for their glorious deeds.

³⁸ "O Grava Criza Morala," *Romania Libera*, 19 June 1990.

³⁹ Anton Uncu, "Why We Did Not Publish," *Romania Libera*, 29 June 1990, p. 57, FBIS, Apr-Jun 1990 CD-Rom.

⁴⁰ Anton Uncu, "No One is Above the Law," *Romania Libera*, 15 January 1991, p 49, FBIS, Jan-Mar 1991CD-Rom.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "Declaratia Departamentului de Stat al Statelor Unite ale Americii din 15 Junie 1990," *Romania Libera*, 19 June 1990.

By 19 June, *Romania Libera* had identified the perpetrators and named the government as the instigator of the violence. Teofil Pop, Minister of Justice, then countered that journalists were responsible to correct inaccurate reporting about the events, to which *Romania Libera* reporter Radu Georgescu responded that the Minister had no right to impose his standards or control the press.⁴³ Prime Minister Petre Roman continued the government's attack against the press explaining that certain groups (the miners) came to the capital to defend democracy and institutions of the state. Extremists, he explained, provoked the crisis and he denied that the government influenced the miners.⁴⁴

Romania Libera, it appeared, had distanced itself from its Communist past and was reflecting independence gained through a stronger advertising base in the paper that provided it editorial independence from the government. For example, journalist Constantin Vranceanu boldly asked why the police did not intervene to stop the violence and why was the Minister of Internal Affairs, a holdover from the Ceausescu regime, still in place? And who led the miners to the opposition papers and party offices?⁴⁵ He also stated that these actions would hurt Romania's international image. The paper, at this time, was already carrying advertising from international and domestic companies such as Konica, Minolta, Hungarian Airlines, and the Soros Foundation, as it began to privatize and separate from government control. Other groups were also beginning to voice the opposition to the violence.

An important local NGO, the Civic Alliance, issued a request to the Minister of the Interior in 1991, to arrest those guilty of instigating violence against the press and people holding different opinions. The Alliance said that there was a proliferation of verbal and physical violence in the streets aimed at specific journalists and writers as well as against those in detention. "The state of law is not just a calling card for Europe," it stated.⁴⁶ A report by the League for the Defense of Human Rights in Romania and the Association for the Defense of Human Rights also criticized freedom of speech abuses by

⁴³ "Legee Presei Interseaza si pe Ziaristi," *Romania Libera*, 22 June 1990.

⁴⁴ "Securisti in spatele recentelor evenimente din Romania?" *Romania Libera*, 22 June 1990.

⁴⁵ Constantin Vranceanu, "Alte Intrebare," *Romania Libera*, 27 June 1990.

⁴⁶ "Civic Alliance Issues Appeal Against Violence," *Romania Libera*, 26 February 1991, FBIS, Jan-Mar 1991 CD-Rom.

the government committed since January 1990. They accused the government of cutting the amount of newsprint available and encouraging police violence against journalists. The NGO's also mentioned the violence of the Army and miners against the protestors in the 13-15 June 1990 riots and added that the continued existence of Securitate even under a new name threatened democratization.⁴⁷

Following the reporting on the social disruptions of coal miner's rampages of 1990 and 1991, which *Romania Libera* performed adeptly, it handled a major political event, the national election of 1992. The three national elections provided an opportunity to examine written coverage of the same phenomenon over the course of time, spaced at four-year intervals, 1992, 1996, and 2000. Though each election was equally important, the press reported them differently. The first election coverage suffered from lack of in-depth coverage on the candidates and their platforms. The second election received more attention because of popular and media interest in the growing and organized centrist right-wing opposition. The last election coverage of 2000 however, suffered from apathy and disappointment after the corrupt and inept rule by the first democratically elected opposition since 1989, the Democratic Convention of 1996, as well as a real lack of serious opposition and drama to the second Ilescu candidacy.

In 1992, the country held national elections which the press reported superficially, providing only scant coverage of the politicians and their platforms. This event provided the first ever opportunity for politicians to competitively vie for votes and for the journals to discuss multi-party politics, unlike the hasty elections of May 1990, convened so soon after the Revolution. Many privately owned journals had appeared by this time and provided news though the government penalized journalists for unfavorable articles and prohibited strikers from presenting their viewpoints on television. There were 800 journals, and one television and radio station, both state-owned, as of 1992.⁴⁸ The two main candidates were sitting President Ion Ilescu and the main challenger, Emil Constantinescu, a university professor and head of the Democratic Convention coalition of opposition parties. The Socialists Democrats under President Ilescu generally supported social protection, trade protectionism, did not support liberal reforms, and

⁴⁷ "Repeated Attempts to Restrict Rights Deplored," *Romania Libera*, 26 February 1991, FBIS, Jan-Mar 1991 CD-Rom.

⁴⁸ Bogdan Teodorescu, *Marketing Politic si Electoral* (Bucharest: Editura SNSPA, 2001), 50.

maintained traditional structures. The Democratic Convention was more pro-Europe, pro-NATO, favoring rapid privatization and capitalist business policies.

Romania Libera began the earliest coverage of the national elections on 1 August 1992. The paper devoted most of its space to the two front-runners but did interview all six candidates. In a 5 August editorial, it supported Constantinescu for President arguing that the country was in a state of crisis and needed a change. This was the beginning of its alignment with the center-right opposition. The editorial stated that the opposition Democratic Convention would work to better separate executive, legislative and judicial powers, and described the Convention's support for the Orthodox Church and its plans to reorganize and professionalize the military. The Convention, the editorial stated, would also vigorously pursue privatization of the economy, push for NATO integration, and promote civil society.⁴⁹

The paper also reported negatively on President Iliescu's support of subsidies to failing state companies, highlighting the different economic approaches of the two parties while openly supporting privatization efforts and the newspaper's independence from the government.⁵⁰ Its coverage provided thumbnail sketches of the contenders: Gheorghe Funar, of the powerful ultra-nationalist Romania Mare Party (Greater Romania), Mircea Druc, a recidivist proponent of reclaiming lost territory, Caius Traian Dragomir, a constitutionalist who supported greater separation of powers, and Ioan Manzatu, who ran on his honesty and transparency of government platform.⁵¹ The socialists retained power in the elections and *Romania Libera* devoted minimal space to the victory.

Between the 1992 and 1996 elections, the variety of media grew to include four new private television stations, two radio stations, and more local daily journals. The press became more involved in providing political coverage, covering political talk shows, and debates. Some media also began to attack the ruling party for corruption while providing valuable exposure to the growing Democratic Convention Party and its "Contract with Romania" message modeled after the 1994 American Republican Party "Contract with America" program popularized in the United States.

⁴⁹ Doina Doru, "Romania pe care o dorim," *Romania Libera*, 5 August 1992.

⁵⁰ "De ce a participat DL. Iliescu La Sedinta guvernului?" *Romania Libera*, 27 August 1992.

⁵¹ Doina Doru, "Sase Candidati, Sase Propuneri," *Romania Libera*, 2 September 1992.

Romania Libera continued its 1996 campaign coverage as a partisan pro-Democratic Convention (CDR) paper and began to attack President Iliescu's character. On 3 September the paper announced the opening of the CDR campaign in Alba-Iulia, birthplace of modern Romania in 1918. It printed the Constantinescu proclamations around the country including his Contract with Romania program while highlighting Iliescu's supposedly official support for ethnic discrimination. The paper generally offered steady coverage of the election on page three and predicted a defeat for Iliescu and the Social Democrats early on in the campaign. It portrayed the unfolding campaign of Greater Romania candidate Vadim Tudor as an extremist movement while suggesting that Iliescu was a Ceausescu clone formed by the old Soviet system. Partisan editorials proclaimed that President Iliescu was "little and knows nothing," which showed they could attack the man but demonstrated a notable lack of objectivity. The journal of 28 October compared the 1996 elections with those of 1946 and intimated that the Social Democrats, like the Communists, might win through fraud.

The Democratic Convention did win, however. Once in power, the CDR faced a strong opposition Parliament of experienced political foes who frustrated neophyte politicians President Constantinescu and Prime Minister Victor Ciorbea. The government committed a series of blunders which damaged its hopes for re-election in 2000, which *Romania Libera* failed to adequately report. One issue was the government's major public relations problem with a union.

In the first two years, *Romania Libera* gave the Convention favorable coverage. The CDR's dealings with Miron Cozma, the coal miner's union chief, ended badly for the government in what became of series of political mistakes. Arrested in 1997 by the newly elected Convention, the government indicted him on charges of undermining state authority, violating firearms laws, disrupting railway traffic and property destruction. Prosecutors convicted him of disturbing the public order but sentenced him to only one and a half years in prison. In the early 1990's, he had organized thousands of miners who descended on the capital in January 1990, June 1991 and September 1991, rioting, killing student protestors, hospitalizing hundreds, and destroying property.⁵² A strong editorial on this event came from a competitor. Cornel Nistorescu, editor at the

⁵² *ROMPRES*, Bucharest, 10 January 1997, FBIS, Jan-Mar 1997, CD-Rom.

Evenimentul Zilei, conjectured that the administration did not want to uncover the whole truth because it feared revealing information against other high-ranking officials. One and a half years prison time, in Nistorescu's opinion, signaled the administration's inability to successfully close out a corruption case and proved that Romania did not yet have the rule of law.⁵³

The Miron Cozma scandal, the Assos Cigarettes Customs Fraud, along with a powerful and effective Social Democratic Party opposition, made the four-year reign of the Democratic Convention a bitter and frustrating experience for them and their supporters from the beginning. The press uncovered the Democratic Convention's problems and held the leadership accountable for its failure to get the country into NATO, Prime Minister Victor Ciorbea's inability to work with a hostile Parliament and highlighted the slow pace of economic privatization. The media, by uncovering "Assos Cigarettes II" revealed a major corruption scandal that reached into the various government agencies of the administration, reporting a major contraband shipment delivered at the military airport. Emil Constantinescu continued to lose popularity over this and the other issues mentioned so that by 2000 he, his party, and the coalition had virtually disappeared. The press was reporting the downside of a Presidency that many of the papers initially supported. The print media was maturing, taking on the ultimate symbol of authority, the government, and even the Presidency, and demonstrating a sense of journalistic integrity. Several major dailies carried the contraband story for nearly a month of steady coverage.

The press, including the partisan *Romania Libera*, had become more professional over time and boldly investigated the cigarette scandal. In 1998, the Assos Cigarette Contraband Scandal rocked the administration because of the depth of corruption it revealed and the inept handling of the situation by a President who squandered the last of his political capital in this debacle. Earlier in the decade, in 1993, another contraband cigarette case made the news because it involved hundreds of thousands of dollars of contraband cigarettes. The government implicated the Army because it stored the

⁵³ Cornel Nistorescu, "Sweet Angel Miron Cozma," *Evenimentul Zilei*, Bucharest, 15 July 1998, FBIS, Jul-Sep 1998 CD-Rom.

material in its warehouses, which Customs agents seized.⁵⁴ The 1993 story received some coverage but nothing like the second scandal because of the greater amount of contraband, multi-government agency involvement, and a more receptive media.

Romania Libera provided extensive coverage, this time, utilizing photographs of the accused, locations of arrests, shipping manifests, airport documents, and credible theories. This journal began cautiously by asking the important questions. The reporter, who used only his initials (PP), asked who paid for the goods, what hotel did the aircrew use, and who was waiting for the contraband?⁵⁵ The paper also recorded the President commenting that the scandal was actually a well-planned sting by anti-corruption units, which made him appear foolish and less than credible. The paper also implicated several Arab businessmen, Jamal al-Atm and Hitam Silim, both of whom fled the country, along with General Gheorghe Florica.

Its journalists ventured that Vitali Usturoi and Costel Ciuca were the “brains” behind the scandal but did so without offering hard evidence.⁵⁶ The newspaper began to speculate about international mafia ties between Colonel Trutulescu, special operations reconnaissance, and Vitaliy Usturoi, of the Soviet special operations reconnaissance.⁵⁷ The reporter, Vladimir Alexi, wrote that the two had a history of cooperation that extended back to the revolutionary days in Timisoara and Bucharest in December 1989. Air Sofia was also involved in secret operations, he continued. The United States had warned Air Sofia for running Scud missiles from North Korea to Iran in 1994, and detained an aircraft in the Cape Verde Islands in 1995 for a cargo of Stiel missiles headed to Ecuador. Alexi summarized the event saying that the Otopeni bust was a small part of larger smuggling activities. After this corruption scandal, the next major news event was the national elections in which the Right failed to show up and the newspaper covered without its previous enthusiasm of the 1996 elections.

The heavily pro-Democratic Convention *Romania Libera* did not cover the 2000 elections with the same vigor as the 1996 elections possibly because of the weak standing of the CDR, which virtually vanished after President Constantinescu’s government

⁵⁴ Mihai Valentin Neagu, “Un comunicat al partidului de guvernament,” *Evenimentul Zilei*, 12 May 1993.

⁵⁵ “Au inceput arestarile,” *Romania Libera*, 25 April 1998.

⁵⁶ Vladimir Alexi, “Vitali Usturoi-creierul aferii de la Otopeni,” *Romania Libera*, 14 May 1998.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

imploded. There was also a general public apathy over the failed experiment of the CDR. Nevertheless, the journal continued to attack Iliescu, who ran again for President, devoting more of its coverage towards the campaign of his opponent Mugur Isarescu, associated with Emil Constantinescu, but whose candidacy never mounted a serious challenge to the former Social Democrat President. Ion Iliescu won with 70 per cent of the vote in the second round against Cornel Vadim Tudor, of the Greater Romania Party. After the elections, the paper quoted Ana Blandiana, director of the Civic Alliance NGO and early founder of the Democratic Convention Party, as saying that the election signified the failure of the Right pointing to the internecine struggle within the Convention. She concluded that the Social Democrats were in a serious situation, fighting with extremists who, if they won, threatened the country's future integration with Europe.⁵⁸ After this electoral victory, Iliescu benefited politically from a major international event, NATO expansion, which ironically, his opponent Emil Constantinescu had championed in 1996.

Foreign affairs gained momentum on the country's agenda with the scheduled announcement of another NATO expansion eastward, in 2002. NATO spokesmen announced the admission of Romania, along with other countries, from Prague on 21 November 2002, which received almost universally favorable coverage by the press. The acceptance of Romania into the NATO military structure represented a major coup for President Ion Iliescu's government. Romanians who felt betrayed in 1945 when the West allowed the Soviets to take control, now felt vindicated and secure over the country's entry into the European-Atlantic institution which many hoped would lead to a forthcoming invitation into the European Union.

The story had interesting implications for the newsmakers. Did Romanians, a former Warsaw Pact nation, want to go into the NATO camp, the military opposition over the past four decades? What social costs would entry entail? Was anyone worried over Russian concerns over a neighbor joining NATO? As to the last question, the history of bad relations with the Russians over disputed territory, followed by Soviet occupation and the legacy of Communism, was too heavy to allow any thoughts other

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than a feeling of deliverance at the prospect of unity with the West. Russian objections failed to resonate within the Romanian community to any noticeable extent.

The dailies almost unanimously, with one exception, *Ziua*, praised the move into NATO and reported issues on the future look of the Romanian military. Noticeably lacking was the debate, as seen in the mid-1990's in the East Central European countries of Hungary and the Czech Republic, over the social costs of diverting a NATO mandated 2-3 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) to military-related expenditures for upgrades in a country that has the second lowest per capita income in Europe surpassing only Albania.

Showing its partisan political stripe, *Romania Libera* interviewed opposition politician Victor Ciorbea, head of the Peasant Party, who was Prime Minister when Romania was passed for admission over in 1997. Ciorbea affirmed that his Party and the country supported this move toward integration with the West.⁵⁹ The journal avoided contact with government leaders in its coverage. The paper then quoted American President George W. Bush, in another article, who left Bucharest for St Petersburg to explain to his "friend" Russian President Vladimir Putin that NATO extension was in everyone's interest in the war against terrorism.⁶⁰ This paper's writers covered the story with the certainty that new membership was also in Romania's self-interest. Because the Communist bloc no longer existed, one journalist pointed out that the alliance was unique, providing a vehicle for military and security cooperation. Additionally, as a Western institution, it would force Romania to begin political reforms which would translate towards greater democracy, transparency, and encourage anti-corruption measures, it noted hopefully.⁶¹

In its last article of 2002, a *Romania Libera* editorial addressed what it saw as the true reasons for the country's inclusion and some of the problems that still remained for Romania. The article pointed out two reasons for NATO's invitation: the events of 11 September 2001 and their international implications, and the country's geo-strategic position in southeast Europe on the Black Sea. Helping its case, the government also

⁵⁹ "Victor Ciorbea apreciaza sinceritatea si francheta discursului lui Bush," *Romania Libera*, 25 November 2002.

⁶⁰ "Bush...il consoleaza pe Putin," *Romania Libera*, 23 November 2002.

⁶¹ Gabriel Anghel, "Expertii, cu ochii pe noii membri NATO," *Romania Libera*, 30 November 2002.

endeared itself to the American government by voluntarily providing several hundred military police to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan before it was even in the alliance. NATO authorities overlooked problems, the journal speculated, that normally would have been “showstoppers” in admitting Romania, such as a lack of government transparency, the continued presence of Securitate officers in power, and endemic official corruption. By joining NATO, Romania, had finally left the shade of communism and returned to the Euro-Atlantic family.⁶² The editorial was sound in its conclusions and displayed a realistic appraisal of the country’s role in southeast Europe.

Domestic affairs led coverage in 2003. The clamor for access to individual files in the Securitate archives and demand for the release of thousands of Securitate officer’s names, dominated the press. In 1999 Parliament enacted Law 187 to allow access to personal archives, identify former officers of the Interior Ministry’s Securitate, and align Romania with European standards of access to information. Then in 2001, Parliament enacted Law 544 “Regarding the Free Access of Information in the Public Interest,” on 12 October 2001. Law 544 stated that the free access of the individual to information represented a fundamental principle. Later the next year, to protect classified information, the government enacted Law 182 on 12 April 2002 which ensured that classified information against espionage, sabotage, and unauthorized access would remain classified. The two laws created a natural tension between access to information and the protection of state secrets.

To provide access to personal records established prior to the Revolution, the government opened an office in Piata Victoria, Bucharest, for the access to Securitate Archives, where anyone can go, request their file if they have one, and read it four to eight weeks later, depending on how long it takes to assemble it from the various archives and agencies throughout the city. The government can also sanitize the file if it contains “sensitive information,” which it defines as containing state secrets of a military or strategic value. It was free to request this service and the archives offered large tables in well-lit rooms in a comfortable, modern setting, much nicer than the physically neglected, intimidating, historical archives with their windows bearing years of cobwebs

⁶² “Anul in care NATO si-a deschis potile pentru Romania,” *Romania Libera*, 31 December 2002.

and filth, where researchers normally work. Even the age of the staff at the Securitate Archives, many in their early thirties, suggested a generational difference with the workers at National Library, for example, who are from an older generation.

Romania Libera reported the issue as a conflict between government officials who were having a turf war over access to Securitate files and how it affected Romanian military officers who needed security clearances in line with NATO standards. Without the clearances, officers weren't qualified for duty and vulnerable to separation from duty. The Prime Minister, the paper reported, while saying that he favored a transparent process of weeding out former Securitate members from the new, NATO-aligned defenses, was just trying to build his political image from the issue.⁶³ De-classifying the Securitate officers, it continued, should become part of the public debate, and it was about time, after fourteen years, that these political police have their names published so that the country could move on. External pressure from NATO caused these tensions and it was time to act and deal with the situation. The irony of the situation was that for years, the Social Democrats (PSD) blocked release of these names and allowed these individuals access into high-level government jobs. Only in 2004, an election year, did Prime Minister Adrian Nastase call for an accounting. The PSD, it concluded, still allowed the Intelligence Service to block release of the names, while PSD members on the CNSAS oversight committee who was supposed to facilitate access to this information, were frequent no-shows to its meetings, blocking decision-making. *Romania Libera*, while highly partisan, had shown itself a newsworthy paper, moving towards the standards of West European journalism in presenting a variety of news stories, most of them well-researched and offering a valuable alternative to government supplied news releases.

Other papers were around at the Revolution, however, and *Libertatea*, (Liberty) exemplified a spirited but immature young journal. It began coverage of the Revolution on 22 December with the headline "Traiasca Libertatea!" or "Long Live Liberty!" *Libertatea*, a national newspaper, started in 1989, as a company of Ringier Romania, a Swiss-based group. Today, it is a tabloid of 24 pages, with an estimated readership of

⁶³ Ion Traian Stefan, "Cine desconspira si cine conspira Securitatea in Romania," *Romania Libera*, 17 September 2003, p. 3.

308,000 daily readers, according to the Pro Institute. According to Mihai Coman, *Libertatea* took over the tabloid recipe of the German newspaper “*Der Bild*” and followed the sensational, the personal, sport, scandal and crime. The politics and social columns of the newspaper provide lurid reporting and there is also a weekly “agony” column and a daily page of news based on human interest.

Its coverage of the Revolution basically echoed the National Salvation Front’s dictates. Though the paper declared that 22 December represented “the first hour of freedom,” it provided almost no coverage on terrorism, causes of the revolution, or the execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu. Instead, the paper gave ample space to the only organized alternative leadership, the National Salvation Front or FSN. In this sense, the new paper acted almost as FSN’s mouthpiece calling the FSN’s leaders “popular Romanian heroes.” It published a *Declaratie* or Declaration, from the FSN to the terrorists requesting that they cease fire, not carry arms, and stipulated that professionals, above all, should continue working, as if city services could continue running without the workers.⁶⁴

Libertatea appeared naively non-plussed over the immediate appearance of the National Salvation Front. On 25 December, the very day of the President’s execution, the paper, without asking how this overnight government organized so quickly, published FSN’s new leadership “Decret” (Decree) naming Ion Iliescu as President, Dumitru Mazilu as Vice President, Petre Roman as Prime Minister, and Nicolae Militaru as Minister of Defense. The leader Nicolae Ceausescu was still alive, no other parties had even appeared and curiously the FSN was the only political group to emerge. The FSN’s organized response to events suggested that either this was a very astute group of politicians who seized the moment, or more likely, that they had been planning a coup, awaiting the right time. The journal made no mention of the FSN’s rapid birth but did publish an honest image, a photo in the 27 December edition that showed graffiti with the following message: “De craciun, ne-am luat ratia de libertate.” (“On Christmas we took our piece of liberty.”)

⁶⁴ “Declaratie,” *Libertatea*, 25 December 1989.

Libertatea published more FSN proposed laws on 29 December including a new name for the country, simply “Romania,” this time, without the “Socialist Republic.” The paper announced the formation of an FSN council that would issue decrees, name people to write a new constitution, control the Army, and destroy all institutions of the former regime. On 30 December appeared one of the few references to the violence. Octavian Andronic reported someone fired a “terrorist rocket” at the Securitate Archives but that the device missed its mark. Photos of the dubious rocket, quite suspect to even an untrained observer, show a small missile, intact, that appears to have been laid in an open space on undisturbed ground with no evidence of the projectile slamming into the earth or any skid marks near its resting place. On 4 January Calin Anastasu wrote that the Army tried to stop the terrorists and was loyal to the people. The FSN, he continued, was the first authentic political power in Romania after the President’s death, it offered Romania new hope, and exhorted people to support it. Contrary to *Libertatea*’s enthusiastic reportage, the well-organized emergence of the FSN, led by Ion Iliescu, suggests that arrival of the FSN wasn’t a miracle but rather an intra-party coup, planned well before the arrest and execution of the country’s leading couple with a replacement regime ready to go. Its coverage of the revolution ended on 8 January 1990.

Another major daily that existed in 1989 was *Adevarul*, (Truth) and is owned today by Adevarul, S.A. It is now a centrist, mildly pro-government paper. No figures were available for its daily readership estimates but it is a major daily and its motto is “Nobody is Above the Law,” from the Constitution. The originally pro-government, leftist paper provided pro-FSN coverage from the beginning, issuing sympathetic press releases. It worked closely with Iliescu to get the FSN’s message out to the people and during this period was its party paper. The journal called the FSN’s rise a “Broad Collaboration of Creative Forces in the Country” on its front page, 25 December while naming the terrorists “armed fanatics” without suggesting who they might be. Concerning the execution of the first couple, it said tersely: “The sentence was final and was executed.”⁶⁵ It printed no photos and the leader, formerly referred to as “Beloved Ruler” by this paper and others, but who was now a “lizard.” Iliescu, in the paper’s 27 December release, stated that the Revolution was a spontaneous revolt by the people and

⁶⁵ *Adevarul*, 26 December 1989.

that the FSN came out of this movement. Terrorists, the writer added, were still trying to intimidate the people. On 28 December the paper called for unity and economic stability. The journal mirrored Iliescu's proclamations that the Revolution was "an emancipation of a popular, spontaneous uprising."⁶⁶ An opinion poll from the 30 December edition revealed that 51% thought the economy was the most important problem, 25% were concerned about the standard of living, and 21% believed political reorganization was the most pressing problem.

The paper printed an interview the following day with future Prime Minister Petre Roman, in which he declared the need for clean and competent people in government, political pluralism, and supported the justice of the dictator's execution. *Adevarul* disclosed aspects of the Ceausescu's lifestyle unveiling his secret villas, special train, gold bathrooms, and gold dog dishes in the 4 January edition in a sensational article. The 5 January edition included a piece by Iosif Pop who continued the paper's role as disseminator of the FSN's program discussing the new regime's plans to keep agriculture under state control, avoiding radical changes in the villages, returning expropriated lands to farmers and allowing some free market measures.⁶⁷ *Adevarul* ended its coverage of the Revolution with editorial statements on the need to limit restructuring of the economy which would lead to chaos. The government, it argued, should maintain current structures while simultaneously developing new ones, in a marvel of double-speak.⁶⁸

Adevarul, was still a government-controlled paper in 1990 and coverage of the coal miner's rampage in June of 1990 reflected this bias quite clearly. In the events leading up to 13 June, *Adevarul* covered the students' protest by blaming them for violent skirmishes, portraying them as "vandals" who attacked police and emphasizing the chaos in the city that the mayor was unable to control.⁶⁹ The paper made no mention of why the students protested. The protestors were upset that the National Salvation Front, which had promised not to run in the national elections, was aggressively seeking office. Also, the opposition had requested more time to prepare so it could compete fairly, but the Provisional government, which won the elections, denied them more time.

⁶⁶ *Adevarul*, 28 December 1989.

⁶⁷ Iosif Pop, *Adevarul*, 5 January 1990.

⁶⁸ *Adevarul*, 6 January 1990.

⁶⁹ Corina Dragotescu, "Violenta la rang de lege," *Adevarul*, 6 June 1990.

In subsequent days, the paper continued to emphasize that it was students who were initiating aggression against the authorities. It mentioned their hunger strikes in Piata Victoria and described illegal hit and run tactics by the “trouble-makers” against the police. In one account the paper said the protestors believed they were fighting for democracy but were really directed by a diabolical brain. The protestors, it continued, were sick, mentally affected, and unknown sources had given them money and false identity papers, according to these accounts.⁷⁰

The first day of the miner’s attack, 14 June, this paper resorted to fiction and communist-speak without covering the unfolding atrocities and violence. One story suggested that the demonstrators hated the Romanian people and had diabolical intentions. Apparently, opposition to the Provisional Government had satanic overtones for the reporter, Corina Dragotescu. The protestors, she wrote, had violent tendencies, the opposition parties behaved like villains, and many students had links with the Legionnaires who were Fascists from the 1930’s. The miners, coming from the Jiu Valley, would “defend” the country against the protestor-terrorists.⁷¹ This was the only public source that knew that miners were coming to Bucharest, which suggested a close relationship with a government that had ordered the miners’ deployment to put down the protest.

After the attacks began, *Adevarul* took the offensive using logic reminiscent of the terror in Stalin’s Soviet Union where the state vilified the victim for threatening the established order. The accusations continued. The miners had voluntarily come to the capital, they wrote, to counteract the disorder created by the protestors who wanted to overthrow the government. The police behaved too gently against the anti-social elements consisting of “criminals and prostitutes.”

Invoking the original Communist Provisional Government’s arguments of 1947 when the Communists came to power, the paper criticized all opposition parties including the Hungarian Democratic Union, the National Liberal Party, and the National Peasants Party, for instigating violence.⁷² Nobody invited the miners, it said, who came on their own and outraged, broke windows and equipment at opposition headquarters where these

⁷⁰ Corina Dragotescu, “Adevar sau Fictiune,” *Adevarul*, 13 June 1990.

⁷¹ Darie Novaceanu, “Evenimentele din Piata Universitatii si Capitala,” *Adevarul*, 14 June 1990.

⁷² “Ieri in Capitala,” *Adevarul*, 15 June 1990.

political parties were “counterfeiting money and selling drugs.”⁷³ The people should love the miners and the press should portray them in a positive light because they were working people in solidarity with the government, it said. In a direct attack against its competitors, *Adevarul* admonished *Romania Libera*, *22*, and *Barricade*, to present the truth and stop inciting violence with its disinformation. We appeal, its editors wrote, to these papers to edit their stories carefully as responsible journals.⁷⁴ The paper’s last word was predictable. It ended its discussion commenting that the violence of 14 June was a natural response to attacks on the workers who could not be expected to respond peacefully.

Familiar with the road to Bucharest, the miners returned to the capital in September 1991, but they came this time to protest against the government. The demonstrators turned violent again voicing concern over lack of meat in the state-run shops, low wages and high prices. Wages at this time equaled U.S \$53 per month.⁷⁵ The miner’s protests forced the resignation of Prime Minister Petre Roman that month. Roman’s resignation also indicated the rising influence of conservatives in the NSF who opposed his attempts at economic reforms. At the same time, a Romanian court freed the last members of Ceausescu’s politburo who were still in prison, citing lack of evidence to convict those responsible for administering the dictator’s policies.⁷⁶

A year’s time and change in ownership dramatically changed *Adevarul*’s coverage, highlighting the difference in management goals between the old ex-Communist oriented leadership, and the new, more professional and less ideological management. By 1991, the paper was under new ownership. Formerly, the paper, founded in 1888, was known as *Scinteia*, (Spark) which was the government’s mouthpiece. On 23 December it changed its name for one day to *Scinteia Poporului*, then to *Adevarul* 24 December. The staff conducted a *putsch* in 1991 to change leadership, converted the charter to employee ownership, and it became financially and politically independent. The paper, according to Deputy Editor-in-Chief Adrian Ursu, attempted to find the right balance between promoting sales and journalistic integrity.

⁷³ “Le Gindese Minerii,” *Adevarul*, 15 June 1990.

⁷⁴ “Apel al Readactiei Ziarului Adevarul,” *Adevarul*, 17 June 1990.

⁷⁵ Celestine Bohlen, “In Romania, Miners Face Uncertainty,” *NY Times*, 6 October 1991 available from Lexis-Nexis, General News, Internet.

The collective leadership of editors, he believed, minimized the chance of errors and promoted smoother management.⁷⁷

Adevarul reflected this changing from a pro-government source to a more balanced journal beginning with its reporting on the next coal miner's "invasion" in Bucharest, in September 1991. In this episode, unlike the June 1990 attacks against demonstrators, poor working conditions and low salaries in the remote, coal-mining country of the depressed Jiu Valley, motivated the miner's to address their situation directly with a visit to the capital. This time, the government opposed the visit and shot miners, killing three and wounding twenty-five who attempted to enter public buildings. *Adevarul* presented the miner's point of view suggesting that the government had not fulfilled its promises and that it or some individuals manipulated the workers. The paper directly blamed Prime Minister Petre Roman for instigating the protest which turned violent and for failing to create a dialogue with them.⁷⁸ The coal miners, directed by the government to use force to repress dissent in 1990, felt empowered afterwards and entered the capital of their own volition in 1991. The second visit received more balanced press coverage from this paper, the only major daily that had covered up government brutality in its 1990 reporting, because of the change in management which ended state control and brought more professional standards to the paper.

Adevarul continued its professionalization with balanced reporting of the 1992 elections. Starting its coverage on 5 August, the paper ran an article on National Salvation Front candidate Dragomir who advocated change without vendettas and an improved health care system. It covered President Iliescu, who spoke about the need to provide legal and economic protection of the individual, national unity, and a regeneration of the spirit.⁷⁹ The journal wrote brief fifty word biographies of the candidates as well as their zodiac prognostications which often accompany Romanian news reports.

The paper first mentioned the Democratic Convention Party on 8 September and discussed the Alliance's concern over President Iliescu along with the dangers of ultra-

⁷⁶ Chris Stephen, *The Guardian* (London), 24 December 1991, Lexis-Nexis, General News, Internet.

⁷⁷ Adrian Ursu, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 5 June 2002.

⁷⁸ Sergiu Andon, "Misterul Noii Manipularii," *Adevarul*, 1 October 1991.

⁷⁹ "Cred in Schimbare in Bine a Romania," *Adevarul*, 10 August 1992.

nationalist and anti-Hungarian candidate Gheorghe Funar. Beginning 11 September, it published interviews with all candidates. On that day, Traian Dragomir spoke about the benefits of capitalism and on 12 September Mircea Druc discussed the importance of union with Moldavia. In the political news section, the other candidates got space and then the paper provided a public opinion poll on 22 September. Michael Jackson's visit upstaged election day coverage. The government announced the results of the second round run-off 5 October, with Ion Iliescu's party defeating the runner-up Emil Constantinescu and his Democratic Convention Party.

By 1996, *Adevarul's* political coverage was more organized even offering minority reporting. Increasingly sensitive to political issues, the paper reported on Gyorgy Frunda's Democratic Hungarian Union for a possible Presidential candidacy on 8 April in Tirgu-Mures, months before the other dailies began political coverage. Political reporting on a national minority was groundbreaking because under the Communists, beginning in the early 1970's, the government promoted a homogeneous society that recognized socialist man while it tried to eliminate ethnic-national identification such as gypsies, Hungarians, Serbian, etc. There was also antagonism against the Magyar minority of Transylvania over old territorial issues, bilingual education and language issues. By including coverage of the Hungarian Union, the paper added a powerful and important minority in the political discussion.

The paper also benefited from the help of outside professionals from Hungary, representing the Soros Foundation. *Adevarul* presented better election coverage compared to its 1992 efforts, employing opinion polls provided by the Soros Foundation for an Open Society, which has promoted democracy in Eastern European countries through projects such as this. George Soros, a billionaire currency speculator, poured money into former communist countries after 1989 to help them achieve democracy and capitalism. The journal used the Foundation's help to provide opinion poll data on 12 April showing an early Iliescu lead over Constantinescu of 29% to 15% popularity. However, on 14 June, the Democratic Party allied with the Democratic Convention to form a coalition that eventually won and unseated the government in the country's historic, first-ever freely elected change of power.

The journal covered the CDR's message which Constantinescu used effectively to discuss the need to enter NATO, join the European Union, promote privatization, and fight poverty. On 22 August *Adevarul* attacked Iliescu in a powerful editorial asking why Iliescu should have another chance if he hadn't performed in the last six years.⁸⁰ By October, the paper had published biographies of all the candidates and lengthy interviews. The government held the elections in mid-November and Constantinescu won the run-off with 54 per cent to Iliescu's 46 percent, held on 19 November and announced the same day, this time, unlike the 1992 delay.

The journal's reporting on the cigarette corruption scandal, like its solid effort in the 1996 elections, demonstrated a cautious approach and balance. As mentioned earlier, the Democratic Convention Party (CDR) got itself into serious political trouble with the Assos Cigarette scandal at Otopeni airport. While *Adevarul* offered minimal coverage on this topic, its reporting was factual, to the point, and not sensational as with some of the other papers. The journal asked sensible questions such as why a civilian aircraft was on the military side of the airport and why were the soldiers who unloaded the plane, wearing masks?⁸¹ The paper reinforced the obvious fact that the incident was a contraband issue and implicated Colonel Trutulescu of the President's Secret Service. The paper provided photos of the warehouses where the smugglers stored the goods as well as important documents which included bills of lading documents, which provided the origin, content, and destination of goods, along with names of recipients during the process.

In a carryover from its traditional, strong attachment to the government, the paper continued to present the President in a positive light, even while he was under attack in much of the press. This newspaper carried President Constantinescu's comments that the guilty would be punished and also wrote about Trutulescu's strong relationship to the Secret Service. Breaking ranks with most other journals, it portrayed the President as proactive, stating that he dismissed two general officers. Finally it noted that the air traffic control tapes, always kept as part of the record, were erased from that night. *Adevarul's* careful coverage represented responsible journalism. It also revealed a

⁸⁰ Adrian Ursu, "Va face Ion Iliescu in 4 ani ce ne-a facut in 6?" *Adevarul*, 22 August 1996.

⁸¹ Nicolae Militaru, "Contrabanda cu tigari pe Aeroportal Militar Otopeni?" *Adevarul*, 23 April 1998.

hesitancy about asking the deeper questions of involvement at the higher levels since the contraband entered the country bypassing military and civilian authorities at the country's major airport which, as a joint civil-military installation, was always heavily surveyed and monitored by police, military police, and customs agents.

The major media story in the 2000 elections was the return of Ion Iliescu and the meteoric rise of nationalist politician Cornel Vadim Tudor of the Greater Romania Party. Early polls gave Tudor's party little chance and the press, which disliked and ridiculed his extremist policies, ignored him. *Adevarul's* election 2000 coverage also neglected Vadim Tudor's candidacy until well into the campaign. A 7 September poll gave leftist Iliescu 42%, centrists Isarescu 23% and Stolojan 14%, and rightist Vadim Tudor only 7%, a relatively poor showing which probably explains the early lack of interest in his candidacy.

The journal conducted lengthy interviews with the candidates, except for Tudor, in the months leading up to the elections including a four page interview with Gyorgy Frunda, the Transylvania candidate running on the Magyar ticket on 7 October, and a seven page interview with Iliescu on 12 October. On 28 October, *Adevarul* invited all the candidates except Tudor to the paper for interviews. The paper ran a critical article on him on 16 November accusing him and his friends of lawlessness, specifically pointing to one crony involved in illegal financial dealings, and another who fixed football games. Portrayed by his followers as a Messiah, the article indicated that he would try to jail his opponents and impose a dictatorship if elected.

It is somewhat understandable that *Adevarul* (and the other major papers) ignored him and his politics because his rightist extremism was distasteful, but as a political force with strong backing, the papers had a journalistic obligation to carry his message. The journals did eventually report on his campaign when the polls revealed his rise in strength and after he made the two-person cutoff in the second phase of the election.

The initial elections of 27 November allowed the two front-runners, with Iliescu garnering 41 per cent, and Vadim Tudor second with 25 per cent, to meet each other in the December runoff. The 11 December vote gave Iliescu with a 70 to 30 percent victory and sighs of relief by many in Romania that "we remained in Europe." *Adevarul* got good marks for its reporting on the 2000 elections from the European Institute for

Media.⁸² The European Institute monitored election coverage by *Adevarul*, *Evenimentul Zilei*, *Ziua*, and *Jurnalul National*, 23-29 October and 11-24 November and noted that all provided sufficient coverage of the elections. *Adevarul* allotted thirty negative articles to the Social Democrats and seventeen to the Democratic Convention party. *Evenimentul Zilei* printed forty-seven to the Social Democrats and twenty-seven to the Greater Romania party, both in a negative light. *Ziua* shifted its invective from anti-Social Democrat to anti-Greater Romania and *Jurnalul National* was the only paper not to negatively depict the Social Democrats or Greater Romania candidate C.V. Tudor.

Tudor's rise shocked many but *Adevarul* had an interesting analysis of his popularity. In one article, Cristian Popescu questioned the doom scenario of Octavian Paler, a commentator, who spoke of Romanians committing "mass suicide" by voting for Tudor. Popescu disagreed, reminding readers that the country was a democracy but was undergoing hard times economically and spiritually. He made a biological analogy stating that if the body was malignant, the democracy would beget a sickness, that would plague the body politic. Many of Tudor's voters were young, part of the transition, and carried anti-Semitic, racist, and chauvinistic ideas. Like Emil Constantinescu in 1996, Vadim Tudor also appeared as a Messiah who could deliver miracles. Events later proved that the Romanian people did not strongly support Vadim Tudor against Iliescu, giving him only 30 per cent of the vote.

Almost two years later, NATO invited Romania to join in its 2002 expansion round which included several other Eastern European countries. Romania was now closer to the West, at least in its defense and security arrangements and the *Adevarul* editorials, like those of most papers, supported the new alliance. Writing on the Securitate archives issue, it mentioned that Senator Predescu threatened to use force to open the archives while members of the National Council on Security Archives, (CNSAS) complained that the head of the Council, Mr. Onisoru, a Social Democrat, (Iliescu's party) blocked their efforts.⁸³ The Council meanwhile compiled a list of 5,000 Securitate officers for possible release to NATO and the public. The paper also presented an article that the Supreme Council of Defense would analyze the Secret Services about

⁸² "European Institute Issues Report of Romanian Media Coverage of Election Campaign," *Adevarul*, 28 November 2000, FBIS, Oct-Nov 2000 CD-Rom.

⁸³ "Senatorul Predescu vica deblocheze cu parul activitatea," *Adevarul*, 9 January 2003.

decommissioning political police from the ranks of the military. In a mild criticism of the Prime Minister, it suggested that he was “evasive” about publishing the names of ex-officers.⁸⁴

Another major paper, published in Bucharest like the others, is *Evenimentul Zilei* (Event of the Day) which first appeared in 1992 and rose fast as a major paper. Readers consider it a rightist, pro-American, pro-NATO and free enterprise advocate. In 1998, the German media group “Grun+Jahr” A.G., part of the multinational trust Bertelsmann, bought 50 % of the Romanian company and became the main shareholder of the newspaper. The paper reflected the German capitalists’ expertise in marketing and sales, producing an opinionated paper, bold in imagination and flashy in appearance. In 2003, Bertelsmann sold its share to the Swiss company Ringier. Its motto is “Yes, of course!” or in Romanian “Sigur ca da!” It is in an intermediate format between broadsheet and tabloid; 16 pages (4 full-colored pages) with pull-out supplements: EZ Sport, EZ Weekend & TV. The paper became very popular mixing a blend of scandal type reporting along with serious stories and insightful editorials by owner-editor Cornel Nistorescu. Nistorescu never shied away from taking on the government, regardless of party, and developed a reputation for his paper as an independent journal.

In its beginning in 1992, the journal provided a new format geared for commercial success combining superficial reporting with scandals, titillating photos of woman and disasters, to promote sales.⁸⁵ It offered limited and negative election coverage of Iliescu, lecturing him to resist corrupt practices which would be hard, according to the paper, given his background and access to power. The paper did not present the platforms of any of the candidates and reporting was limited to editorial comments though it did provide a transcript of the candidate’s television interviews. On the day of the run-off between the two leaders, Iliescu and Constantinescu, Michael Jackson’s concert tour got better coverage.

Evenimentul Zilei matured greatly after its 1992 political reporting and provided in-depth and more balanced election coverage in 1996. It began its reportage on 2 September with the announcement of the Gyorgy Frunda campaign, along with

⁸⁴ “Fostii securitsti, in discutia CSAT,” *Adevarul*, 18 September 2003, p. 2.

⁸⁵ Cornel Nistorescu, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 6 June 2002.

biographies of other top candidates and their issues. After 6 September, the paper covered the candidates on a daily basis presenting their ideas along with interviews. The Petre Roman platform, for example, emphasized an anti-corruption program while ethnic Hungarian Gyorgy Frunda spoke about the need for federalism and possible autonomy in Transylvania for Hungarians. On 10 September, the paper ran a story on the history of fraud, deception, and political patronage by the directors of TVR, the government television station controlled by Iliescu and his PDSR party.⁸⁶ This paper was not afraid to take on the government.

Reporting on rural issues in the campaign, the paper and the candidates broke ground in addressing the neglected rural sector. In the 1996 election, the candidates fought for the rural vote and *Evenimentul Zilei* reported the debates on farm prices, tolls, the cultivation of diverse crops, and the challenge of keeping rural workers on the farm.⁸⁷ It reported the candidates' discussions on the quality of schools and subsidies for housing in the countryside, all grave problems in Romania's forgotten rural landscape. *Evenimentul Zilei* distinguished itself by reporting on the countryside in politics, which the Communists had undermined for forty-five years in their quest to create an industrial nation. The hard work of challenger Emil Constantinescu and his fresh appeal paid off with the challenger polling second place in the first round and then defeating the Social Democrats in the second round that always comprises the top two parties in Romanian national elections.

By 1998, Cornel Nistorescu was well-established and making his mark on the news even going after the Liberal Party with which he was ideologically aligned as a pro-Western intellectual. He was one of the more flamboyant and irrepressible editors in the capital and ready to confront anyone in his frequently strident editorials. The Assos Cigarettes scandal gave Nistorescu an opportunity to attack corruption and he took advantage of it. The paper provided provocative analysis, rhetorically asking if the President knew about the contraband ring. Editorials and stories also suggested ex-Securitate officer involvement through connections at the President's Cotroceni Palace,

⁸⁶ "Marea fraudă electorală prin TVR," *Evenimentul Zilei*, 10 September 1996.

⁸⁷ "Petre Roman si-a prezentat ieri, la Bistrita, Programul pentru agricultura," *Evenimentul Zilei*, 18 September 1996.

from the beginning of its coverage on 25 April.⁸⁸ The paper dismissed the allegations against officers Trutulescu and Suciu, who were mere scapegoats, offering instead that the country's leadership allowed the corruption. The paper later reported that Transport Minister Traian Basescu decided to ban Air Sofia flights from Romanian airports.

The reporting and editorializing on Assos Cigarettes was bold and had an advocate's edge to it. Whereas other journals printed stories based on the available facts, *Evenimentul Zilei* speculated on possible collusion and involvement at the highest levels. This approach separated it from the pack, increased sales, and stimulated reader interest. The paper intimated that the cigarettes were headed to duty-free shops with the help of influential persons but did not follow-up with its allegations as to who was involved, why, and towards what end. Its reporters wrote that several suspects escaped and authorities gradually realized that the list of those captured included the police, customs, airport personnel, and state services. It reported that people did not believe the President's story that the government had planned the operation.

The President's early pledges to end corruption seemed hollow after this debacle.⁸⁹ He later made an incomprehensible statement at the United States Chamber of Commerce in Bucharest in front of President Bill Clinton that "there is no longer corruption in Romania." This observation stunned observers who knew that Western governments also have corruption on a much lesser scale, and do not make such statements lightly. The public speech made President Constantinescu appear ridiculous because Romania has had a chronic corruption problem.⁹⁰ A survey conducted by a non-governmental organization, Transparency International, which collects data for business people, rated Romania as the seventeenth most corrupt country of ninety-nine countries surveyed, in 1999.⁹¹

Evenimentul Zilei devoted less space to the 2000 elections while giving more prominent space to models and car accident victims for a staple of sex and gore. The elections were dull in terms of news making and sales for the journal, with the veteran Iliescu competing against the extremist Tudor who didn't have the votes to win. Still, the

⁸⁸ Ilie Stoian, "Contrabanda la nivel inalt," *Evenimentul Zilei*, 25 April 1998.

⁸⁹ "The Chronology of a Dirty Deal," *Ziua*, 30 April 1998, FBIS, Apr-Jun 1998, CD-Rom.

⁹⁰ Constantin Nistorescu, "May it Rest in Peace," *Evenimentul Zilei*, 20 July 1998, FBIS, Jul-Sep 1998, CD-Rom.

paper covered centrists Isarescu and Stolojan, and offered pre-election polls of the contest. More complete daily coverage emerged by the end of September, including discussion of the platforms of Iliescu, Frunda, and Paunescu. Judged by the placement of the election related articles in the paper, politics did not sell in 2000, at least in this journal, because the articles appeared on page six or seven and only moved up to page five by mid-October.

In the first round of the election, Iliescu led all candidates, followed by late rising Cornel Vadim Tudor, clearly depicted by the paper as an ultra-nationalist, anti-Semitic and anti-Magyar candidate representing the Greater Romania Party. Interestingly, none of the major journals covered his campaign or ideas in what was a coordinated but voluntary self-imposed censorship of news about this candidate who the press disliked and feared. Obviously large elements of the electorate appreciated him more than the media.

By November, *Evenimentul Zilei* decided to savage Vadim Tudor in a ferocious campaign to discredit him. Articles appeared in the paper equating a Tudor presidency with rule by the machine-gun, a future of public executions, and more violent miner's rampages in the capital.⁹² The paper then revealed that Tudor, while presenting himself as a traditional Romanian, was actually an Evangelical Protestant, which shocked many of his conservative supporters in this nation where the vast majority of believers are Eastern Orthodox Christians. The attacks increased with this paper comparing him to Adolph Hitler, and as a tax evader, and liar.⁹³ Tudor lost the election with 30 per cent of the vote, which was still almost one-third of the voters.

Following the elections of 2000, a major story for Romania and *Evenimentul Zilei*, was the country's entrance into NATO which the paper enthusiastically supported. The paper distinguished itself in its reporting on the NATO issue and separated itself from the pack as a dependable source for issues on United States-Romanian issues. Cornel Nistorescu, who speaks good English and is knowledgeable about the West, ensured that the paper provided extensive reporting on this issue. Editor-in-Chief Nistorescu, championed the pro-Western and pro-American move and opened the

⁹¹ *Mediafax*, Bucharest, 27 October 1999, FBIS, Oct-Dec 1999, CD-Rom.

⁹² "Gasca lui Vadim," *Evenimentul Zilei*, 21 November 2000.

⁹³ "Corneliu Vadim Tudor pune in practica teoriile din Mein Kampf," *Evenimentul Zilei*, 4 December 2000.

dialogue with a long editorial that discussed Romania and NATO in depth. The article covered the history of NATO, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, estimated costs of integration, the benefits of the NATO umbrella, geo-strategic implications, interoperability issues, and modernization of the military.⁹⁴

The paper interviewed Mihai Capman, a Romanian liaison to NATO, discussing the strategic position of the country and especially its position on the Black Sea as critical to NATO's future.⁹⁵ The article discussed the budgetary implications of membership, and the need to reduce the size of the military while improving training and upgrading equipment. Capman discussed the idea of military control not just through control of territory but also through mobility, a new concept in post Cold War NATO. He mentioned that Romania was reviewing its present policy of conscription which had certain budgetary advantages but did not provide a professional force. The reporter then asked what effect NATO admission would have on the shepherd in the hills. Capman replied that NATO would not put bread on the table but that it would provide security and open the door to further Euro-Atlantic integration that would affect the economy.

This journal reported the visit of President George Bush enthusiastically and mentioned one curious aspect of his dialogue with President Iliescu. It suggested that President Bush believed that Romania could act as a valuable bridge between NATO and Russia. The statement was odd because Romania and Russia have had historically bad relations, even during the years of alliance in the Warsaw Pact. Demonstrating an acute sense of historical awareness, *Evenimentul Zilei* followed up with Mircea Geoana, former Ambassador to Washington, for clarification. The Ambassador said that Bush spoke of the Romanian-Russian bridge in terms of a common front against global terrorism, which made sense from an American perspective though a Romanian might wonder about its feasibility. In another sense, NATO admission empowered Russia's smaller neighbor, which as a new member could now speak as part of a larger military organization, providing it coordinated its goals and statements with NATO leadership.

While 2002 brought the nation security within NATO, *Evenimentul Zilei* also reported positively on the domestic reform movement to allow freedom of access to

⁹⁴ "Ziua Cea Mare," *Evenimentul Zilei*, 21 November 2002.

⁹⁵ Robert Turcescu, "Am intrat in hora, trebuie sa jucam!" *Evenimentul Zilei*, 24 November 2002.

personal files compiled over the years by the state security apparatus. Opposition politicians and activists requested that the government open the Securitate personnel files created on individuals, and publicly release the names of Securitate officers and informers. Many, especially those in the political opposition, believed these actions would complete the catharsis begun in during the Revolution and move Romania towards a Western style government, one responsible to the people. *Evenimentul Zilei* provided extensive coverage on the Securitate archives problem which many felt, represented a connection to the Communist era that had to be broken by opening the issue to the light of day. The Council compiled a list of 5,000 Securitate officers whose names appeared on 1.2 million files of targeted people.⁹⁶

In a comparison that showed Romania less cooperative than other countries, one article discussed an historian's frustrated attempts to gain access to records. American historian Vojtech Mastny accused Romanian authorities of keeping secret the nature of its collaboration Russia during the Cold War.⁹⁷ He tried for two years to get information from the archives on Warsaw Pact collaboration during the 1950's and 1960's, but unlike other countries, the Romanian archives would not cooperate. He received irrelevant documents compared to the Czech, German, and Hungarian sources and cited that he couldn't get anything operational or on military exercises, while the other countries were forthcoming.

Evenimentul Zilei also reported that when politicians discussed closing the Archives oversight council, Unions and NGO's united for the first time to protest the closure by forming a human chain around the People's House Parliament. They saw the opening of the archives as an attempt to keep memory and truth alive after decades of secrecy and lies. The unions were specifically interested in the Securitate files because workers could lose their jobs based on information held in those documents. Workers, football players, actors, and others participated in the demonstration.⁹⁸ Mircea Toma, a well-known activist, suggested that certain politicians wanted to ban the council because it was going to publish a list of the 5,000 names. To date, little has happened but *Evenimentul Zilei* publicized the issue, an important move towards freedom of access to

⁹⁶ Alecsandra Ecard, "CNSAS," *Curentul*, 31 January 2003.

⁹⁷ Dan Tapalaga, "In plena campanie pro-NATO," *Evenimentul Zilei On-line*, 4 October 2003.

⁹⁸ "Nu Ingropati tracutul," *Evenimentul Zilei*, 10 March 2003.

government records. The government's refusal to publish the 5,000 names also indicates the limitations of the press in a country where public opinion cannot easily be mobilized into civic action.

Other papers such as *National*, *Ziua*, and *22*, have contributed to the diversification of the press while achieving sound journalistic standards. A lesser known but rising paper *National* knew that a good corruption story would sell newspapers and it had one when it was the first to report the Assos Cigarette contraband story after receiving an anonymous fax on 23 April 1998 that detailed highlights of the caper.⁹⁹ This paper garnered some fame because it "broke" the scandal and got recognition for its role in uncovering a major scandal in President Emil Constantinescu's government. This and other scandals led to the demise of the Democratic Convention which did not even appear on the ballot in the 2000 elections.

The paper reported that unfortunately the writer of the fax remained anonymous and his motivations were obscure. The fax related that on the night of 16 April 1998, an IL-76 aircraft with Ukrainian markings landed and parked on the military side of Otopeni International Airport in Bucharest. A Colonel Trutulescu arrived with a military contingent of masked men in military uniform and proceeded, with the permission of the installation commander, to off-load cases of Liggett and Meyers Greek made Assos cigarettes into their three trucks. Colonel Trutulescu was a member of the Presidential Secret Service and an important figure in the Presidential entourage which had negative implications for the ruling party. The whistle-blower ended with the statement that the press needed to investigate this action because many high-ranking and powerful people were involved.

National reporter Mirel Curea's first impressions were that the Romanian Intelligence Service was attacking the Secret Service in a power struggle. He invited readers who knew anything more about the case to contact the paper.¹⁰⁰ The fact that he used his name in the by-line suggested that at this paper at least, the writer wasn't afraid of retribution and his editor openly credited the reporter for his professional work, something not seen frequently in earlier years. Curea later clarified that the plane was of

⁹⁹ "Stimatii domnului," *National*, 23 April 1998.

¹⁰⁰ Mirel Curea, "SRI si SPP au inceput un razboi fara mila," *National*, 23 April 1998.

Ukrainian make but flew for Air Sofia, a Bulgarian airline. He speculated that for the plane to have landed and cleared all the check points, especially on the military side of the base, the military, the Financial Guard, police, and customs officials, all participated in the deception.¹⁰¹

The newspaper's quick attention to the matter got the attention of government officials. The Defense Minister fired the Commander of the Otopeni Military Airport, Ioan Suciu, for allowing a foreign plane to land without clearing the flight with Air Defense authorities. Suciu's version, a plain lie according to *National*, was that the plane landed and took off without leaving any merchandise. Airport logs revealed no documentation of this flight, according to Curea's investigation.¹⁰² The Secret Service suspended Colonel Trutulescu from duties, and then the Director, Nicu Anghel appeared in front of government officials to explain the circumstances. The paper also interviewed a major arms dealer, Shimon Naor, President of Orient Energy Agencies and Services, who denied any involvement with these events.¹⁰³ The reporter had no evidence to accuse Naor and seemed to be ruminating about accomplices in the public forum of this paper.

National faced denials by the alleged conspirators but the story forced the government to take action. The military absolved itself any part in the affair. A spokesman stated that the Civil Aviation Authority cleared the plane to land, without any merchandise for crew rest. While parked, nothing unusual happened, according to a corporal on duty. The Chief of Logistical Services stated that no merchandise was delivered.¹⁰⁴ In spite of the denials, the government began to arrest people. President Constantinescu declared that no one had immunity from prosecution.

On 25 April, authorities arrested Ioan Suciu for trafficking contraband cigarettes. Military authorities also arrested Base Commander Dumitru Balan and Gabriel Negoescu, Chief of Quick Air Service. Negoescu's workers, apparently, had moved the contraband from the plane to the vehicles. Ninu Sapunaru, Chief of Customs, declared

¹⁰¹ Mierl curea, "Afacerea LM-SPP a explodat," *National*, 24 April 1998.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ "Shimon Naor considera ca imaginea lui de om de afaceri este lovita din sentimente de gelozie si rautate," *National*, 24 April 1998.

¹⁰⁴ "Militarii de garda la Aeroportul Militar Otopeni declara ca nu au vazut camioane sau personae straine in preajama ciuionului Ucrainean," *National*, 24 April 1998.

that the merchandise did not have documents and that there were false stamps on the cigarettes. The state lost more than \$600,000 in taxes on this delivery.¹⁰⁵

The journal *National* raised questions, much of it speculation, some of which it answered and some not, but the discussion did lead to action by the authorities against those involved. The paper also accused Air Sofia of Bulgaria, of flying contraband as far as Ecuador, Rwanda, North Korea and Iran. The company claimed that it made the Romanian stopover because of mechanical problems and that it needed crew rest for a flight cleared to Sweden. Swedish authorities however, denied any flight plan with Air Sofia, and in fact the aircraft departed Romania for Bulgaria the next day.¹⁰⁶

The President himself suffered from the episode especially after Senator Radu Timofte suggested that Presidential Counselor Dan Petre and Col Trutulescu had a close relationship (which Petre denied) and that the President's own declarations showed perhaps too much of an intimate knowledge of the subject.¹⁰⁷ Some called the episode "Otopenigate" and allegations emerged that the Social Democrats used the incident to embarrass the ruling coalition and hurt the President. Senator Serban Sandalescu of the Peasant's Party commented that this scandal was just one of many like it perpetrated at the airport which was infamous for its contraband connections.¹⁰⁸

National led the story and the reporting of the investigation which uncovered a web of corruption and clouded the tenure of President Emil Constantinescu who never satisfactorily answered the many questions raised by this episode. The Social Democrats attempted to use the event to maximum political effect calling for the impeachment of President Constantinescu and the resignations of the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Director of the Romanian Intelligence Service, the Commander of Military Aviation, one of the Presidential Counselors, and the General Prosecutor. Opposition politicians and

¹⁰⁵ "Presedintele Constantinescu a precizat ca in sistemul actual, daca exista dovezi, nimeni nu este protejat," *National*, 27 April 1998.

¹⁰⁶ "Asupra Companiei 'Air Sofia' planeaza de mai multa vreme suspiciunea ca se implica in contrabanda cu arme, narcotice, si tigari," *National*, 27 April 1998.

¹⁰⁷ Aura Alexa Ioan, "Presidentului," *National*, 28 April 1998.

¹⁰⁸ Dorel Tircolnica, "Majoritatea celor din SPP implicati in operatiunea 'Otopeni' au actionat incinte in DIA," *National*, 4 May 1998.

government prosecutors implicated the military, the intelligence services, and other government agencies in this tale which *National* brought to the public forum.¹⁰⁹

Ziua, another small paper like *National* and less popular than the others mentioned, traditionally focused on personalities in its reporting which showed in its coverage of the Assos cigarettes scandal and the country's admission into NATO. It typically covers events in depth interviewing well-known political commentators and writers for their opinions on the event.¹¹⁰ In its reporting on the corruption scandal, the paper provided a transcription of the phone calls between the commander of Otopeni Airport, Ioan Suci, and his deputy, Valentin Vasilescu, followed by a chronological time line of events.¹¹¹

Ziua was very partisan in the 2000 elections, leading with an attack against Vadim Tudor after he got into the runoffs against Ilescu in national elections. Its topic sentence in its political coverage section stated, "Let us look hell in the face. The extremism of this movement's leader has drawn an iron curtain around Romania."¹¹² It continued ominously that there would be no Euro-Atlantic visas and foreign investments and credits will stop.

For the NATO membership story of 2002, the paper incorporated multiple opinions. One commentator called the NATO expansion a vote of confidence and another called it an important beginning of a new era, while others complained that it came late and should have happened in 1996. A cynic or realist, perhaps, he stated that the United States invited Romania only because of the crisis with Iraq.

This kind of journalism allowed easy identification with the issues through individuals but lacked analysis, though some might prefer unedited, direct news. The paper covered distinct opinions pro and con. A few days later *Ziua* joined the enthusiastic wave, stating that Bush's address to Romanians in Revolutionary Square touched many who cried with joy over the country's inclusion, and added a comment by President Bush who pointed out a rainbow to the crowd suggesting that it portended good

¹⁰⁹ "Impactul si consecintele operatunii 'Tigareta II' asupra imaginii prezidentului Romaniei," *National*, 18 May 1996.

¹¹⁰ "Mesajul Americii, interpretat de analisti politici romani," *Ziua*, 25 November 2002.

¹¹¹ "Chronology of a Dirty Deal," *Ziua*, 30 April 1998, FBIS, Apr-Jun 1998, CD-Rom.

¹¹² "PSDR's Options in Light of PRM Election Showing," *Ziua*, 28 November 2000. FBIS, Oct-Dec 2000, CD-Rom.

luck.¹¹³ *Ziua* reported the Bush visit with the heading “Welcome America” in English. It reminded its readers that NATO admission was also a reward for Romania’s political-military activities outside the country, referring to its presence beside America in Bosnia and Afghanistan.¹¹⁴

Perhaps the lack of any real debate in the popular press over the move into NATO in terms of social cost for a poor nation such as Romania should be viewed against the backdrop of Soviet occupation followed by forty-five years of totalitarian rule. The euphoria most people felt was palpable and the release from the past came rapidly and unexpectedly, unlike the scenario in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic where opposition groups, independence, and public dialogue had a longer history.

The paper *Romania Mare*, voice of a popular political movement by the same name, has been open about its views especially regarding minorities and any issue which affects the patrimony of the nation, which it claims to protect. It is a nationalist paper that was famous for its minority bashing thought it is trying to change that perception. Its editor-in-chief and frequent candidate for the Presidency, Senator Cornel Vadim Tudor, represents a hybrid movement that contains elements of disparate political ideologies. *Romania Mare* or Greater Romania, has claimed in the past that the national and ethnic minorities have hurt the unity of Romania, which ideologically connects it to the ultra-nationalist Legionnaire movement of the 1930’s, modeled after the Fascist movements in Europe at that time, though the movement would deny this association.

Romania Mare’s leadership grew out of the Communist system of forty-five years, and it aligned itself with the ruling, leftist Social Democrats of President Ion Iliescu during the early 1990’s but later broke with the PSD. The Communist movement in Romania always had a strong nationalistic, anti-Soviet element to it that Westerners mistakenly confused as pro-Western. The Greater Romania Party is nationalistic but politically closer to the Social Democrats than any other Party. A review of the Party’s history and weekly paper coverage of the national elections will clarify its partisan reporting and its political position.

¹¹³ “Curcubel, semnul, legatanintului intre Dumnezeu si oamenii,” *Ziua*, 25 November 2003.

¹¹⁴ “Welcome America,” *Ziua*, 25 November 2002.

The paper began in 1990 and has always been a strictly partisan paper to support its political party. It reports a weekly circulation of 32,000 copies for the country which is small, and boasts that it accepts no advertising so that its message can remain “pure.” It is also possible that potential advertisers have feared association with the movement. Radu Toma, counselor to Senator Tudor, suggests that his party is not nationalist but interested in keeping the history of lost territories Bukovina and Moldova (to the Soviet Union) alive in the public consciousness. The supporters of the movement and journal, are “blue-collar” people, generally 18-44, many of whom do not understand the capitalist transformation and feel left behind, as they see a rich entrepreneurial class growing around them.

In the 1992 national elections, there was almost no political coverage of the campaigns and the election news was basically editorials on the Party’s position or character attacks on the other candidates. It began its reporting on one candidate, Petre Roman, saying that he moved about the country talking to people but really didn’t care. Caius Dragomir, his companion, looked like Godzilla with his huge belly and wouldn’t attract any votes. Ana Blandiana of the Democratic Convention, was going to have an ice cream named after her.¹¹⁵ On the Hungarian Party of Transylvania, the UDMR, it said it was a Leninist Party that planned to secede with Transylvania and later join Hungary. It was a political error, it continued, to allow a Hungarian political party in Romania because they would tear apart the country. They have a minority complex and are always seeking to assimilate themselves into Hungary.¹¹⁶

While *Romania Mare* sometimes supported the Social Democrats, it also criticized the ruling power. In 1992 during the early phase of transition, the paper claimed that the government was selling off the country, piece by piece, in a negative reference to privatization, which was extremely limited at that time anyway. Vadim Tudor excused himself from the campaign, admitting he didn’t have a chance, and threw his support to Ion Iliescu. Iliescu, he argued, offered stability and experience during the transition.

¹¹⁵ Saptamina pe Scurt, *Romania Mare*, 28 August 1992, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

In an attack against Center-Right candidate Roman Stolojan, the government's representative at the International Monetary Fund, the editorial stated the privatization would make the industries bankrupt and destroy agriculture, making the country dependent on food imports. Unemployment, inflation, and social chaos would also result.¹¹⁷ The paper saved its best arrows for the greatest threat to an Iliescu victory, Dr. Emil Constantinescu. It alternately called him a "castrated rooster" or "billy-goat" because of his goatee beard. Once, in an off-hand comment, Constantinescu said he might share power with exiled King Michael, which the paper then interpreted as his support for a future monarchy. The paper also published accounts about his mentally-retarded brother, saying that the candidate drove him out of the family, abandoning him. His mother, it continued, lived in a fine villa and his wife, Nadia, had a Russian name. The paper provided no proof for these allegations. Emil, it continued, was connected to criminals, an inveterate liar, and an agent of foreign masters, (the IMF) who would rob the country.

Its 1996 coverage still offered only editorials and attacks against the candidates with one noticeable change. The Party now attacked President Iliescu saying that he was a "nothing" who had engineered a coup d'etat to gain power in 1989, and the country suffered from numerous social problems. Interestingly, it also began to associate the President with former President Ceausescu, but only in cartoons. Quite a few of the political sketches had the two men talking, with Ceausescu offering Iliescu advice on how to avoid execution. Political cartoons and caricatures allowed the artist or writer to convey a message without the threat of a libel lawsuit which may have prompted the increased use of this form of satire.

In this campaign, the Party also set forth its political agenda. Its "ten commandments" advocated Christianity, loyalty to the mother country, the fight against poverty, the need to confiscate fortunes obtained through fraud, the need for medical and educational programs, and finally, the fact that this was a messianic mission.¹¹⁸ It also published questions presented to the candidates for a television debate but unfortunately left out their replies.

¹¹⁷ Radu Theodoru, "Inalta Tradare," *Romania Mare*, 4 September 1992.

¹¹⁸ "Comitatul al Partidului Romania Mare, "A inceput compania," *Romania Mare*, 23 August 1996.

In the year 2000, color appeared in the paper, along with the topless girls, and more advertising. It again offered only editorials and attacks against the opposition candidates. One article singled out the Hungarians as fascist-inspired invaders of the motherland, whose tradition, the Magyar UDMR Party carried on, with its threats of social unrest and foreign-inspired aggression. At least the paper recognized and followed its editor Vadim Tudor's candidacy, which few did before the second round, surprising most pundits and frightening many Romanians and Europeans with its strong showing.

Another weekly but entirely different in its outlook, is the intellectual weekly *Revista 22*, which has consistently offered deep analysis and even historical background on complex issues. It benefited from financial seed money and guidance from a Western NGO, the Central East European Publishing Project, chaired by the writer Timothy Garton Ash. The journal 22 offered the most comprehensive and in-depth research, reporting on the reform law that allowed access to information in the secret files of the Interior Ministry and other related Secret Services. The newspaper's format is less commercial, more in-depth, and its weekly format lends itself better to investigative journalism. At the same time, it appeals to a small audience and has a limited circulation within the capital.

Its coverage of the reform to make public the Security archives issue is illustrative. "22" recounted that in 2001 the Council wanted to start naming 100 Securitate names a week. The Romanian Intelligence Service (RSI) delayed naming the officers claiming technical difficulties. Members of the Council belonging to the Social Democrats supported the RSI and helped suppress the release. RSI then began writing negative reports about officials who wanted to open the archives while PSD members tried to change the law. In the end, the RSI only released 29 names. At their hearing, the Intelligence officers claimed they were patriots and specialists, not killers. Gheorghe Goran, Commander of Security Forces in the capital, expressed no regrets about serving the communist dictatorship. He was defiant and stated he had no reason to be sorry. Securitate archives currently exist at the RSI, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and Public Affairs. According to former Director Virgil Magareanu, there are

1.6 million tracking files and around 400 thousand informer files. The tracking files each have a specific subject and names of his/her acquaintances.¹¹⁹

The journal found credible sources who knew firsthand about the issues involving domestic intelligence. Andrei Oisteanu, a writer, detailed his attempted recruitment by Securitate in the 1980's, for "22," revealing that the service wanted him to travel to the United States to spy on his friend, writer Mircea Eliade. When the officers wanted to track someone, they typically recruited his friends to observe and influence him. The Security Service complimented its human intelligence gathering with technology, planting listening devices in the home whose location they would periodically change to avoid detection.¹²⁰ In addition to travel, they offered him money, good meals at restaurants at a time when many people were starving, and other perks. After he refused to cooperate, they added additional allegations to his personal file, emphasizing that he posed a flight risk. They intercepted his letters, listened to his telephone conversations, and went to great lengths to monitor him especially after he requested permission to present papers abroad at conferences. They weren't always efficient though, issuing him a visa which Securitate failed to block even though they didn't want him to travel.¹²¹

The appearance in the major journals and "22" of a story concerning Securitate, the once feared domestic intelligence force that controlled the population, indicated that the press, by 2003, no longer avoided even the most sensitive subjects. Any material was fair news. This represented a major advance by the written press of ridding itself of self-censorship. However, an uneven level of professionalism predominated in the industry, as seen by journals stating fact as opposed to opinion, a lack of follow-up, and a poor use of documenting sources, among the editorial staffs and writers which separated Romanian journalists from their counterparts in the West.

Mihai Coman, former Dean of the School of Journalism at the University of Bucharest, reflected a despondent picture of journalism in Romania, from the management of the enterprise to the level of the reporters. To begin with, he commented that ethics and accurate reporting have clashed with the business interests of a newspaper so that at times editors steered reporters away from stories that conflicted

¹¹⁹ Rodica Palada, "Audiera ofiterilor de Securitate," 22, 2-8 September 2003.

¹²⁰ "Mergeti la Parlament," *Evenimentul Zilei*, 11 March 2003.

¹²¹ Andrei Oisteanu, "Despre dosarul meu de Securitate," 22, 2-8 September 2003.

with advertiser's or other groups' interests.¹²² The editor, said Coman, faced the constant tension of choosing between integrity and independence and in making a profit by selling scandalous papers and keeping advertisers happy by avoiding certain subjects, etc. As long as the newspapers failed to file financial statements, how could the public know who the ownership was? This information would explain the newspapers' benefactors, interests, and journalistic slant. Where, he asked, were the financial reports on these enterprises?

Regarding reporters, he stated that they have a hard and dirty job that often produces unhappy journalists who have to work within a bureaucratic enterprise that stifles initiative. Low salaries have also contributed to a sense of malaise among the journalists' community that renders them prone to bribes and other forms of corruption. Additionally, there are currently no standards or governing organizations that control the entry of reporters into the field, as is the case with other professions. A lack of professionalism from the grassroots hurts the craft.

Journalists are not above corruption themselves. Much has been made, correctly so, of the negative influence of powerful individuals from the government and business intimidating reporters involved in uncovering corruption. These individuals act like "bosses" and have intimidated through lawsuits, threats, or violence. On the other side, lawsuits have deterred irresponsible journalists whose companies or individuals have paid off journalists to smear political or business opponents with innuendo or outright lies. These examples are not so well known because the victims are not getting attention from the press NGO's that publish abuses and which otherwise do an outstanding job.

Reporters at *Romania Libera*, according to Bogdan Ficeac, Editor-in-Chief, traditionally were not trained as journalists but came to the job from other work, typically technical careers they learned in the Communist era, lacking the most basic premises of a liberally educated student normally trained in sociology, history, or political science, along with journalism.¹²³ Most reporters at his paper were trained on-the-job. The older journalists were "old school" meaning Communist era, and had little experience asking the right questions to get the story. Freedom came so quickly that they were stunned,

¹²² Mihai Coman, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 6 June 2002.

¹²³ Bogdan Ficeac, Interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 4 June 2002.

and he noted that the community of journalists had no perspective on events during the explosion of euphoria. Regarding his company, the paper is a private enterprise and attempts to maintain its independence. A German company, WAZ, parent of *Westdeutsche Allgemeine*, is a part-owner, which strengthens *Romania Libera* financially while providing an established model for management.

Evenimentul Zilei, like *Romania Libera*, is owned by a foreign corporation, the Ringier Group of Switzerland which bought the paper from Bertelsmann Media of Germany in 2003. It is currently #2 in circulation, nationally. Ringier also owns *Libertatea* giving the group control over half the circulation of major dailies which indicates a growing media concentration in print media.¹²⁴ Cornel Nistorescu, was the Editor-in-Chief through 2003 and was internationally famous for his poem “Ode to America” which highlighted the enduring strength of democracy in America after the 11 September terrorist acts in New York and Washington, DC. He stated that his reporters all needed on the job training because the level of education at the University of Bucharest School of Journalism was still improving.¹²⁵ He and his management team emphasized the values of democracy, the free market, along with a strong character and will, to the new reporters. The Romanian reporter, he continued, was susceptible to blackmail and bribery because of low salaries and moral corruptibility. In spite of high turnover, he attempted to create a strong newspaper by hiring young people who never worked under the Communists, and who demonstrated the strong character necessary to survive in the business.

Like the major dailies, the provincial papers also face financial challenges though their mission is different. According to Mihaela Dascalescu, senior editor at *Buna Ziua Brasov*, the second ranked newspaper in Brasov, the circulation has steadily risen and the budget is modest but stable.¹²⁶ The paper, established in 1995, depends completely on advertising for its financing. Reporters at this paper have limited experience but work hard and get all their training on the job. The journalists are working on the techniques of verifying sources to ensure the veracity of their stories. The focus of this daily, like other

¹²⁴ “Media in south Eastern Europe: Legislation, Professionalism, and Associations,” Media Task Force, The International Center for Journalism, November 2003. www.ijnet.org Cited 1 Jan 2004.

¹²⁵ Cornel Nistorescu, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 2 June 2002.

¹²⁶ Mihaela Dascalescu, interview by the author, Brasov, Romania, 4 July 2002.

provincial papers, is local coverage of the city and Brasov County, with some stories about Transylvania. Brasov is the second largest city in the country but is only one-fifth the size of Bucharest. Management said it would welcome a foreign partner for financial strength so it could continue to expand its reporting. Currently, Pica said, Brasov had five dailies but three would be adequate for the market. Low readership and weak advertising support have made survival difficult in the secondary markets as well.

Over the past fifteen years, the Romanian print media has made enormous strides and represents the truest, best form of objective journalism in the media. Foreign ownership, little or no known debt to the government, and rising advertising revenues, have allowed the papers a great measure of journalistic independence to reach its reading public. A more powerful medium, broadcast television and radio, both state and private, reaches more people but because of political control and financial weakness, is subject to political manipulation and is the story of the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

Television, Radio, and the Internet since 1989

Like print media, the broadcast media of television and radio have advanced technologically and numerically since the days of Communism, when Romanians had one state channel of television, which broadcast socialist platitudes two hours a night and offered limited radio programming. The growing number and diversity of sources of broadcast media from local and international sources have broadened the appeal of the media and freedom of the press. State television and radio have also evolved in their programming content but remain firmly under the control of the ruling party in their programming, especially regarding news content that deals with the government. The private sector in television and radio has also advanced in terms of offerings and variety and yet it too feels the effects of the ruling party's dictates on politically sensitive issues because of economic vulnerability, chiefly from tax debt owed by certain companies to the government.

The number of television stations rose in an increasingly competitive market along with cable television that brought new Romanian programming to the country as well as news and shows from Italy, Spain, Germany, the United States, France, and Great Britain. Viewers can even watch *telenovelas* from Latin America in Spanish and Portuguese, or Russian series that offer stereotypical hard drinking and mafia-style killings. The country has state television Romania 1 and TVR2, and commercial channels like ProTV, Antena 1, Prima TV, Atomic TV for pop music videos, and B1. Foreign programming provides HBO, Eurosport, Discovery, National Geographic, and

Animal Planet for example. Private FM radio stations also provide choices for the radio audience in addition to the state run Radio Romania.

Mihai Coman has compiled statistics on the business side of the media and provided the following numbers for comparison, among the different media.¹²⁷ The majority of the newspapers, magazines, and broadcasting institutions, he stated, were commercial (for-profit) businesses. At the same time, the advertising market was not well-developed in terms of attracting international investment. The media compensated by attracting alternative financing solutions through integration with big media groups (Antena 1 in the Intact” media group), and within international media groups (ProTV, Prima, *Romania Libera*, *Evenimentul Zilei*, *Capital*, Radio Contact, Radio Europa FM, etc).

Revenues from advertising, in 2000 were as follows according to Alfacont Mediawatch: television: \$326,260,800, which represented 73% of the total; dailies: \$70,925,700, 16%; magazines: \$34,868,900, for 8%; and radio: \$12,104,000, 3%.¹²⁸

The main media groups in the printed press, as of 2000¹²⁹:

Table 1

MediaPro Group	Ziarul Financiar	PRO Sport	Acasa Magazin	Madame Figaro	PlayBoy	PROTV	Abracadabra
Ringier	Evenimentul Zilei	Libertatea	Gazeta Sporturilor	Capital	Lumea Femeilor	TV Mania	Unica
Adevarul	Adevarul						
Romania Publishing Group	Avantage	Elle	Viva	Estetica	20 Ani		
Hearst	Cosmopolitan	Ziua	Ziua Turistica	Ziua TV			

In 1999, the total incomes of these groups were:

¹²⁷ Mihai Coman, *Media in Romania, 1990-2001: A Source Book*. Berlin: Vistas Verlag, 2002.

¹²⁸ Coman, Table 1.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Table 2

OPI	\$11,186,294
Ringier	\$8,516,346
Media PRO Group	\$5,980, 091
RPG	\$3,742, 272
Adevarul	\$2,368,898
VNU-Hearst	\$501,900

According to the analysis offered by the “Pro” Institute, the biggest advertising incomes in 1999 in decreasing order were: *Ziua* - \$11,186,924, *Evenimentul Zilei* - \$5,375,673, *Romania Libera* - \$3,229,631, *Libertatea* - \$1,770,580, and *Pro-Sport* - \$1,328,778.¹³⁰

In specialty publications, such as business publications: *Capital* (magazine) earned \$3,423,238, *Ziarul Financiar* (daily) \$1,243,401, and *Curentul* (daily) \$899,799. The feminine press incomes showed the following: *Avantaje*-\$1,899,640, *Unica*-\$1,307,263, *Cosmopolitan*-\$501,900, *Acasa Magazin*-\$227,698, *Lumea Femeilor*-\$151,682, *Formula AS*- \$133,247, and *Ioana*-\$105,511.

The advertising total incomes in television increased surprisingly the last few years:

Table 3

PRO TV	\$171,000,000
Antena 1	\$129,000,000
Prima	\$68,000,000
Romania 1	\$41,000,000
Tele7 ABC	\$29,000,000
Acasa	\$17,179,000

The rate card is low compared to Western rates at \$3,500 for 30 seconds for the show “Surprise, Surprise,” at Romania 1 with a 17% rating, and \$2,200 for 30 seconds for “Vrei sa fii miliardar,” of Prima TV has a 5,5% rating.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Coman, Table 2.

¹³¹ Coman, Table 4.

Clearly, the revenues television enjoys indicate the financial power of the medium vis-à-vis print journalism and radio. The primacy of television has attracted the interest of politicians since the early days of the Revolution, and its control by the new nomenklatura, the National Salvation Front (FSN), the ex-Communist group led by Ion Iliescu and Petre Roman in 1990 at the beginning. Georgeta Pourchat has argued that the FSN used the media, specifically TVR, the state television channel, as early as 22 December 1989 to legitimize itself and consolidate power in front of a large national television audience presenting itself as the savior of the nation.¹³² Subsequent coverage by TVR, the only television station at the time, shut out political and civil groups that did not support the regime.

Pourchat cited other examples of government control and manipulation of the medium. In early January 1990, citizens held public rallies challenging the FSN's dedication to democracy, protesting its power and control of TVR, did not broadcast these rallies. On 28 January, people held a large protest in Victoria Square against the FSN's political monopoly and control over the television medium. The anchor assigned to the story stated that unusually heavy fog prevented the televising of the rally, while citing the dangers of a violent coup against the Revolution and the FSN from this group of "anti-democratic forces."¹³³ The FSN used television to build up its symbolism as the only political option and by doing so, retarded the growth of a healthy, democratic dialogue. Peter Gross pointed out that on 22 December, the FSN took over the television station which then became its headquarters using it as a platform for its message.¹³⁴ For the next few years, until 1994 at least, viewers watched the government station more than any other with an audience share of 82 percent.¹³⁵

The Democratic Convention Party tried to break the monopoly of the nomenklatura at the government station by replacing its personnel, to open the way for freer television broadcasts. Anca Toada, a former TV anchor, returned as national editor to TVR, the station she hoped would promote a new era in Romania broadcast

¹³² Georgeta Pourchat, "Mass Media and Democracy in Romania: Lessons from the Past, Prospects for the Future," *Romania in Transition*, ed. Lavinia Stan (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1997), 75.

¹³³ Pourchat, p. 77.

¹³⁴ Peter Gross, *Mass Media in Revolution and National Development: The Romanian Laboratory* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 34.

journalism. She came back after quitting during the first Iliescu presidency, upon receiving promises from the Convention Party that public television would be free. Romanian television under Iliescu, for example, didn't cover King Michael's visit and in another case, reported the NATO-Kosovo War from only the Serbian perspective, whose side President Iliescu favored. The new director, Alina Mungiu, recalled the station's reporter from Belgrade, instructed him to stop wearing a Serb military uniform and ordered him to cover the anti-war protests in Belgrade as well.¹³⁶ Mungiu did not last either and has since departed TVR.

TVR is still secretive however, and subject to partisan control by the Social Democrats. The author attempted to visit TVR in 2004 to interview the news director but the point of contact said a visit would be impossible without direct permission from the General Director who wasn't granting access to anyone because of an ongoing scandal.

The use of the station for political purposes indicates that TVR has remained a state rather than public station. Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, formerly of TVR herself, wrote that state television traditionally subordinated news to the national interest as defined by the government. A public television station offers content that is editorially independent and an autonomous public service, which clearly TVR is not.¹³⁷ Mungiu said that because TVR's property remained in the state, the government decided the value of the license fee, and because even the MP's viewed the station as national and not public, it was not public. TVR has never been autonomous in any real sense, from the government. In an effort to wean government television from state subsidies, a small step towards financial independence, citizens pay a small, direct tax which is the license fee to support the station.

The television market has become even more important in the country and the potential market of 23 million people compares favorably with medium-sized European countries. In 2001, according to the National Audio-Visual Council (CNA), more than 27 per cent of the available households, subscribed to cable television. Another source,

¹³⁵ Gross, p. 69.

¹³⁶ Jane Perlez, "TV Makeover in Romania: It's Not Just Cosmetic," *New York Times*, 5 May 1997. Lexis-Nexis, General News, Internet.

¹³⁷ Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, "State into Public: The Failed Reform of State TV in East Central Europe." *The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy* (2000), 15.

AdMaker, claims the number of subscribers is over 3.3 million, making Romania the fifth country in Europe by number of cable subscribers.¹³⁸

PRO-TV, a commercial station, is the largest Romanian station and is foreign-owned by Central Media Enterprise (CME), whose CEO is Ronald Lauder, of the Estee Lauder cosmetics manufacturing family. PRO-TV appeared in 1996 as part of a joint venture between Adrian Serbu and Ion Tiriac, the former professional tennis player and millionaire businessman. CME also prints newspapers in most major cities in Romania with the notable exception of Bucharest, along with Playboy and Cuinele Meu magazines (“My Dog” for dog owners) and produces films at Media Pro Film Studios.

Commercial television is big business in Romania as elsewhere, but the aspect of undue influence on its news making is troubling precisely because it reaches so many people. Florian Goldstein, Editor-in-Chief of *Bursa* (The Exchange), has highlighted a serious issue involving Pro-TV and the issue of government influence on private sector television news-making for several years. The story is interesting because it illustrates how the government can influence the media, even a powerful sector like commercial television. *Bursa*, a specialized financial journal founded in 1990, carried several investigative stories on mutual fund scams in the nascent Romanian stock exchange and then uncovered an important story concerning Media Pro International, S.A., the parent company of PRO TV, and owned by Central European Media Enterprises Limited (CME). Goldstein asserted that the government offered Media Pro corporate tax relief in exchange for favorable reporting on the government.¹³⁹

Bursa has published several editorials arguing that Media Pro, part of the “Media Imperium” of CME, refuses to list its debts, pays no taxes, and runs into a direct conflict of interest with the government over this issue. It is important because as mentioned earlier, PRO TV has the largest television audience in the country and wields powerful influence. The newspaper stated that Media Pro owes \$21 million dollars to the State in unpaid taxes (according to government figures as of 2000) and that the last two governments have tolerated non-payment of this debt. How, the article asks, can the government show such enormous lenience, essentially a gift, to multi-millionaire

¹³⁸ Alex Ulmanu, “The Romanian Media Landscape,” 9 April 2002, European Journalism Center. www.ejc.nl

¹³⁹ Florian Goldstein, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 1 July 2002.

American Ronald Lauder, while many Romanians are starving?¹⁴⁰ The article also suggests that the government offers Pro Media fiscal benefits for Adrian Sirbu, chief of Pro Media, his family and business relations, while the company in turn helps certain ministers of Prime Minister Adrian Nastase's cabinet.

Media giant CME has benefited from the tax relief and may have also promoted corruption in the government and society, among the worst in Europe, while also affecting an important segment of television broadcasting. *Bursa* also reported that the American Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) was investigating the accuracy of the public disclosures of CME, which owns 66% of Pro Media, because of hidden debts in the company. The SEC asked the Romanian Consulate in New York to furnish information on debts accumulated by Media Pro to the Romanian state budget because it is interested in the accounting ledgers of Arthur Andersen, Media Pro's accounting firm, to verify if the firm's audited reports were accurate.¹⁴¹

The European Union has also questioned the issue of media debt in a "Report on Romania," based on a London *Financial Times*' comment that PRO TV is heavily indebted to the Romanian state, has applied for a rescheduling of its debt, and that its tax liability makes the operation dependent on the goodwill of the government.¹⁴² This has led the EU to consider problems in the areas of freedom of the press as well as corruption and could delay entry of the country into the EU. Recent allegations have surfaced as to whether Minister of Finance Mihai Tanasescu took a \$500,000 bribe to help Media Pro either delay the tax collection or forgive it entirely, and went unanswered.¹⁴³ Florian Goldstein aptly summed up the matter with the words "the press tries to limit the freedom of the press."

Goldstein's story has parallels with other private television stations which owe large tax debts to the government. When Baroness Emma Nicholson of Great Britain released a report to the European Union suggesting that Romania would not be ready for inclusion into the EU in 2007 and needed more time to implement structural changes, this major news item was a non-event in the state television, as expected, but also in the

¹⁴⁰ "Digressions in the Media Pro Scandal," *Bursa*, 11 January 2002.

¹⁴¹ "The Pro Media Scandal enters the 'too late' phase," *Bursa*, 28 January 2002.

¹⁴² "Media Pro International owes the Romanian state over \$40 million," *Bursa*, 7 February 2003.

¹⁴³ "Media Pro International owes the Romanian state over \$40 million," *Bursa*, 7 February 2003.

commercial television news. Mircea Toma of the Media Monitoring Agency wrote that the economic pressure of large debt owed by the main television stations to the government was the reason for total self-censorship practiced by all of the national stations.¹⁴⁴

In the 10-16 February edition of *Academia Catavencu*, Mircea Toma provided the following data on private television debt to the government:

Table 4

Commercial Television Debt to the State Budget	Debt as of 30 Sep 2003
Amerom Television Prima TV	\$8.5 million
Antena 1	\$1.9 million
Antena 1 Culture and Art	\$1.7 million
Media Pro PRO TV	\$7.8 million
National TV (Rieni Drinks)	\$1.5 million
National TV (Scandic Distilleries)	\$1.4 million
Realitatea TV	\$470.000

Source: Ministry of Finance Web Page. 9 January 2004

The report by Emma Nicholson accused the government of corruption, and suggested the need for a free press and the establishment of an independent judiciary as necessary pre-conditions for admission. Toma monitored television for the period of 15-28 January 2004 for news on the issue and did not find one single report critical of the Prime Minister whose government the report singled out. State television not unexpectedly ignored the report. The same findings also suggested that Bulgaria had

¹⁴⁴ “Televiziunile lui Nastase au castrat-o pe Emma,” *Catavencu*, 10-16 February 2004, p. 15.

carried out the necessary reforms ahead of Romania and should be considered for 2007 admission to the EU. State television responded with negative programming that accused Bulgaria of promoting drug exports, and allowing rampant crime, in very hostile, one-sided reporting.

Razvan Popescu of the National Audiovisual Council criticized the television media for its handling of the event and stated that the CNA could fine the station for mishandling the news. A Liberal Party senator said that the opposition parties should monitor television programs and send their findings to the EU to check on Romania's progress towards press freedoms. Mona Musca, another Member of Parliament, called for the resignation of President Valentin Nicolau for poor television standards, which offended an allied, neighboring country.

By contrast, the print media was ready and willing to discuss the issue. *Romania Libera*, an opposition paper, invoked a sarcastic tone over the country's "achievements" which did not include freedom of the press and called the Prime Minister "arrogant" in his attempts to hide the obvious truths mentioned in the Nicholson report.¹⁴⁵ Simona Popescu wrote that the Nicholson issue was really about corruption that would slow the entry of Romania in to the EU. The European Parliament had signaled that Romania would someday be in the EU but that it needed a lot of work still.¹⁴⁶ The reforms have not worked and the country needed a new strategy. Other problems the mentioned included the need to limit powers of the Ministry of Justice, stop violence from the police, and improve coexistence among the minorities. In its typically more understated fashion, *Adevarul* also addressed the issue but did so by emphasizing Bulgaria's positives. The journal mentioned that Bulgaria was implementing *real* reforms and that it should not be left waiting for EU entry because of its slower neighbor that had its own rhythm.¹⁴⁷ *Adevarul* also mentioned the Irish Prime Minister's positive support for Romania's bid to the EU, which still showed its coverage of an issue which television avoided.

¹⁴⁵ Nicolae Prelipceanu, "Vorbele si faptele," *Romania Libera*, 24 February 2004, p. 1.

¹⁴⁶ Simona Popescu, "Corupt si nelinistit," *Romania Libera*, 23 February 2004, p. 1.

¹⁴⁷ "Liderul liberarilor din Parlamentul European, Graham Watson, vrea decuplarea Romaniei de Bulgaria in integrarea in UE," *Adevarul*, 25 February 2004.

While the management of Pro Media International may have developed an unhealthy relationship with the government, its television reporters in the newsroom believe they are creating a good product for the public. Newsmen Cristian Tabara, a well-known late night news anchor for PRO TV, epitomizes the atypical path that many Romanian journalists took to reach this career after 1989.¹⁴⁸ The bearded, physically imposing Tabara, began his journalism studies in Timisoara and was present in the city at the beginning of the Revolution ignited by Fr. Laszlo Tokes of the Hungarian national minority. He covered the Bosnian conflict for a regional newspaper in 1990 before returning to his hometown of Orada where he turned to theological studies for a spiritual career as a monk. Some years later, journalism called him back to the world, with PRO TV and the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) both offering him scholarships to study journalism in London and Liverpool where he learned the television and radio business. In 1999, PRO TV transferred him to Bucharest where he reported weather, became a news anchor, and then got his own show.

PRO TV's motto is "Think Free," and according to Tabara, the station wants to open the Romanian mentality to the benefits of liberalism, democracy and free market progress. The network evaluates itself by subscribing to the national "People Meter" which rates all stations for audience viewer share, a kind of Romanian Nielsen Ratings. PRO TV attempts to present complete coverage of nationally important political, social, and economic issues, such as election coverage, unemployment, European integration, minority issues, and ethnic tensions in Transylvania, but also realizes that the public wants its share of "if it bleeds it leads" stories.

Economic hardship stories, a fact of life for so many, have to be packaged carefully, according to Tabara, because Romanians will quickly turn channels if reminded too often about hard times ranging from underemployment or unemployment to stories about their diminishing buying power in the face of rising prices and stagnant salaries.¹⁴⁹ Another issue which affects the viewers and the public in general, he believes, is a Romanian fatalism which emanates from a lack of national cohesion in a country where powerful regional and ethnic identifications prevail. Romania, he points

¹⁴⁸ Cristian Tabara, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 10 September 2003.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

out, only united in 1918, which is recent compared to other European countries, and was directly affected by the break-up of the Austrian, Ottoman, and Russian Empires. Socialism did not bring social cohesion for the minorities, just impoverishment along with the rest of the country. Following World War Two, forty-five years of Communist repression added to the sense of malaise as an occupied people. This fuels escapist tendencies in viewers who long to see images of what they believe is a more idyllic world. Tabara concluded by suggesting that future may see greater national unity with Romania's entry into NATO and an invitation into the European Union, possibly within the next ten years time.

Tabara benefited from his training at the British Broadcasting Company while others have interned at CNN's Atlanta studio and bring the skills learned from these organizations to their respective newsrooms. However, the political effects of the tax debt that PRO TV owes the government are demonstrably negative and are a factor in the form of pressure from the government in return for favorable treatment in the news. Clearly, it would be in the station's best interest to liquidate the debt to avoid any control the government might want to exercise over the station and avoid even the appearance of untoward influence.

B1 television is another new commercial television channel that began transmissions in 2001 as part of the Newscorp Group with Fox News, according to news editor Corina Hadareanu.¹⁵⁰ Like other reporters, she came to the news from another field. She was a physicist who changed jobs after the Revolution, worked for PRO TV, studied at the BBC in London, and then moved to the fledgling B1 television station located in the capital. Like B1 which tries to maintain its independence from the government, Antena 1, is owned by successful businessman Dan Voiculescu, a possible political candidate, who formed his own political party which will broadcast its opinions on his own channel. While this is not objective journalism in the American sense, it is in line with Western European partisan politics and represents plurality of opinions and opposition to the ruling power which is democracy in action.

¹⁵⁰ Corina Hadareanu, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 9 September 2003.

B1 has tried to provide alternatives to standard news broadcasts by showing more documentaries, less scandal reporting and fewer crime stories, though they are cognizant that the public enjoys gratuitous violence. The station also subscribes to the ratings system for advertising and follows the national broadcasting codes set by the Romanian National Audio-Visual Council (CNA) which limits the broadcasting of images of stories on minors, dead or mangled individuals, and rape victims, all in line with European standards.

As a major national station, B1 has the resources to provide national and international coverage throughout the country which is not the case with the provincial broadcast media in the secondary markets outside of Bucharest. Local stations, even in major provincial cities do not have the markets to justify more than a small staff and minimal training. Television journalism training has only been available for Romanians since 1989 and is a new program in the universities. Since 1990, the BBC has helped train aspiring journalists and now there is a “BBC School” in Bucharest.

There are those who would argue that foreign investment has drawbacks. Stations that offer international programming do so at the expense of local programming and may be hurting the national industry. Foreign domination might limit Romanian initiatives in television and movie production which is a danger of media globalization. However, recent history shows that as late as 1989, the state television offered only two hours of programming a day of praise to the Communist leadership while the rest of the country suffered from survival issues such as low paying jobs, and a lack of food and heat in the winter. The Romanian television industry had little experience before the Revolution and the economic reality is that commercial partnerships with international media groups have allowed local stations to survive and even offer some portion of local programming along with the foreign programming.

Relative to television, radio is older but still important and it has also changed dramatically since 1989 in terms of expanded program offerings. During the Communist years, Romanian National Radio used the same broadcaster over a fairly long program, five hours, to deliver shows of socialist content which officials monitored and censored. Listeners clandestinely monitored Radio Free Europe (RFE), the British Broadcasting Company (BBC), Voice of America (VOA), and Radio Paris for transmissions that

provided news from a Western perspective which also psychologically connected them with the outside world, and at some risk if discovered.¹⁵¹

Since the Revolution, young people of diverse political backgrounds have begun to rise in the state-run radio hierarchy. Unlike its commercial competitors, some of which are foreign owned, the national station is wholly Romanian owned and commercial free. The station is situated in an older government building, with its cavernous meeting rooms and uniformed military officer who guards the place. The hallways, like many others in Romanian government buildings, have hundred of old wooden doors, always closed, as if to protect the offices from unknown influences or perhaps from other suspicious people. While programming is favorable to the government promoting “positive” issues, management insists that guests are free to contribute their opinions.

Another perspective on state radio news is that it unabashedly promotes the government, according to the business weekly *Capital*. *Capital* monitored the station between 4 August-6 September 2003, and found a heavy pro-government bias at its popular Radiojournal 0700 hours broadcast, listened to by 59 per cent of Romanians.¹⁵² Of 331 stories, 97 covered members of the government, its reports were always favorable to the government, and the stories were mostly declarations and decrees with no independent analysis. The study revealed that 16 stories focused on the President, 25 for the ruling PSD party, 21 for the Liberals, 16 for the Democrats, 8 for Romania Mare, and 6 for the Hungarians. The article concluded that the station was a “mouthpiece” of Prime Minister Nastase.

The Washington, DC-based International Center for Journalists also found that public radio and public television have shown less independence since 2000 with the rise of pro-government censorship and self-censorship. Opposition party coverage has diminished while the government and ruling party stories continue to dominate up to 70 per cent of the coverage.¹⁵³

Still, Radio Romania has expanded its programming relative to the pre-Revolution days. After the Revolution, Dragos Seuleanu re-organized Radio Romania to create a music and interview archives. The station created a press agency called RADOR

¹⁵¹ Gross, *Mass Media*, 46.

¹⁵² Petre Barbu, “Radiojurnla sub talpa Puterii,” *Capital*, No. 38, 18 September 2003.

¹⁵³ “Media in South Eastern Europe,” p. 45.

which monitors TV and radio stations for domestic and international news stories and has five divisions which include Breaking News, Culture, Youth, Music, and an International section that broadcasts shortwave into East and Central Europe in seventeen languages.¹⁵⁴

The Youth or *Tinerut* Program, which focuses on the youth niche, provided an example of how public radio has ventured into new areas without challenging the state in its news programming. The station attempted to attract and educate listeners but not in a strongly didactic way that would turn off listeners, as it did in the past. There has been a difference of opinion over the direction of the programming based on generational philosophies with the young reporters, broadcasters, and programmers wanting to experiment more while the older Communist-trained managers preferred to stay with known formulas. The target audience of this division is between 15-35 and the programs broadcast to major cities.

The programming covered subjects such as school issues, scholarships, job searches, sex education, and other topics of interest to this age group. The station sent reporters around the country to interview youth over problems they faced while also highlighting success stories. One show had a title oriented to teenagers called “Radio Bluejeans.” Anchors tended to be the same age as the audience which helped both broadcasters and listeners connect. The manager of this division concluded this interview by expressing interest in corresponding with American youth radio program managers to get their ideas.¹⁵⁵ State radio can fill cultural gaps but it self-censors itself to stay within the bounds of politically acceptable issues without running afoul of politicians or the broadcast monitoring committee.

Occasionally, however, progressive programs have aired which had repercussions for the producers. In Radio Romania’s International Division, one such incident happened when the station presented a program on the beating of journalists, using live phone hook-ups with the assaulted journalists, while a member of the ruling Party represented the government as part of the show. The commentator interviewed assaulted journalists Ino Ardelean, a print journalist, Ioanna Raduca, a television reporter, and

¹⁵⁴ Denise Theodorou, “Structura Societatii Romane de Radio,” Radio Romania International, 1 November 1998.

¹⁵⁵ Alina Mihut, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 12 September 2003.

Adina Angelescu, another print journalist. Bogdan Niculescu Duvaz, a spokesman for the ruling government and a Social Democrat, later complained to the radio's management that the discourse was biased and he wanted his own time, by himself to refute any open remarks or innuendo made by the journalists that may have impugned his government. Radio management also indicated its displeasure with the hosts' show. It is surprising that the show was even aired considering the station's subservience to the government.

Private radio stations, all FM, appeared in 1990 and now number 150 throughout the country. The major stations at the beginning were Radio Contact, Nova 22, and Radio Delta. A Gallup poll in 1993 showed a 25 percent audience share for independent radio.¹⁵⁶ Start-up stations faced problems of inadequate financing, finding trained personnel, and studio space. After 1989, the government began to levy taxes and transmission fees which forced stations to scramble for revenues or perish. The main commercial groups in radio broadcasting today are Radio Romania, PRO FM radio, Intact (Antena 1, Radio Romantic), SBS (Prima), Contact (Radio Contact network), Expresiv (Radio Total and Radio XXI network), Europa FM, and Radio Brasov (Mix FM Radio network). These stations provide music and periodic newscasts and there are no AM radio stations in Romania.¹⁵⁷ As with television, the private sector has more freedom to program its shows but state radio has also attempted to follow the dictates of the market to provide listeners with diverse programming.

Radio PRO FM-Brasov, a local affiliate of the main PRO FM radio station in Bucharest, is one of the larger radio stations that reaches listeners throughout the country. It is the second most popular station in the city and in addition to music, it presents news every thirty minutes along with special interest programs on politics, society, the economy and of course, the weather. The corporate managers from Bucharest ensure that no one at the local station says anything controversial in a form of self-censorship. The government doesn't need to control the station because it regulates itself. News consists mostly of feeds from Bucharest that include national and international items and local interest pieces. It is a commercial station and theoretically free to broadcast all news

¹⁵⁶ Gross, *Mass Media*, 66.

¹⁵⁷ Ulmanu, p. 4.

topics but because of the station's affiliation with media group PRO TV, and its debt to the government, the station avoids any controversial topics that the government might object to. The issue of financial debt affects not only the nation's number one television station but also one of the top radio stations as well.

Another radio station, Europe FM, from Bucharest, also reaches a national audience but is more independent than PRO FM, not carrying the albatross of debt that has created a conflict of interest as it does with other companies. Opened in 2000, it is the top rated station in audience share nationally and presents a varied, upbeat programming including domestic and international news, political, social, and science topics. It has correspondents abroad as well. When the station broadcasts sensitive news items, it tries to present all sides of the issue for a more balanced, objective approach. This station, like many of its Western counterparts, is also available through the internet for foreign listeners. Europa FM gained its reputation for quality, cutting edge programming, like its science reporting (unique in Romania) and objective news presentations, because it is financially independent and able to present the news in a professional and objective manner.

Monitoring both radio and television broadcasts is the government oversight agency for television and radio broadcasting in Romania, the Consiliul National al Audiovizualului or National Audiovisual Council (CNA) located in Bucharest. The Council, which operates under Law No. 504 of 11 July 2002, granted licenses for audiovisual and radio broadcasting stations until a recent reorganization. It is composed of eleven members appointed for six years who don't judge the quality of programming, just its legality. Its stated mission is to provide a plurality of information sources to the public, free competition, a fair balance of national, regional, and local radio-broadcasting services, to protect human dignity, minor children, ethnic minorities cultures, languages, and customs.¹⁵⁸

Prime Minister Adrian Nastase appointed the President of the Council, Ralu Filip, who is a member of the same party and has been subject to accusations that he favors programming that shows the ruling Social Democrats in the best light. However, Mr. Filip stated in an interview, that in 2003 the broadcast media was open and when one

¹⁵⁸ www.cna.ro

compares today's media with that of 1989, it has relatively few rules and restrictions.¹⁵⁹ Television management, he noted, reacts negatively to any kinds of restrictions but Romanian broadcasting, he asserted, operates under similar rules as media in the United States and Western Europe.

He admitted that the Council practices censorship but that these controls were in the public's interest. In television, for example, the stations will not offer unrestricted pornography. Regulations ban certain sexually explicit programs before 8 o'clock at night, and then the rules relax gradually from 8 to 10 o'clock, 10 to 12 o'clock midnight, allowing more explicit programs after 12 o'clock until 5 in the morning. Radio too is subject to controls. The Council has attempted to limit the playing of certain songs, especially those from American rap groups that advocate drug use, violence against women, and attacks against the police.

The quality of television programming, in his opinion is dropping because of commercial pressures. The Romanian "People Meter," like the American Nielsen Ratings, indicates that viewers prefer violence and erotica which is driving down the quality of programming. To counter the public's sentimental desire to see the authorities helping abused children, the Council enacted a law to protect children under fourteen from news stories featuring them under duress. Filip would like to see more quality educational programs and top European films as opposed to the commercially more successful Hollywood productions but realizes this may be a chimera.¹⁶⁰

As of 2003, there were 70 national and local television stations and 464 radio stations, which offered a variety of shows. The government overturned a decision in 1997 to require these stations to pay 3 per cent of their advertising earnings to the State, which relieved the stations of a financial burden. The media has also strengthened itself earning more with the rise in advertising revenues from companies such as Proctor and Gamble, Unilever, and communications giants Orange and Connex, that influence the media through their marketing by targeting certain ages and groups to increase sales.

The market, says Filip, is a growing influence on television and radio broadcasting. In 2001, car manufacturers totaled more than \$1 billion in sales with only

¹⁵⁹ Ralu Filip, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 25 September 2003.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

\$60 million in advertising fees compared to an average of 25 per cent advertising expenditure in Western Europe. The television audience is growing but the technology and standard of living still lags behind the West with 20 per cent having no televisions, 13 per cent owning black and white sets, and 60 per cent of those owning sets having access only to limited frequencies and channels.¹⁶¹

The European Union has indicated that it believes the CNA has made progress since 1997 in bringing the country's regulatory framework closer to its audiovisual standards. Both houses of the Romanian Parliament have approved legislation ratifying the Council of Europe's Convention on transfrontier television. The European Community Acquis (accords) have attempted to promote the free movement of television broadcasts throughout the member states. They also promote the production and distribution of European audio-visual products allotting them a minimum proportion of broadcast time. The Union's approval is important to the future of Romanian broadcasting because of the benefits it will bring to the industry as it moves into the EU, a stated goal for some time.

While the CNA watches over the public and private broadcast media, the most modern, but underutilized and as yet, unregulated sector of mass media is the internet and web-based media, a source of potentially free information for Romanians. An estimated 25 per cent of the population access it occasionally while two million people, almost 10 per cent of the entire population, have daily access mostly at work, school, or at home.¹⁶² Cable and high-speed modems are too expensive for most Romanians and most go on-line through standard telephone modems. As in the West, computers sales have taken off in Romania with sales increasing every year though not at the same rate. Computers cost roughly the same as those sold in Western Europe and the United States, making home ownership prohibitive for most, leaving the workplace as the most common place of use.

For perspective, a Romanian worker makes approximately \$130 per month and a middle class salary of \$400 and up, for a professional, is quite respectable while most working-class pensioners receive about \$75 a month. Those lucky enough to work for foreign companies might make \$1000-\$2000 per month if they have exceptional legal,

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² I.R., "10 Ani de internet," *Evenimentul Zilei*, 27 February 2003.

business, or computer programming skills, while also commanding the English, French, German, or Japanese language. A laptop (in 2003) sold for \$700-\$2000, while a desktop went for \$600-\$2000 depending on features. Similarly, for home phone or internet access, the Romanian phone company (state run) charges the home consumer by the minute for “pulses” which discourages long periods of browsing. In the countryside, some schools have internet access and village leaders acknowledge that they want this technology for students. Children in mountainous or isolated areas, however, may have never heard of the internet or computers, lacking even phone service in these remote regions.¹⁶³

For those who have access to a computer and on-line services, around \$30 per month for home dial-up service, there is an abundance of news available from on-line dailies, and other sources. MediaFax, S.A., (www.mediafax.ro), a subscriber service available in Romanian and English, provides an informative country introduction with a short history, explanation of the government, economic and political analysis, lead stories of the day, and a search engine. A comprehensive and free site is the Romanian News Page (www.radur.demon.co.uk/news.html) which provides links to sixteen major on-line dailies, *Adevarul*, *Azi*, *Cotidianul*, *Curentul*, *Curierul Nacional*, *Evenimentul Zilei*, *Gardianul*, *Jurnalul Nacional*, *Libertatea*, *Romania Libera*, *Ziarul de Iasi*, *Ziarul Finaciar*, *Ziua*, sports papers *EuroEchipe*, *OnLine Sport*, and the government paper *ROMPRES*. Many of these papers are in English and Romanian, and have archives and search engines.

Another free, on-line news service is Romania Online (<http://stiri.rol.ro>) which provides BBC news from both domestic and international sources, and a newsletter to your e-mail account. This site also offers dozens of Romanian journals including on-line Hungarian and German editions from Transylvania. The site also lists on-line radio stations by city. For a more analytic perspective, the weekly *Revista 22*, mentioned earlier, (www.revista22.ro/html), is a liberal magazine published since 1989 with the goal of bringing unbiased news since the fall of the communists on 22 December. *22* has editorials, political and economic analysis, philosophy, social issues, electoral

¹⁶³ “Copii de la tara, prietini cu Google,” *Evenimentul Zilei*, 7 June 2003.

commentary, theater, film, and art sections that are also archived. Nine O'Clock (www.nineoclock.ro) is an English language on-line paper that has a limited content but offers the obvious advantage of news in a mainstream language. Radio Free Europe, a United States' government financed organization (www.rferl.org) provides perspectives on East European countries with up to date statistics and country fact books. Two other comprehensive sites are the Internet Resources for Romanian Studies-Online News (www.slavweb.com/eng/cee/romania/roma-e.html) and Mass Media Romaneasca pe Internet (www.scribens.polymtl.ca/~ureche/ziare/) both organized by domestic and international news, along with radio and television sites. Ziare.com offers multiple links, and for a synthesis of the days' major political stories from the major dailies, DSCLEX-Romanian Legislation (www.dsclex.ro/presa/english/revistapresei.htm) gives a quick look synopsis. Even monarchists have entered the computer age with their site www.zap.to/Romania/ which provides news, editorials, and facts about the monarchy in exile in Switzerland. The government also maintains a website Gov.Ro which offers information about the presidency and the branches of the government.

The state-run media enterprises in television and radio, while they offer more and better programming than before the Revolution, still avoid challenging the state in their news reporting. Private television, often jointly owned with foreign partners, broadcasts diverse programs from Europe, America, Latin America, and Romania. Even commercial television news programs, however, are subject to self-censorship depending on the station's debt and its effect on the government. The quality of commercial television for example varies widely but the public does have choices, especially when compared with the state broadcasting system.

Regarding the latest technology, the internet is available with no restrictions except one's ability to buy a computer, "surf" the internet at work, or pay for minutes at an internet café to browse. Romanians have access to global programming through television, radio, satellite and cable television, and the internet. These more recent technologies have increasingly affected Romania and Eastern Europe and will continue to do so if the standard of living improves over time.

One of the continuous subjects of media news are the national minority populations, which in Romania, like other Balkan countries, represent large numbers of people. The next chapter discusses the recent history of minorities and how this history has affected their reporting in the media.

CHAPTER V

Minorities in the Media

“...a State which fails to understand that it must itself act as the greatest fighter for the deeply understood rights of its minorities, would violate not only the laws of humankind, which should guide the whole civilized community, but would also violate the very law of its self-preservation.”

-Nicolae Titulescu¹⁶⁴

The Romanian state, pressured by the people and various organizations, has just recently begun to address the needs of minorities who are now demanding respect and fair treatment from their government, and the official and commercial media as well. A history of chauvinistic nationalism developed over the years and led to a fragmented view of society as opposed to a holistic, inclusive view of groups in the social fabric. Official policy towards minorities during the Interwar years, World War Two and the Communist period, wreaked havoc among the minorities, creating divisions, hatreds, and even annihilation. The media portrayal of minorities during the transition was subject to these forces but has changed with the influences of European transnational governmental and non-governmental organizations. This chapter will review the social history of minorities to understand the powerful forces that have affected the media, and then examine minorities as portrayed in the press during the transition period.

Print media, television, radio, and the internet convey news to the public while recent history has shaped the writing and perception of these stories. The issue of national identity is a major influence in news stories today because it has been a key question in Romanian history since before national unification, when the nation

¹⁶⁴ Lya Benjamin, “Anti-Semitism as Reflected in the Records of Councils of Ministers, 1940-1944: An Analytical Overview,” *The Destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews During the Antonescu Era*, ed. Ralph L. Braham (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 1997), 1.

incorporated Transylvania during the founding of modern Romania in 1918. A brief history of the social policy toward the national minorities provides perspective emphasizing the position of two important minorities that have a documented past, the Jews, and Magyars.

William Oldson has detailed the problems of Jews from the origins of the country's founding, outlining an entire generation of Romanian leaders including the politicians Kogalniceanu and Maiorescu, the writer Mihai Eminescu, and historian Nicolae Iorga, who opposed citizenship for Jews. Jews lived mostly in Moldova and many Christians feared them because of suspicions over their "failure" to assimilate into Moldovan society and worried that they would promulgate social revolution.¹⁶⁵ The writer Bogdan Hasdeu suggested that Jews should not participate in the providential selection by God of the new Romanian state while the Constitution of 1866 stated that "only foreigners of Christian rites may obtain naturalization."¹⁶⁶ According to these parameters, all Jews were aliens. Oldson suggested that after the loss of Bessarabia in 1878, Romanians reacted negatively to any European power telling them how to run their country after they turned their backs on Romania in its time of need. Romanian discrimination of Jews began with the denial of citizenship, a key aspect of the nationalism for the two newly united principalities.

The mark of a democratic society is the treatment it affords its minorities, often its weakest or numerically smallest members. By this measure, the history of twentieth century Jews in Romania reveals an exclusionary policy, affected by currents of fascism prevalent in other European countries at the time. An obvious irony is that Jews played an important role in the Romanian economy and life. As of 1913, 12 per cent of Jews were industrial workers, 12 per cent were enterprise owners (3X the Romanian average), and 31 per cent worked in commerce and transport (7X the Romanian average).¹⁶⁷ Jews held 31 per cent of the total industrial and commercial enterprises in the interwar period,

¹⁶⁵ William O. Oldson, *A Providential Anti-Semitism: Nationalism and Polity in Nineteenth Century Romania* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1991), 108.

¹⁶⁶ Oldson, 39.

¹⁶⁷ *Romania: A Historic Perspective*, eds. Dinu C. Giurescu and Stephen Fischer-Galati (Boulder: Eastern European Monographs, 1998), 539.

participated in political life through bourgeois and socialist politics, and promoted culture and religion with their presses, synagogues, and cultural institutions.

Soon after the beginning of the newly formed nation in 1919, citizenship issues surfaced for the Jews. The Constitution of 1923 stated in Article 56 that Jews were not citizens but they and other minorities had the right to become Romanian citizens. In 1938, King Carol and President Octavian Goga decided to review the stipulations for citizenship. A law proposed by George Alexianu and enacted in the same year, prohibited the speaking of any language other than Romanian in the street.¹⁶⁸ At this point the laws became increasingly harsh. In 1940, the state enacted Decree 2650 which created legal categories of Jews, limiting their civil rights, and Decree 2651, that prohibited marriage between Jews and Romanians.¹⁶⁹ Most vulnerable were Category I Jews who arrived in Romania after 1918. Category II Jews were those who could prove their families fought in the 19th century wars of independence, and all others were Category III.

General Ion Antonescu implemented his policy of “Romanization” by confiscating Jewish businesses and factories as the economic expression of his program while Legionnaires forced Jews to sell or donate their homes to local Germans to demonstrate support for Hitler’s vision. Decree 3347 forced Jewish peasants to donate their lands to the state beginning in 1940.¹⁷⁰ Other decrees forced Jews to quit their jobs and leave their homes while authorities limited shopping to the hours of 10-12 o’clock. Jewish doctors had to wear name-tags stating their religion and were prohibited from treating Christians, which in the end forced doctors out of the professional medical association. The government also prohibited Jews from attending universities but did allow them to build their own schools.

The military began its involvement in anti-Semitic activities when in July 1940 a Major Gorlov ordered the arrest and torture of thirteen Jews in Judetul Dorohoi while a Major Carp mutilated eight people in northern Bukovina. In 1941, Romanian and German troops loaded thousands of Jews from Iasi onto sealed trains for Calarasi. Many died from heat and dehydration with the result that eventually 13,000 lost their lives in

¹⁶⁸ Radu Ioanid, *Evreii Sub Regimul Antonescu*, (Bucharest: Editor Hasefer, 1998), 25.

¹⁶⁹ Ioanid, *Evreii Sub Regimul Antonescu*, 26.

¹⁷⁰ Ioanid, 33.

the Iasi pogrom.¹⁷¹ Later, Romanian authorities forced 120,000 Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina to march to Transnistria in winter and 90,000 perished.

In 1944-1945, the Antonescu government changed its policy and resisted deportation orders from Germany and attempted to help Romanian Jews emigrate to Palestine which was difficult because both the Nazis and British attempted to block their resettlement.¹⁷² The government's about-face makes an overall judgment of the Holocaust in Romania more difficult to assess when compared to the single-minded ruthlessness of the Horthy government in Hungarian-controlled Romania.

Radu Ioanid, using figures from Raul Hilberg, states that during World War Two, the Jewish population in Romania fell from 756,000, out of a total country population of 18 million in 1930, to 355,000, of 17 million in 1945.¹⁷³ The government killed or aided in the death of approximately 400,000 Jews who died in Romanian Labor Camps in northern Moldova, Bessarabia, or in other areas where Magyar officials in Transylvania sent them.

Before the Holocaust, Jews were historically strong in urban centers especially Iasi and Bucharest, where they dominated economic, cultural, and professional activities. After the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, most of the remaining Jewish population emigrated in stages. Many disliked the socio-economic restructuring under the Communists, some left to escape memories of the Holocaust, others felt the attraction of the Jewish state, or perhaps they had a Zionist impulse. A high percentage of those who stayed continued to work in the liberal professions.

Under the Communists, the state did not interfere with Jewish life, and according to Dr. Alexandru Elias, prominent member of the Bucharest Jewish community and psychiatrist, community life in Romania was better than in other Eastern European states.¹⁷⁴ Jewish culture under the Communists revived to an extent with a few synagogues teaching Judaic courses on the Talmud and Hebrew language. However, Dr. Elias also stressed that under national communism, there was an undercurrent or unofficial policy to marginalize Jews and destroy synagogues, along with Christian

¹⁷¹ Randolph L. Braham, ed., *The Destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews During the Antonescu Era* (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 1997), xiv.

¹⁷² Giurescu, *Romania: A Historic Perspective*, 543.

¹⁷³ Raul Hillberg, *La Destructions des Juifs d'Europe*, 1046.

churches, under the Ceausescu regime. In a sense, the Communist regime was not anti-Semitic per se, rather it enforced anti-religious policy against all groups, including the Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Protestants, and Uniates. After 1989, anti-semitism came out into the open with the Romania Mare or Greater Romania political movement.

This movement has represented a powerful political party that has distorted history and attracted numbers of voters, making this a real issue and not some academic debate. Following the fall of Communism, two perspectives emerged on the legacy of the Jews both during and after World War Two. The first movement was open anti-semitism espoused by the modern day Greater Romania Party. They have continued to depict the Jew as the “enemy within,” blaming them for Romania’s former and present problems. Denise Rosenthal calls it the idea of the “mythical Jew,” because Jews declined precipitously during the War and now represent only a fraction of the population.¹⁷⁵ Greater Romania’s leadership has recently stated that it wishes to stop its anti-Semitism but based on its history, this may be an election ploy.

The second debate concerns the argument among liberal-democrats, called the Holocaust-Gulag debate. In this argument, those of the pro-Gulag camp argue that Communism destroyed the country, all suffered equally under it, accuse the Jews of “memory confiscation” and of trying to dominate the suffering. The “Holocaust” proponents oppose its equivalence with the Gulag and the accusations of Jewish-led communism.

This argument has divided the press with journals *Romania Literara* and *Revista 22* promoting the Gulag view, while Radu Ioanid, a researcher at the Holocaust museum in Washington, DC, Michael Shafir, regional expert at Radio Free Europe, and Stelian Tanase, editor at *Sfera Politicii*, subscribe to the Holocaust version. Communist ideology minimized these debates, submerging them until after 1989. Then in 2000, the Greater Romania Party burst on the scene, attracting one-third of the voters with its renewed attacks against Jews which the press first ignored and then responded to vigorously, countering the anti-Semitic vitriol.

¹⁷⁴ Dr. Alexandru Elias, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 15 September 2003.

¹⁷⁵ Denise Rosenthal, “The Mythical Jew: Anti-Semitism, Intellectuals, and Democracy in Post-Communist Romania.” *The Nationalities Papers*, Vol 29, No.3, 2001, p. 428.

After 1989, minorities were free to organize, speak freely, and deal openly with the new representatives of power. The Jewish community, reduced in numbers by the Holocaust, emigration, and age, generated little news for itself outside of occasional attacks against it from extremists which has used all the minorities as scapegoats at various times, especially the Romania Mare Party of Cornel Vadim Tudor.

Jews have typically been the target of the extreme nationalists, even though they are few in number, around 8-10 thousand, and old demographically, with 70 per cent over the age of 60. The public has grown accustomed to allegations and insults from the Romania Mare Party.

President Iiescu himself caused an uproar recently when he suggested that there was no Holocaust in Romania. The papers were timid about challenging this assertion except for the iconoclastic weekly, *Catavencu* which superimposed traditional Hasidic dress and hair over a photo of the President on the front page of the journal which drew attention to the matter by ridiculing his statements. Romania has not dealt with its history of aggression toward the Jews and statements from the mainstream leadership confirm this.

Today the Jewish community in Romania is small and aged. The elderly stay because they have friends, understand the language and have established lives. Where possible, young people have emigrated abroad especially to Israel and the United States for economic opportunity and a more modern life. The remaining community cannot adequately maintain the many cemeteries and synagogues that it would like to keep open as a part of its cultural heritage. The Center for Hebraic History in Bucharest is active however, and promotes the study of Jews in Romanian life through access to its archives and other avenues of research in the country.

The director, Dr. John Serbanescu, emphasized that with the falsification of history under the Communists, the archives were especially important to study the recent and more distant past. The publisher Editura Hasefer prints books related to Jewish history in Romania and works closely with the Bucharest Center as well as the other centers of Hebraic studies in Cluj, Timisoara, and Iasi. Serbanescu related that while these Centers have some important material, the researcher would find more primary source documents in smaller provincial or town archives because the government

destroyed many of the older documents maintained in Bucharest during World War Two. Without a documented history, it is easier for those with an agenda even people unknowingly influenced by demagoguery, to write damaging news about Jews or any minority.

It is no surprise that the mainstream press didn't adequately cover or refute the statement by President Iliescu concerning the Holocaust. His comments reflected a serious lack of historical memory. *Adevarul* reported that the President, speaking to a reporter from the *Haaretz* paper of Jerusalem, said that there was no Holocaust in Romania.¹⁷⁶ He later modified his statement saying that many suffered throughout the continent in World War Two. One paper, *Realitatea Evreiasca* (Jewish Reality) that covers Jewish history, social events, culture, book reviews, politics, and community life, challenged the President and began a lively discussion with its admittedly limited readership.

Recent articles in this paper included a history on the extent of Romanian participation in the Holocaust with a story that the government transported Jews to Auschwitz in May 1944, sending 30,000 of which 2,000 survived. Another story was a cultural article on Sergiu Commisiona, who celebrated fifty years of conducting with the Bucharest Philharmonic. Other newspapers that deal with Jewish issues are the intellectual journals "22" and *Dilema*, which debate issues such as writer Mircea Eliade's involvement with the fascist Legionnaires and his place in Romanian literature. Cioran, a renowned Romanian philosopher, also flirted with fascism and anti-semitism, and this too has created debate about his contributions.

In a surprising development in early 2004, Cornel Vadim Tudor recently apologized to the Israeli Ambassador to Romania, Rodica Radian-Gordon, for his and his paper's history of anti-Semitism.¹⁷⁷ Media Relations, his political media advisors, suggested that he recant his anti-Semitism and he has, on paper at least. Writing in his own paper, *Romania Mare*, he defended the building of a statue he recently erected in Brasov, that honors the fallen Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin. The Israeli Ambassador was upset that he hadn't coordinated the construction of it with the Embassy

¹⁷⁶ *Adevarul*, 26 July 2003.

¹⁷⁷ "Scrisoare Deschisa," *Romania Mare*, 16 January 2004, p. 12.

or Rabin's family. Vadim Tudor stated in his open letter, that he has recently controlled anti-Semitic articles in his paper from reaching print and will stop further attacks against the "chosen people."

He admitted its excesses in the past and promised to accomplish several projects in addition to stopping his paper's attacks. He stated his support to build a Holocaust Museum in Bucharest and take one-hundred Romania Mare political youth to Auschwitz to educate them. He also apologized for denying the Holocaust in past editions and states that he desires to make his party a model of racial and ethnic coexistence. For the 2004 elections, he will specifically address the issue of anti-Semitism in his Party's platform, he said.

Jewish issues and particularly the Holocaust will continue to receive attention in the press especially around election time when tensions surface more readily. Another minority, the Magyars or Hungarians, also get stereotypical treatment in the media around election time when politicians try to arouse their constituents to score points with the voters. Magyars, most of whom live in the northern and western parts of the country in Transylvania, saw their fate change with the defeat of Fascism and the emergence of Communism. They have lived in a contested zone that has gone back and forth between Hungary and Romania but which now is firmly under Romanian control. In 1920, the Treaty of Trianon granted Transylvania to Romania from the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Romania inherited 1.3 million Hungarians.¹⁷⁸ Following the defeat of the Nazis by the Red Army, the Communists began taking control in 1944 and developed different programs over time to deal with the minorities.¹⁷⁹ These programs changed over the years depending on political goals.

The first program lasted ten years, from 1948 to 1958, when leaders tried to attract minority support to consolidate the regime. There were very few Communists in Romania when the Red Army took power so the authorities built up the party by recruiting workers, poor peasants and minorities, often Hungarians, Ukrainians, and Jews where possible. Simultaneously, they developed a policy of ensuring "healthy social origins" for Party membership, to justify the rise to power of these new groups while

¹⁷⁸ Catherine Durandin, *Roumaine un Piege?* (Paris: Edition Hesse, 2000), 74.

¹⁷⁹ Mircea Martin, "Cultura Romana intre communism si nationalism," *Revista 22*, 11-17 February 2003.

controlling or eliminating old and competitive elites. The government initially encouraged minority participation in the Security apparatus to materially benefit those interested in exchange for their loyalty and information.

After the Communist takeover, freedom of the press ended for the Hungarian and German newspapers and journals. The official press bureau edited and published news in Bucharest at the Scinteia building with new socialist dailies such as *Munkasalet*, (Worker's Life) *Neuer Weg*, in German, the Ukrainian *Novii Vik*, (New Life) and others. In theory, the Constitution of 1952 guaranteed equal rights to the national minorities as well as free use of their own language, and the right to have books, newspapers, journals, theater, and education in their own languages.¹⁸⁰ The Hungarian minority, about 8 per cent of the Romanian population, got the Hungarian Autonomous Region (HAR) in 1952 which gave the illusion of independence but in reality was mostly for show.

The government created the region for its international propaganda role and to control Hungarians. This designated area included only about one-third of the regions' Hungarians, and those outside this administrative designation suffered discrimination. Away from the HAR, the government eliminated bilingualism, signs and notices in Hungarian disappeared, bilingual Party meetings ended, and officials terminated the use of minority languages.¹⁸¹ International events followed that changed the landscape for Magyars living in Romania.

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 had ramifications in Romania which negatively affected minorities, especially the Magyars, and intellectuals. The uprising in Hungary sprang from liberal voices within that country reacting to de-Stalinization. The protestors believed that Soviet President Nikita Krushchev's questioning of the Stalinist system gave them an opening to challenge socialist policies mandated from Moscow. The Soviet military crushed the movement in Budapest killing many, destroying the city, and creating high anxiety in neighboring Eastern European countries, including Romania.

For a brief time, student movements in Romania, supportive of the Revolution, emerged in Timisoara, Cluj, and other areas with Magyar populations. President Gheorghiu-Dej decided to counter any liberalizing trends with firmer control and

¹⁸⁰ Elmer Illyes, *National Minorities in Romania: Change in Transylvania* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1982), 115.

¹⁸¹ Illyes, 120.

repression against minorities and intellectuals by instigating terror against these groups.¹⁸² Romanian authorities accused the Hungarian minority in Transylvania of “counter-revolutionary attitudes” and began arresting people beginning with 10,000 detainees, and continued until it reaching a staggering 40,000 people.¹⁸³ His control over society was so total that he negotiated the departure of the Red Army in 1958, convincing Soviet authorities that Romania would continue to be a loyal ally.

Following the Soviet withdrawal of troops from the country, minorities gradually lost their special rights. Some Romanians resented the unification of Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj that provided Hungarian language courses. This and other universities ended their bilingual classes in Hungarian and German languages. The issue of social origins, i.e., working-class, bourgeois, etc., also became less important over time and minorities, along with other groups, lost influence. The criteria of the “file” so critical in the 1950’s for Party membership and career advancement, gradually diminished in importance.

In 1964, Gheorghiu-Dej completed his rule by breaking with Moscow and charting an independent, national course for Romania which became evident in foreign policy when Romania began official contacts with Israel, West Germany, and the United States. The emphasis on nationalism over the class struggle further eroded the position of minorities. The government began to remove Hungarians and Jews from key positions in the Party and Securitate so that by the late 1960’s, few had jobs in the important ministries of Defense, Interior, and Foreign Affairs.

The succeeding leader, President Nicolae Ceausescu, firmly consolidated his power by emphasizing Romania’s unity, which naturally precluded having autonomous areas. In 1966 he abolished the Hungarian Autonomous Region. From the mid-1970’s he imposed a policy of Romanianization in Transylvania where the government resettled large numbers of Wallachians and Moldavans to the region boosting the Romanian population of Transylvania from 32 to 49 per cent between 1975 and 1989.¹⁸⁴ Improved diplomatic relations with West Germany resulted in the emigration of ethnic Germans or

¹⁸² Mircea Martin, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 2 October 2003.

¹⁸³ Illyes, 124.

¹⁸⁴ Crampton, *The Balkans*, 195.

“Saxons” so that by 1989, the Germans living in Romania who had comprised about 2.2 per cent of the population, had virtually left.

Ceausescu also instituted the program of *omogenizarea natiunii* or national homogenization. This move represented a turn towards cultural chauvinism with the intent of creating a socialist people. At this time, the phrase “irrespective of nationality” encompassed the new official attitude as opposed to the former affirmations of respect and protection. The program restricted permits for national minorities to settle in urban areas and prohibited their access to new housing in cities, the base for the socialist nation. Transylvania towns had to change their German and Hungarian names to new Romanian ones.

The government forbade contacts between Romanian national minorities and foreigners, and closed Magyar and German museums, libraries. Authorities disrupted or prohibited research by national minority scholars while announcing that historical documents, archives, manuscripts, and church documents were property of the State. This robbed the Hungarians and Saxons of their historical heritage and made Transylvanian historical scholarship difficult.¹⁸⁵ Authorities harassed, intimidated, and arrested minorities to forcibly subjugate them to this policy. In one case, Securitate followed and arrested a group of German nationality writers, the Grupul de Actiune Banat, from Timisoara, consisting of Herta Muller, William Totok, Johann Lippet, and Richard Wagner.¹⁸⁶

The regime also decided to destroy the peasantry with its program of “systematization,” a variant of national homogenization. Introduced in 1968, the government planned on razing Romania’s 13,000 rural villages along with their homes and churches, in its move to industrialize the country and create an industrial proletariat. The inhabitants, under this plan, had to move to self-contained agro-industrial complexes and into apartment blocs, effectively destroying the peasant family autonomy of both Romanians and Magyars. This was another highly unpopular measure that led to riots in Magyar populated Timisoara in later years.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Illyes, 144.

¹⁸⁶ Martin, “Cultura romana,” *Revista* 22, 11-17 February 2003.

¹⁸⁷ Ghita Ionescu, *Communism in Romania 1944-1962* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 183.

Ceausescu stated that ethnic particularism would eventually vanish and that all citizens could then commit themselves to socialist Romania first while retaining minimal ties to their ethnic base. Ethnic particularism was bourgeois after all and ran counter to the new socialist man ideal. Ceausescu worried about the Yugoslav and Hungarian minorities in Transylvania because of their geographic and cultural ties to their respective countries of relation which both enjoyed higher standards of living. The Hungarians reacted by protesting the policy of ethnic homogenization and created the only samizdat under Ceausescu's rule.

In the 1980's, Jews, Germans, and Hungarians fled the country. The government reacted by carrying out reprisals against relatives who remained in the country by dismissing them from their jobs. Having a relative living abroad was a black mark. The government advocated a chauvinistic Romanian nationalism and attempted to create a climate of xenophobia against both the West and the Soviet Union. Hatred against foreigners worked against the national interest and resulted in what writer Mircea Martin calls anti-national nationalism. Romanians resisted these attitudes when possible by staging hunger strikes and fleeing the country at the risk of imprisonment.

Ceausescu's nationalism exacerbated tensions among the nationalities reviving old animosities and prejudices. These social stresses manifest themselves today in what Martin calls the Transylvania Complex of open hate-mongering against minorities. In 1992, Cornel Vadim Tudor, in one of his more blatant publicized moments, declared that the government should militarize the Magyar-majority areas of Harghita and Covasna.¹⁸⁸ The fact remains however, that the minority situation in Romania is part of a larger issue where various national minorities live in the surrounding countries of Bulgaria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and the Ukraine, creating a Balkans mosaic of ethnicities.

After the 1989 Revolution, the Magyars' influence in Transylvania continued to grow as they forged commercial ties with their more advanced and industrious Hungarian neighbors and organized their own print media. The Transylvania Magyars created their own press to cover news in the Hungarian language, especially at the local level. They constitute approximately 20 per cent of the population of Cluj-Napoca, an intellectual and commercial center in Transylvania. The region has the most important Magyar language

¹⁸⁸ Durandin, *Roumaine un Piege?*. 85.

paper, *Szabadsag*, which means freedom in Hungarian. Founded 22 December 1989 at the outset of the Revolution, the daily has a circulation of 10,000, giving it the top sales of any paper in the city and is the most important Magyar paper in the region.¹⁸⁹ *Szabadsag* is a privately owned company controlled by Minerva, a non-governmental organization and is the largest of the nine Hungarian language dailies in Romania. The paper provides local, national, and international news in the Hungarian language to serve the local community, while also promoting Magyar culture and language. On 15 March 1995, the paper went on-line and was the first Romanian paper to do so.

Aron Ballo, Editor-in-Chief, opined that Romania had a free press but qualified this with several mitigating factors. Until 2002, libel, calumny, and slander laws reduced the effectiveness of the press. The government has since eliminated these laws which should have a positive effect on the paper's ability to produce news without fear. Another issue was that newsprint for his paper came from only one source, the Letea factory of Bacau which had the potential for problems, since the factory could always have "problems" and then the supply of newsprint would stop for an indeterminate time. The State also taxed the company a 19 per cent value added tax which is high for a start-up paper with only a local appeal and market.

Both national chauvinism and a fiefdom mentality hampered the newspaper, when in the early 1990's the paper struggled to get newsstand authorization for sales. The mayor, George Funar, a member of the Romania Mare Party, also fined the company for having a bi-lingual sign, as he did businesses, schools, and churches, but lost the case in court. Advertising, the life blood of newspapers, along with sales, also ran into problems. Though *Szabadsag's* circulation was robust, the advertising was weak. Romanians wouldn't buy ads in a Hungarian language newspaper, against good business sense, according to Ballo. Prejudices, it seems, could override people's common sense to their detriment.

Mayor Funar of the Romania Mare Party, has continued the symbolic war against this paper once threatening a *Szabadsag* journalist that he would "straighten his bones." Most egregious however, according to Aron Ballo, was the governments' undercounting

¹⁸⁹ Aron Ballo, interview by the author, Cluj, Romania, 8 July 2002.

of the 2002 census in which the Magyars received 19 per cent, just under the mandatory 20 per cent required to qualify for special status. The census takers did not count the Magyars who live in Romania but work abroad in Hungary, which drew criticism by the minority which accused the government of undercounting.

Cluj is perhaps the most picturesque, culturally dynamic city in the country but the mayor has effectively polarized the ethnic Romanian and Hungarian populations by attempting to remove important Hungarian monuments and even degrading the Romanian national colors by painting public garbage cans and other objects in the street in the familiar red, yellow, and blue, as if he had to remind the Magyars that they lived in Romania. Ballo and his staff seem undeterred and continue to publish on a regular basis.

In a discussion on the press coverage about Hungarians in the mainstream press during the early transition years, social critic Mircea Toma of *Catavencu* commented that the two major dailies, *Adevarul* and *Jurnalul National* reported negatively about Hungarian issues employing nationalist diatribes against the minority. The government, however, promoted the Project of Ethnic Relations in 1995 to end the attacks against Hungarian culture and politics in Transylvania and now most papers are relatively free of anti-Hungarian bias, with the exception of Greater Romania's publications. Earlier in this dissertation, there was discussion of how several of the major dailies began to cover George Frunda's Hungarian Party and its participation in the national elections of 1996 and 2000.

The quality and content of the ethnic Hungarian newspapers still lacks professionalism and remains provincial in scope. According to the Media Monitoring Agency, a watchdog agency in Bucharest that compares reporting among the different media, the ethnic Hungarian papers focus on their own internal topics which "passively" (uncritically) cover the news, employing heroic Hungarian symbols to the exclusion of national and international coverage. Only *Kronika*, according to this watchdog agency, backed by Hungarian investors, attempted to produce a more diverse paper. Other publications have little investigative reporting and follow the "previous" dusty and symbolic pre-1989 style coverage.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Mircea Toma, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 24 September 2003.

Nationalist topics are emerging again with major elections set to occur in 2004. Symbols take on renewed meanings with the statue of an Hungarian General Officer in downtown Arad, which has evinced strong comments. He is either a hero or an enemy, depending on one's perspective. Politicians strongly influence the debate on this and other symbolic matters which come to the public through the press. At the same time, international events, such as Romania's acceptance into NATO, has forced Romania and Hungary to settle an old border dispute while creating three Protocols of Understanding. These protocols between the government and the Magyar UDMR Party, have led to gains for the Magyar minority, to include the right to display bi-lingual signs in communities with a large Hungarian presence. Magyars may also use Hungarian language in official administrative matters, in the judicial system, and in some of the Magyar schools which are now locally run as are their churches.¹⁹¹ Unlike the diminishing Jewish population, the Magyars are thriving in Transylvania and will continue to be a political and social force, represented in politics and in the press.

International pressures, in this instance from the European Union, have aided another ethnic minority, the Rroma. The Rroma, or gypsies, were until recently a silent group without access to the media and a target of much ridicule in the press. Now, with government encouragement and help from NGO's, the Rroma are beginning to convey their story through the press to counterbalance negative, stereotypical images.

The use of the word gypsy acquired such negative connotations that linguist and philologist Professor Gheorghe Saratu developed the name Rroma to identify members of this group while creating a written language, Rromane, developed from nine dialects.¹⁹² The Rroma now have their own NGO, "Aven Amentza," that reports on Rroma issues. Traditionally the Rroma have had little political voice and there was scant interest in them but increasingly they are making themselves heard on a political level. The European Union is subtly pressuring the government to include them in education and mainstream life where possible.

Anti-Rroma attitudes however, are endemic and stereotypes still dominate most journalism. Television coverage consists mainly of gypsy crime, killings, and

¹⁹¹ "Romania Moving Toward NATO and the EU," CSCE Digest: United States Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe," 22 December 2003. www.csce.gov

¹⁹² George Lacatus, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 16 September 2003.

emotionally-charged stories.¹⁹³ Many Romanians from all sectors of life, believe that the Rroma spoil the image of Romania internationally. Public figures have been reluctant to admit their origins from the Gypsy minority, fearing the consequences of such an admission which might lead to exclusion from social life or a decline in their careers. Romani politicians sometimes insult their own communities to show that they belong to high society.

Valeriu Nicolae and Hannah Slavik have argued that hate speech and discrimination have characterized media coverage of the Gypsies since 1989.¹⁹⁴ On 19 February 1990, TVR-1, a public television station aired news of the Provisional FSN government justifying one of several coal miner's invasions of Bucharest by stating that it was an attempt to control "hooligans and unemployed Gypsies" from overthrowing the regime.¹⁹⁵ Later, a daily newspaper published a report that the now executed and reviled Ceausescus were actually of gypsy origin, which the media later disproved. On 13 June 1990, a group of protestors attacked the TVR station, accusing State Television of spreading propaganda for the ruling regime. Following the attack, the General Director of the station, Emmanuel Valeriu stated that Gypsies had attacked and looted the station, without proof.

Adevarul, a major paper, published a more recent story of a rapist and killer of three children, Mihai Olariu, speculating that he was a Gypsy while in fact he was an ethnic Romanian. The paper never issued a retraction. The Media Monitoring Agency of Bucharest also reports that many articles represent the Gypsies in a negative light which continues an historical trend. Legendary tales of 15th century hero Vlad the Impaler, emphasize his slaughter of Gypsies, along with criminals, Turks, etc. Well-known twentieth century writers Emil Cioran and Mircea Eliade, early Fascist proponents, both wrote pejoratively about the Gypsies which added to the climate of intolerance.

Today, NGO's fight the idea that Rroma children don't want to learn and have made ads showing Romanian children going to school. These organizations have worked with commercial television stations such as Prima and PRO-TV to professionalize

¹⁹³ Mircea Toma, Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ "Being a Gypsy: The Worst Social Stigma in Romania," European Roma Rights Center, 25 May 2003. <http://errc.org> Cited 1 Jan 2004.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

reporting which has traditionally been racist. Public television and radio appear to be more objective in their reporting. By contrast, Romania Mare in its publications used open hate speech against the Rroma portraying them as “dangerous” and using “we/them” categories to objectify and isolate them.

To improve this situation, The Center for Independent Journalism, a Western sponsored Romanian-based journalism NGO, offered George Lacatus a journalistic scholarship to study in Bucharest where he now studies and writes for a daily, *Curierul National* (National Currier). Lacatus, a former Rroma radio talk show host and elementary school teacher from the town of Ramnicu-Sarat, was eager to become a professional journalist and write the news from a more balanced perspective. According to Lacatus, the Rroma in Romania are organized by occupation and identify first with their profession. Some popular occupations include goldsmithing, carnival showman and animal trainer, potter, metal worker specializing in housing gutters and roofs, musicians, iron collectors, and foundry workers. Lacatus, like many Rroma, does not speak the language fluently but sees a resurgence in interest by the Rroma in their culture which the government supports with Rroma language and cultural studies offerings at the university level.

The *Curierul National*, which employs him, was the first paper to devote regular space to Rroma issues and assigned him to Rroma specific stories as well as other topics. Lacatus stated that reporting on the Rroma traditionally included stories on rapes, theft, and the mafia, with hardly any mention of the positive aspects of Rroma life. He has written stories about the high quality and low cost of Rroma construction crews, the fight to get the University of Bucharest Rector to implement the decree from the Ministry of Education offering Rroma scholarships, as well as a story on Rroma iron foundries which created a class of wealthy Rroma businessmen who are bringing entrepreneurial capitalism to the country and hiring Romanian workers. One of his more emotionally challenging articles was a story he wrote on the Rroma and Romanian children of Mizil, Prahova County, who contracted HIV at a hospital where they went for routine immunizations. The article included details on children who suffered from this tragedy because the hospital failed to sterilize infected hypodermic needles. This story has now

reached the international media. The Dutch airline KLM was recently showing a film on its flights in February 2004 depicting the children's story while providing the name and contact of an NGO that needs contributions to build facilities and otherwise provide for the children. This is just one example of how an NGO and a journalist made a difference.

Other mainstream newspapers are beginning coverage of Rroma issues. The major daily *Romania Libera*, recently reported on how Rroma iron and glass collectors perform their job. The story was informative and suggested that non-traditional ways of doing business could work, without demeaning its subjects. The writer explained that the Rroma metal collectors typically approached the periphery of a city in their mobile homes and parked. They then entered the city by horse cart, buying old iron and glass, practicing street commerce and incidentally recycling material.¹⁹⁶ In the cities where the Rroma work, one can hear women singing out "cumparam fier vechi," (we buy old iron) through neighborhoods, frequently beneath towering apartment blocs, with the background sound of horseshoes rhythmically hitting the pavement. The horse cart and voice are traditional but effective.

Reporting on education, *Gardianul* wrote about scholarships for Rroma students, explaining that the Education Ministry offered Rroma language training for teachers and set aside places for Rroma in the free but competitive high schools and universities. For example, the National Theater Academy and the University of Music in Bucharest each offer one scholarship, the Academy of Art offers three, the Polytechnic University offers five, the University of Bucharest has twenty-five, and the University of Babes-Bolyai at Cluj gives sixty.¹⁹⁷

In a more typical article that highlighted the occasional absurd battles among Rroma royalty, *Evenimentul Zilei's* Madalin Popa reported on a controversial issue over the legitimacy of two kings and their internal fight for power. The reporter stated that the Rroma crowned Ilie Stanescu International King of the Rroma, as head of his 78 million subjects worldwide.¹⁹⁸ His crown weighed 2.2 pounds of gold loaded with precious

¹⁹⁶ "At the Periphery of the Capital," *Romania Libera On-Line*, romanialibera.com/2soc/02s2stig.htm Cited 1 Sep 2003

¹⁹⁷ Alexandru Calmacu, "Tiganii au mai multa locuri puse deoparte," *Gardianul*, 4 September 2003.

¹⁹⁸ Madalin Popa, "King of the Gypsies," *Evenimentul Zilei*, 1 September 2003.

stones, while the article described his luxury mansion, limos, and a posh lifestyle. The other Roma king, Florin Cioba, declared that his rival was “unnecessary.”¹⁹⁹

A more serious and unsettling story emerged in October 2003 about the arranged marriage of a Roma couple in which the girl was twelve years old. The papers noted that Roma cultural norms were clashing with Romanian law and Western European sensibilities. Meanwhile, *Ziua*'s Catalin Stoian has written about the Roma's desire for what they believe is their legal right to circulate freely throughout Europe, as guaranteed by the European Convention. The article suggested that both Roma and The National Office for the Roma, need to work harder to disseminate information on civil rights.²⁰⁰ The National Office, a government agency, provides contacts for Roma issues including legal advice, information on resources, grants, and cultural information.²⁰¹ One can see that some Roma traditions and the looming presence of the European Union, will have to be reconciled one day, probably through compromises by both sides.

The far Right also has its opinion of the Roma and they use modern technology through their website to disseminate their message. One group of extremists, called the New Right, have used the website that deals with what they call the gypsy problem,” homosexuals, religious sects which they define as non-Romanian Orthodox.

Homosexuals and a broad coalition of sexual minorities under the umbrella of an LGBT non-governmental organization, have also been pressing for acceptance and influence. Since the development of the local organization ACCEPT, lesbians, gays, and others have opened communication with the press and the public to change perceptions and battle damaging myths about their lifestyles and activities.

Extremists and even many Romanians who normally consider themselves tolerant, have strongly negative feelings about sexual minorities which comes from a history of silence, denial, and ignorance of their existence under the Communists and opposition by the Orthodox Church. The gay community, along with other sexual minorities collectively known by the acronym LGBT (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transsexuals) believe that their public image is inaccurate and that the press depicts them

¹⁹⁹ Madalin Popa, “Coup of the Tent,” *Evenimentul Zilei*, 2 September 2003.

²⁰⁰ Catalin Stoian, “Give to the Gypsies What is Theirs,” *Ziua On-line*, www.ziua.ro/archive Cited 1 Sep 2003.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

as troublemakers and prostitutes. In one highly publicized case, the press reported innuendo against Prime Minister Adrian Nastase in the mid-1990's suggesting that he was gay, calling him a "sweetie," which sprang from political attempts to defame his character. More recently, politician Cornel Vadim Tudor publicly attacked American Ambassador to Romania, Michael Guest, for his openly homosexual lifestyle and morality.

To counter these attitudes, ACCEPT, a gay rights NGO formed in 1994, created a website www.accept-romania.ro to educate the public, organize activities, increase group solidarity, and offer legal and medical services to its members.²⁰² Its mission is to create a more tolerant society in an extremely conservative culture where many believe that gays are either "ill" or sinners. The Orthodox Church, which represents about 80 per cent of Romanians, strongly opposes the LGBT movement and the Church today represents a serious challenge for the gay community.²⁰³

The group has a magazine, LGBT@ACCEPT and publicizes the fact that Ordinance 137, implemented in 2001, enacted anti-discrimination laws for the first time in history. The organization also discusses medical issues that affect gays and straights, including the HIV/AIDS problem. According to Ana Cazacu of ACCEPT, 12,000 Romanians have HIV mostly from unprotected sex. Her organization directs people to an NGO which gives anonymous free testing and free condoms provided by the European Union and USAID that say in Romanian, "Don't Give Up Sex, Give Up Risk."

According to Cazacu, press reporters have not received training on HIV/AIDS/STD issues. Many articles contain misinformation about AIDS transmission and stereotype street children and prostitutes as the only carriers. The media ignored ACCEPT's campaign in 2002 to provide medical facts to the public about sex and the LGBT community because of apathy or opposition. ACCEPT has also organized concerts that targeted tolerance to Romanian youth but went unreported in the press.

The mainstream press has not undertaken any kind of HIV/AIDS education and in the papers that do report on it, typically sensationalize AIDS cases while failing to discuss transmission behaviors. Reporters normally do not consult medical authorities

²⁰² ACCEPT www.accept-romania.ro

²⁰³ Ana Cazacu, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 17 September 2003.

and remain ignorant of the real issues. The Center for Independent Journalism (CIJ) in Bucharest has started to train reporters in this area. Outside of specialty journals and occasional articles in major newspapers, the American press has also avoided the social and medical aspects of LGBT issues with the exception of the gay marriage movement.

As demonstrated in the historical discussion of minorities in Romania, an ideology of superior/inferior, us/them nationalities (and sexual groups) has a strong hold on a significant minority in society and influences the writing and interpretation of news events. International pressures have mitigated these practices through laws or incentives and seem to be changing traditional attitudes. Of all the obstacles to a free press, which include restrictive media laws, financial pressures, political influence, and the fiefdom mentality, cultural biases towards minorities will remain longer and continue to influence minority news reporting because of the conservative nature of the society.

Groups such as NGO's have done much in the short period of time to implement changes, if not in people's attitudes, at least in providing the education and tools for those who already wanted these changes and for people with minds open to change. NGO's and their effect on the media is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

NGO's and Civil Society

During the 1990's, Non-Governmental Organizations or NGO's emerged to play an important part in the professionalization of journalism through education with Western partners. NGO's also worked with the political establishment to reform repressive media laws and in this way contributed to democracy through media and law reforms. The NGO's that contributed to a free press were the Center for Independent Journalism, the Media Monitoring Agency, Apple, Article 19, Freedom House, the Soros Open Network, and the Civic Alliance. Each of these in different ways has made an impact in bringing an open media to Romania.

A democracy by definition has a civil society and Romania, like other post-Communist societies, began to develop its public life and citizen participation by degrees through politics and with the help of NGO's. Irina Culic defined civil society as a group of citizens working against the State and debating issues of public interest.²⁰⁴ She has argued that civil society in Romania is non-existent because there is no public discourse about social or political issues. A review of the NGO's mentioned, both Romanian and international, showed that civil society does indeed exist, and that it contributed positively to a climate that mutually reinforced freedom of the press and other democratic values even in the face of entrenched interests, active opposition, and simple apathy.

The Center for Independent Journalism (CIJ), located in Bucharest, is one of several NGO's that has effectively promoted a democratic and civil society through its work with the media. The Center for Independent Journalism, founded in 1994, is a non-governmental, non-profit organization that has offered courses and specialized training

²⁰⁴ Irina Culic, "Romania," *Direct Democracy: The Eastern and Central European Experience*. Eds. Andreas Aver and Michael Butzer (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

for Romanian journalists in Bucharest and other cities around the country. Since its founding, it has trained minority and non-minority journalists in Western journalistic practices while also monitoring and advocating freedom of access to information and the repeal of legislation that restricts freedom of speech in the media.²⁰⁵ The Independent Journalism Foundation of New York supports CIJ and similar centers in Bratislava and Budapest. It also participates in The Roma Mainstream Media Internship Program, created in Budapest to promote the normalization of relations between the Roma community and the mainstream media. George Lacatus, the Roma journalist mentioned earlier, benefited from this program.

CIJ receives funding from the National Endowment for Democracy, in Washington, DC, for another program “Training for Local Media,” to offer journalism classes to students taught by American and Romanian journalists. The program lasts a year and recently offered training in Constanza, Tirgu-Mures (Transylvania), and Bacau, (Moldova) changing sites from year to year. It taught courses in news writing, interviewing techniques, writing skills, and investigative, political and economic reporting. CIJ also works with legislators offering advice on the drafting of bills that are media-related.

Liviu Avram, a CIJ trained writer and reporter for *Adevarul*, represents the new, professional investigative journalist to emerge during the transition.²⁰⁶ Originally an engineer, Avram wrote for the student paper at the University of Iasi. After the Revolution, he co-founded a paper in Bacau and represented the BBC in that city during the years 1996-2001. He later moved to Bucharest where he began working for *Adevarul*, one of the major Romanian dailies. After receiving training from the CIJ, he gravitated to writing stories about corruption for which he received an Honorable Mention for the Curt Schork Award for Investigative Journalism, from Columbia University in 2003 for his reporting on government corruption. His investigations have uncovered corruption and influence of the media through control of the newspaper distribution network, RODIPET, and at the street level of sales where mayoral control manipulated the granting of licenses to sell newspapers. His work revealed significant

²⁰⁵ The Center for Independent Journalism, www.cji.ro

²⁰⁶ Liviu Avram, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 23 September 2003.

problems in the town of Focsani where local authorities forced the closure of a newspaper they did not like.

The takeover of the newspaper, *Monitorul de Vrancea*, represented a problem of a “fiefdom mentality” by local politicians who flouted the law, subverting the paper’s ownership to absorb the paper for their own purposes. According to Cornel Condurache of Nord-Est Media Distributors, the local government in Focsani, a town in the eastern Moldava region, decided to take over the *Monitorul de Vrancea*, the town’s main paper.²⁰⁷ Authorities forced the paper to change its name to *Ziarul de Vrancea* which the distributor, RODIPET, refused to distribute because it had no contract with *Ziarul*. The local city council then cancelled the *Monitorul’s* postal distribution rights. The President of the Vrancea County Council where Focsani is located, sent the Financial Police to stop *Ziarul* workers from working. The police then demolished the newspaper’s kiosks and evicted journalists from their offices while local officials filed lawsuits against the journalists to continue harassing them.

Now the local council controls the paper and uses public money to support it. The case alarmed the CIJ which has helped to bring a lawsuit against the Focsani Council for breaking a distribution contract illegally. Such actions smack of strong arm tactics and continue to make headlines for this town because of its blatant disregard of the law. Purportedly, Marian Oprisan said to Condurache, “pack up your luggage and go to the railway station if you don’t want to die here.”²⁰⁸

To counter attacks on the media such as this and to modify oppressive media legislation, the Media Monitoring Agency, Romanian-based NGO, works in the area of free speech advocacy.²⁰⁹ It has worked to eliminate Penal Codes 205, 206, 207, 236, 237, and 238, that contain the slander, calumny and defamation laws often used against journalists, and which conflict with Articles 30 and 31 guaranteeing freedom of expression and freedom of information. It posted issues, legal rulings, violence against journalists, bias in reporting and other media-related stories on the internet and hard copy for the professional journalists, legislators, and the public to review. The Agency also

²⁰⁷ Cornel Condurache, telephone interview by the author, Focsani, Romania, 23 September 2003.

²⁰⁸ “Cazuri de agresiune impotriva presei, 2001-2003,” *Evenimentul Zilei*, 12 December 2003.

²⁰⁹ Media Monitoring Agency www.freeex.org

closely watched rulings by the National Council for Audiovisual Programming which until recently, licensed television and radio stations and approved broadcasting content. In certain cases, it assisted individual journalists with legal help, gave briefs on freedom of expression, and created partnerships with NGO's and the media to end restrictive laws. The group also worked against blackmail, administrative pressures, the threat of violence, economic dependency, internal censorship, restricting access to information, and promoted the free distribution of information.

Two important groups within the Media Monitoring Agency are APPLE and the Freedom of Expression Group. APPLE is a freedom of speech advocacy group composed mainly of journalists and others interested in this civil right. This NGO has worked in the areas of media legislation and assists journalists who are affected by censorship. To accomplish its mission it created a database and documentation center of abuses against freedom of speech which has helped it assess the effects of free speech violations and while supporting journalists who face recriminations. Members attend national and international programs and organize seminars and public campaigns to educate the public on the importance of free speech in a democracy.²¹⁰

Media Monitoring Agency's Freedom of Expression Group synthesizes the issues and makes papers available to the public in periodic reports, accessible in hard copy or on-line, on Romania's legal climate regarding freedom of the press. A recent report issued in October of 2002 in both English and Romanian, spanned 32 pages and covered cases currently under the penal and civil codes, the right to reply law, the classified information law, and the audiovisual law. Another section of the report discussed a case in the audiovisual media, abuses against freedom of speech, and the government's public image strategy.²¹¹ The Media Monitoring Agency and the Center for Independent Journalism are important Romanian NGO's that promote a free and responsible media but there are others, based in Western Europe, the United States, and even Hungary, that have worked to create a better climate for freedom of speech and related rights that together created the beginnings a civil society, which was their goal.

²¹⁰ www.freeex.ro

²¹¹ Ibid.

Another NGO that has worked in the area of free speech rights is “Article 19, The Global Campaign for Free Expression,” which takes its name from Article 19 in the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The British-based group states in its charter that it “monitors, researches, publishes, lobbies, campaigns, and litigates on behalf of freedom of expression wherever it is threatened.” The website www.article19.org maintains a database and archives of articles on freedom of speech issues worldwide. In its archives on Romania, it offers valuable perspectives on the Secrecy Law for State Secrets that the Romanian Parliament passed 7 March 2001 under pressure from NATO leadership as a precondition for joining the military alliance. In a related issue, it documented that on 26 February 2002, Parliament passed the Law on Classified Information which Romanian NGO’s that Article 19 members fear will conflict with the Law Regarding Public Access to Information. They question why the two laws were not developed jointly so that lawmakers could address the concerns inherent in the perennial problem of secrecy versus the right to information.

Article 19 also wrote a comprehensive history, “An Analysis of Media Laws and Practice,” covering the period from 1989 to 1997. This study is one of the more comprehensive examinations of media issues in Romania and includes constitutional provisions and a discussion of the legal framework of media law. It presented the contentious issues of general criminal content restrictions, specifically the penal code as regards the issue of criminal defamation. In Romania this included insult, calumny, proof of truth, and insult and defamation of officials and could result in imprisonment. It also addressed security-related offences, a history of the post-Communist media, and the right to access of information.

An international NGO concerned with freedom of speech issues that has recently reported on violence to journalists in Romania is the American-based Freedom House founded in the 1940’s by Wendell Wilkie and Eleanor Roosevelt. Its charter states that it supports democracy worldwide “when threatened by governments from the left and the right,” revealing its 1940’s anti-Communist and anti-Fascist origins. The NGO, maintains a web-based site at www.freedomhouse.org accessible worldwide. It has supported young democracies emerging from Communism by promoting human rights

and an independent media through research, conferences and publication of these issues.²¹²

An example of its content includes a 9 December 2003 article, “Press Freedom in Romania Worsening,” that drew attention to the beating of Timisoara, Romania journalist Ino Ardelean. A local reporter for the newspaper *Evenimentul Zilei*, he had been writing stories critical of local officials which implicated them for corruption. The attackers broke his jaw and caused head injuries which hospitalized Mr. Ardelean. He is the fourteenth journalist to suffer a beating in Romania this year. The beatings are an attempt to intimidate journalists through violence which is the most extreme case of bossism, a mentality that continues to manifest itself against a free press.

The issue of violence against journalist has gotten so bad that Marlene Kaufman, Director of the Open Society Foundation in Bucharest, commented about the attacks on journalists to the United States Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe which includes members of Congress.²¹³ She noted that many of the journalists attacked were investigating corruption stories. Frequently, she said, the police do not identify the perpetrator and there have been no convictions of individuals accused of assaults against journalists. Only a week after her discussion, thugs seriously injured journalist Csondy Szoltan of the daily *Hargita Nepe* in Miercurea-Ciuc, in his apartment stairwell, beating him until residents chased away the assailants.²¹⁴

Along with these reports from NGO’s on violence, *Evenimentul Zilei* noted that politicians are frequently aggressive towards journalists, physically barring them from meetings that they should report. Worse, the reporters receive death threats and beatings connected to politics, financial issues, and the mafia. They then get telephone threats and broken cameras. Athletes frequently threaten journalists too but for other reasons.

A free press and democracy mutually benefit each other and ProDemocracy has organized at the grassroots level to encourage civic participation. Its website, www.apd.ro is in English and Romanian and is Romanian-based. Twenty-four ProDemocracy associations exist nationwide to energize citizens into becoming active in all

²¹² www.freedomhouse.org

²¹³ “Romania Moving Toward NATO and the EU,” CSCE Digest, www.csce.gov

²¹⁴ “New Attack Against Journalists in Romania,” International Press Institute, Vienna, 30 December 2003.

facets of the democratic processes. Some current projects include changing and simplifying the electoral code, sending university students as interns to public institutions to learn about public service, and monitoring Law 544, the Freedom of Information Act. By encouraging participation in the political process, access to balanced news becomes more important for citizens to make informed choices.

Another civic action oriented NGO is the Hungarian-based Soros Open Network www.son.ro whose website is both in English and Romanian. It brings together twelve NGO's in education, childrens' rights, cultural policies, rural assistance, economic development, health services and policies, minorities, community safety and mediation, legal reform, European integration, and equality of opportunity for men and women. Directed by the financier and billionaire George Soros, this NGO and others founded by Mr. Soros, have benefited Romania and other Eastern European countries since 1989.

The most political NGO to affect Romanian politics and which helped bring to power the only freely-elected opposition party since 1989, is the Civic Alliance, or Alianta Civica, www.aliantacivica.ro whose website is in the Romanian language at this time. In its quest to keep alive in memory the tragic years of Communist rule, so that people will never return to those times, it has fought for the "return of contemporary history, its writing and reporting to the public."²¹⁵ The website has a chronologically organized archives which lists historical events since 1990, to provide a sense of recent history, something the government denied its citizens for the last four decades.

The Alliance has also pioneered important political initiatives, freedom of the press issues, and a memorial to non-Communist prisoners, which gave the media and citizens a chance to learn about the past through a history that was never told. Its stated mission is to defend human rights, tolerance, ethnic and religious groups, help integrate the country into European-Atlantic structures, and fight corruption. A chronology of the group's activities, included in the on-line archives, illuminates its brief history from the time of the Revolution.

In April 1990 the Alliance agitated for the truth about the Revolution, independence of television news, and the removal of the Securitate from the Provisional Government. In November it published a liberal Declaration of Principles in Romania

²¹⁵ Alianta Civica, www.aliantacivica.ro

Libera, written by Ana Blandiana, Petre Mihai Bacanu, and Mihai Sora. In 1991, the group formed a political party, the Democratic Convention, which ran unsuccessfully for the Presidency in 1992 while launching an independent television station, SOTI, which lasted two years. In 1993, when Ana Blandiana proposed the idea of the Sighet Memorial to the European Council, Romanians abroad helped ignite the project by raising \$1.5 million for the fund.

In 1994, the Alliance established the Civic Academy Foundation to publish political and socially oriented histories. A year later, it created the “Contract with Romania” a liberal, political manifesto for the Democratic Convention Party that came into power in 1996. Though the Convention won, it did not control Parliament which was a huge handicap, and the result was a frustrating, disappointing four year rule for President Constantinescu, and the party’s supporters. Recently members showed they could mobilize by organizing a 50,000 strong march in Bucharest to oppose another miner’s march into the city. They have collected signatures for the release of the Securitate files and built playgrounds in Bucharest while also helping street children and orphans throughout the country.

The Sighet Memorial, which opened on 11 November 1998, may be the Alliance’s greatest achievement, in addition to forging a successful opposition political party. Leading the Memorial effort was Ana Blandiana, a writer who became a well-known writer and opposition figure in the 1980’s. At the time of the Revolution, Ion Iliescu named her as part of the leadership of the Provisional Government, which she did not accept, believing it was a political step to help the National Salvation Front gain legitimacy. Iliescu reportedly told her “You don’t have the right to refuse...we need someone well-loved.”²¹⁶ Her friends and others however, wanted her to represent the opposition so she stayed out of the Provisional Government working instead with the nascent Democratic Convention Party. She also promoted the Sighet Memorial as an attempt to bring back memory and knowledge of the past so that the present generation could create a democracy.²¹⁷ Sighet, she said, was created for children and for public education.

²¹⁶ Ana Blandiana, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 12 September 2003.

²¹⁷ Ana Blandiana.

The Memorial Museum provides a sharp image on the history of repression and how it affected freedom of speech and other civil liberties. Its location is significant, situated far to the north of the Maramures region, on the Romanian-Ukrainian border. The Civic Academy Foundation renovated the prison cells of this political prison to tell the story of the victims of Communism and the Resistance.²¹⁸ Each cell tells a different story, providing a composite picture of Communist repression, the Romanian gulag, and stories of individual and group suffering. One cell shows where National Peasant Party leader Iuliu Maniu died after his arrest and imprisonment by the Communists. Another cell tells the story of the abolition of all non-Communist political parties during the mid-1940's. There is a history of the repression of the Church and its priests represented in a cell. Peasant resistance to collectivization is evident in a room where the museum depicts arrested and imprisoned or executed peasant leaders.

The Communists also deported Romanian-Germans, called *Sasi* (for Saxons) to Siberia and these victims have their room with photos, artifacts and national dress. Another powerful reminder is the cell monument to women in prison who resisted and suffered from the regime. Outside, an open air courtyard brings a temporary sense of relief after the tour inside the compound which is soon tempered by the sight of anguished men and women who betray ghostly visages in weird, distorted postures. The effect is powerful and unforgettable. Overall, the exhibit represents a massive undertaking to gather documents, artifacts, photos, and oral histories, available for viewing and reading in the prison cells on-site.

Print coverage of the opening of the Memorial in 1997 was almost non-existent and a television series made during the first Iliescu Presidency, 1992-1996, on the history of Communism and the prison, ended ironically in a case of state censorship. TVR, the public television station, aired a series produced by Lucia Hossu-Longhin called *Memorialul Durerii*, the Memorial of Suffering. The programs first appeared in an early evening time slot, were one hour in length, and aired in chronological order from the 1940's towards the end of Communism in 1989. When the show aired the Brasov riots of 1987, Valentin Nicolau, President of the Romanian Society of Television, reduced the

²¹⁸ Museum Pamphlet, Fundatia Alianta Civica.

show's airing time and placed it in the 2300-2400 hours late night slot. The state-owned network then pulled the series completely claiming that it had no viewership.²¹⁹

Hossu-Longhin accused Nicolau of interfering with freedom of speech in television programming and stated that Romanian public television does not serve the public but acts as a government censored source of information. Some conjectured that the government felt uncomfortable as the show approached 1989 and the Revolution, and feared that it might air sensitive and unflattering information about those in power. A state employee responsible to the government of President Iliescu, Nicolau terminated the first televised documentary that a Romanian journalist attempted to broadcast on the history of Sighet Prison and the years of Communist rule.

The NGO's mentioned here have contributed to civil society and the establishment of a free press, through the training and education of journalists, the publishing of issues related to the media, by organizing political participation activities, establishing opposition political parties, and presenting history through the reconstitution of a prison that symbolized another era. Some of these NGO's have also worked in the area of media law which is the subject of chapter seven.

²¹⁹ "Atac la Memorialul Durerii," *Ziua pe internet*, 22 February 2003.

CHAPTER VII

Media Laws

NGO's are an important part of the movement towards civil society in Romania and they have successfully worked with Romanian lawmakers to reform media laws which had strong authoritarian elements. The pre-1989 baseline of media laws existed to serve the state and the Party. Twelve years after the government created its first post-Communist Constitution of 1992, it has again modified its laws towards the protection of a free press.

The Constitution of 1991 states in Article 30 that freedom of expression of thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and freedom of any creation, by words, in pictures, by sounds, or other means of communication in public are inviolable. By comparison, freedom of speech is in the First Amendment of the United States' Constitution compared to Article 30. Penal codes that preceded this Constitution still applied during the transition but have been modified. Once onerous media laws have been challenged and new legislation since the late 1990's and again in 2002, now exists to protect the journalist, guarantee the public freedom to access of information, and freedom of speech. Progressive politicians and civic groups like those mentioned earlier, have organized citizens and exerted pressure on the political system to change restrictive media laws which resulted in legislative changes in 2002 to the Penal Code and consequently a more democratic media culture.

The Media Monitoring Agency for example, established a dialogue and provided expertise that influenced and helped the government to create a legal system supportive of an open media. A review of the Romanian Constitution of 1991 based on information from Article 19's website www.article19.org pertinent to the media, shows a country that is moving toward a Western-type media but that was also strongly influenced by its Communist past, hampered by a fear of authority and inclined to punish those who

questioned government figures. Segments from an interview with Member of Parliament Mona Musca, an advocate for free press laws, also provided recent perspective on media laws from a lawmaker's point of view.

Article 19, a British-based NGO media watchdog, has archived and translated international documents that pertain to media laws, including the Romanian Constitution of 1991 which laid the foundation for subsequent press laws and media organizations. The first and most important article pertaining to freedom of speech is Article 30 which guarantees freedom of expression of thoughts, opinions, or beliefs by words or in writing. These rights are inviolable and any censorship shall be prohibited, it says. It further states that freedom of the press involved the unobstructed setting up of publications and that no publication can be suppressed.

Other articles, however, show a press that still maintains some features of its repressive past. Freedom of expression, according to the same article, shall not prejudice the dignity, honor, privacy of a person, and the right to one's image. Paragraph seven says that any defamation of the country and nation, or which incites national, racial, or religious hatred...shall be prohibited by law. The NGO Article 19 points out that these qualifiers violate international law and the norms of Western Europe of freedom of speech. Peter Gross, a commentator on the Eastern European media, wrote that there is an ambiguity and inconsistency to a free press that has rules making it unlawful to "commit obscene acts contrary to good morals."²²⁰

Article 31 deals with the right to information in which it states that a person's right of access to any information of public interest cannot be restricted. Paragraph three however reveals that the right to information shall not be prejudicial to the protection of the young or to national security, which qualifies the access. Gross points out that Prime Minister Petre Roman approved a press law in 1991 that included sections on the defamation of government officials punishable by prison terms. Other articles in this bill included clauses on correctness and loyalty with additional penalties for disseminating false information and threatening the established order. The Romanian government later withdrew the bill but its presence indicated the mindset of the government at that time.²²¹

²²⁰ Peter Gross, *Mass Media in Revolution and National Development: The Romanian Laboratory* (Ames: Iowa State University, 1996), 75.

²²¹ Gross, *Mass Media*, 89.

Paragraph four set down more restrictions with the declaration that the public and private media shall provide correct information. The ultimate interpreter of these laws, the judiciary, which used to be totally dependent on the state, may still have ties to the executive or legislative branches. However, the codification of these laws, in principle, suggests the government's commitment to free speech.²²²

A recent article in *Catavencu*, 'Independenta Juititiei'" (Judicial Independence, (March 2-8, 2004) questioned the independence of the judicial system by accusing the Bucharest Tribunal, led by Minister of Justice Rodica Stanoiu, likely a former Securitate officer, of promoting relatives and friendly magistrates into positions of power where she and the ruling party could dominate the legal rulings. The only principle that they respected was to give "the right file to the right judge." There was no question of distributing the files through an electronic system, as recommended by the European Union. The article gave names of corrupt judges and their network of relations who would probably escape scrutiny and continue their activities because they were protected by their superiors. Minister Stanoiu resigned her post because of corruption charges but received an appointment as Counselor to President Iliescu because of her loyalty. If the allegations against her are true that she had relations with the Securitate under the Communists, it explains in part why so much material is classified and why there are problems enacting freedom of information act. Furthermore, The United States Embassy's 2003 Human Rights Report also suggested that the judiciary remained subject to political influence.

The Romanian Penal Code also affected journalists with many repressive regulations during the transition. Parliament revised the Penal Code in 1994 and again in 2002 but included laws for defamation, insults, and injuries against subjects by journalists in the earlier version. By legislating journalistic ethics, Parliament effectively restrained journalists. Penal Code Articles 205, 206, 236, and 239, protected politicians but also intimidated the press.²²³ The Code protected the "dignity and reputation of senior politicians, civil servants, and state authorities" whom the law insulated from attacks. The Penal Code listed defamation as a criminal offense, a notion that deviates from

²²² Gross, 76.

²²³ Gross, 82.

Western European standards. Another restriction is Article 64 which prohibits individuals convicted of a crime from continuing to practice that profession. This law tends to create a system of self-censorship among journalists because of its draconian measures affecting ones' career.

Article 205 of the Penal Code, now repealed, further impinged on freedom of speech. This article related that intentionally insulting someone constituted a crime and could result in imprisonment and a fine. However, the 2002 revisions eliminated the possibility of imprisonment and fully decriminalized the insult law. The European Court, offering another interpretation of the law has stated that freedom of expression applies not only to favorable or inoffensive ideas but also to those that shock, offend, or disturb, and are acceptable in a pluralistic society.

In Article 206, calumny is defined as “the public statement or accusation regarding a certain fact which, if true, would expose that person to criminal, administrative, or disciplinary punishment, or to the public contempt.” Penalties for committing calumny include fines and until the 2002 revisions, the possibility of imprisonment. This article also provided that in addition to the dissemination of information known to be false, statements made in good faith but unproven could also result in criminal penalties. This interpretation of the law was broader than any used in Western Europe where only malicious defamation is punishable. Misstatements and inaccuracies normally hurt the journalist's credibility and can lead to their dismissal and even a management shake-up but without criminal penalties, as happened at the *New York Times* in 2003 over reporter Jayson Blair who plagiarized and faked stories. Now, the good faith intent of the journalist is allowed in his defense.

Article 207 concerned “proof of truth” issues and posited that an insult or calumny do not apply if the accused proves the truthfulness of his statements. The group Article 19 argued that this was too restrictive and the government should leave journalists alone and let their own professional ethics act as a guide. Until 2002, Articles 238 and 239 also provided penalties leading to prison terms for making public statements that insult state officials and are considered crimes against authority. This also included criticism of a public official's actions or policies.²²⁴ If the crime was against a judge,

²²⁴ Gross, 86.

prosecutor, gendarme, or member of the military, it could have resulted in a sentence of up to seven years imprisonment.

European custom, by contrast, allows citizens to criticize politicians because they are in a public position and a more appropriate response would be a debate rather than criminal sanctions. In many of these cases, the defendant must prove his innocence while in a democracy, the prosecution must prove that the defendant is guilty. The recent revisions abrogated Article 238 and reduced the penalties in Article 239 to a fine. Likewise, Article 168 calls for criminal penalties against anyone transmitting false information. A journalist acting in good faith, for example, could be imprisoned under this law. Article 169 punishes anyone who possesses or reveals documents or information which constitute state secrets which might compromise national security.

While the Constitution of 2002 eliminates many of the imprisonment clauses in the law for media infractions, stiff civil penalties have a chilling effect on journalists. The monthly salary of a typical journalist is still only about \$150 but reporter Dan Balasescu at *Gazeta de Olt* received a sentence to pay \$20,000 in civil damages to the Governor of Dolj county. Lia Epure, at the paper *Ziua de Vest*, faced a fine of \$17,000 in civil damages to a Senator from Timis county and approximately 43 per cent of the all newspaper editors in Romania have been threatened with lawsuits under current law in what amounts to legal harassment against the media.²²⁵

In a landmark move, the 2001 Parliament passed the Law on Free Access to Information (FOIA) and the group “Article 19” provided some philosophical underpinning for its relevance. Article 31 in the 1991 Constitution states that “a person’s right to access any information of public interest cannot be restricted.” It suggests that only where there is a free flow of information that “accountability can be assured, corruption avoided, and the public’s right to know satisfied.”²²⁶ Freedom of information is also a crucial prerequisite for sustainable development which depends on an informed public that has confidence in government. Freedom of information refers to the right of

²²⁵ “Freedom of the Media in Romania,” Media Monitoring Agency, September 2003, www.freeex.org (Cited 1 Jan 2004)

²²⁶ “Memorandum on the Draft of the Law on Access to Information of Public Interest in the Republic of Romania,” 30 August 2000. www.freeex.org/en/index_en.html

individuals to access information and records held by public authorities through government publications and personal requests.²²⁷

As reviewed earlier in the section on print media, the press has reported that the authorities have ignored and blocked the public's access to information. The International Center for Journalism reports that authorities do not apply the law as intended and that the Classified Information Law contravenes the intent of some of the FOIA's provisions, as does legislation that regulates the work of public servants.²²⁸ The judiciary is not upholding the Constitution by allowing officials to block the release of personal records. This brings into question the relative independence and integrity of a judiciary that sees fit to interpret Article 31 of the Constitution by denying people access to their personnel files.

Classified information laws present challenges to freedom of speech and access to information. The law on state secrets provides that the Executive may establish other categories of state secrets without providing any limiting criteria, giving it very broad powers of interpretation. Law 14/1992 states that all documents and information from the Romanian Intelligence Service shall not be made public for forty years from the date the documents entered the archive. The problem with this is that too much information from the national security and defense ministry is classified, according to the Media Monitoring Agency.²²⁹ The Classified Information Law does not delineate the categories of classified levels (confidential, secret, top secret, etc.) leaving the system vague and misunderstood. De-classified information, as well, should be made available to the public. For perspective, freedom of information advocates in the United States have also argued that the American government has over-classified too much information as well.

In the realm of broadcasting laws, the Constitution provides for the Law on Radio and Television which established the National Audiovisual Council (CNA) in 1992. Some critics contend that the Council is too large and that as political appointees its members are not always professionally qualified. A new broadcast law issued in 2002 created a new, independent body to be in charge of technical issues and frequency

²²⁷ "Memorandum on the Draft of the Law," www.freeex.org

²²⁸ "Media in South Eastern Europe," 46.

²²⁹ "A Report on the Freedom of Speech in Romania," Media Monitoring Agency, October 2002, www.mma.ro (Cited 1 Jan 2004)

releases while the CNA deals only with programming issues.²³⁰ The Telecommunications Ministry is now in charge of the release of frequencies. The law also stipulated that the regulatory body could no longer withdraw licenses as a result of its previous suspension of OTV's right to broadcast.

Until 2003, the CNA could withdraw a station's license for a single violation committed on a television show. For example, CNA revoked the license of OTV (Omega TV) for airing an interview with the ultra-nationalist politician Cornel Vadim Tudor on the "Dan Diaconescu Live" show aired 9 October 2002, because Tudor disparaged groups with comments about "gangs of gypsies" ruining Romania's image, homosexuals, specifically United States Ambassador Michael Guest, while remembering to save barbs for the Hungarians in Transylvania. Tudor's comments were his own and the commentator listened without agreeing or disagreeing. However, to keep it in perspective, as Gross points out, the Council has facilitated a freer broadcast media, issuing many licenses while it has de-monopolized broadcasting in Romania.²³¹

The broadcast media is subject to other laws such as Article 39 which states that any programming which is prejudicial to the dignity, honor, and one's private life, is punishable. If the program defames the country and the nation, or disseminates secret information relevant to national security, the producer is liable for criminal charges. The group Article 19 recommends that the government abolish Article 39 entirely.

Among the politicians who follow media and freedom of speech issues closely, no one is better informed or works harder for a free press than Member of Parliament Mona Musca. Congresswoman Musca believes that freedom of the press benefits everyone and that without freedom of speech and the right to information, there is no democracy.²³² In an interview focusing on media issues, Ms. Musca commented about the state of audio-visual broadcasting, the print media, and media laws.

She began by saying that while the private sector in audio-visual broadcasting has expanded, state television and radio showed little progress in restructuring, carrying excessive numbers of personnel in comparison with the private sector which does a

²³⁰ "Media in South Eastern Europe," 47.

²³¹ "Media," 78.

²³² Mona Musca, interview by the author, Bucharest, Romania, 28 September 2003.

similar job with far fewer people. State broadcasting also suffers from undue government influence as evidenced by the lack of any political debate on their channels since the Iliescu government took power in 2000. Their news reporting is unbalanced giving the government 80 per cent of its air time with only 20 per cent allocated to the opposition, according to the Media Monitoring Agency.²³³ In an attempt to control State Radio, the government replaced the director even though the company's report to the Committee of Culture showed an improved financial position, greater objectivity in reporting, and higher public confidence in their news stories. The government attempted to suppress the annual report and changed the leadership anyway over vigorous Parliamentary protest.

Speculating on the written press, Ms. Musca believed that print media on the local level has improved as people want to know more about local issues. At the same time, calumny, which should be completely decriminalized, also threatened free speech. There are currently 400 lawsuits pending at the local level throughout the country. In addition to the problem of a restrictive penal code, the government buys advertising in the newspapers which allows the buyer to indirectly influence content, stories, and editorials because the some papers in print media don't have enough outside advertising to consider themselves financially independent. Ms. Musca emphasized that a democratic society has an obligation to promote not restrict, the objectivity of its press.

She has worked successfully with several NGO's including the Center for Independent Journalism and the Media Monitoring Agency to remove ROMPRES, the public media agency, from direct government control. The post-Communist government subordinated ROMPRES to the Ministry of Information, by a law HG 866. The law stipulated that all of its journalists became public servants and that the flow of news had to be approved by the Minister's signature. Working with the civil society media groups, Musca and others passed another law placing ROMPRES under Parliamentary control, which consists only of receiving a yearly report and no other oversight. ROMPRES is slowly freeing itself from the mentality of state control even though the current director is a political friend of the ruling clique and fought against its independence.

²³³ Ibid.

The Congresswoman has also labored to introduce a law that protected sources from both the public and private sectors while opposing other press laws designed to control the press. She believes that the press should regulate itself without having external controls placed on it. At the same time, she successfully fought for a freedom of information law that the ruling party opposed fearing further diminished influence after losing control over ROMPRES. The law included companies that are publicly owned, under public authority, or that use public money. Private institutions were not included in the law, which did not go far enough for open media activists such as Cristian Parvaescu of Pro Democracy. Practical and aware of the art of the possible in politics, Congresswoman Musca insisted that the law was a step in the right direction and that to try to change the law to include all sectors in the Freedom of Information Act, might allow the ruling (and hostile) PSD to modify other aspects of the law.

Freedom of the press, she concluded, needed not just protective laws and the absence of restrictive ones, but also a media that is economically strong and independent. Various major dailies such as *Romania Libera*, owned by German interests, *Libertatea*, and *Evenimentul Zilei* both owned by the Swiss Ringier company, are financially stronger and less likely to succumb to political pressures. Media institutions that have debts to the state, such as Pro TV, are subject to politicians who can unduly influence the people working in the media. In the national elections of 2000 for example, she pointed out that the number of political debates diminished compared to previous occasions because of the powerful influence of the PSD. Realitatea TV used to air shows with independent commentators such as Mircea Dinescu, Stelian Tanase, and Adrian Cioroianu, who have slowly but steadily been excluded from broadcasts. This station now has a single talk show which belongs to a PSD senator, President of the Culture Commission, Adrian Pausescu, a moderator who is a party senator. Television has taken a step back because of the government's new efforts to control it.

In historical perspective, media law has evolved toward a more Western style of liberal structures. While there is scant tradition of democracy, the post-Revolutionary governments have removed most of the authoritarian aspects for freedom of speech and media laws that once existed. Romania is not so unique in its transitional development in terms of its laws, liberalizing activities which promote a free press and authoritarian

traditions which restrict it when compared to other countries. The next chapter compares the general state of the media in Romania with similar countries from East Central Europe and Latin America.

CHAPTER VIII

A Comparison with the East Central European and Latin American Media

In spite of its totalitarian past unrivalled anywhere in the Eastern bloc during the years of Communist rule, Romanian media openness now compares favorably with the more advanced democracies of Poland and Hungary and equally well in comparison with several important countries in Latin America which offer a perspective from the Americas.

Scholars who adhere to the “Leninist Legacy” approach on Eastern Europe maintain that East Central Europe (along with the rest of the Bloc) underwent a unique historical experience and that its political or media institutions cannot be compared with other regions.²³⁴ In the Legacies perspective, as expounded by Kenneth Jowitt, all transitions are not the same. State socialism was unique, he wrote, and the cultural legacy of institutional rules and relationships imposed severe difficulties on the democratization of public life and the media.

Dankwart Rustow, among others, offers a different approach, suggesting with his “transitions” argument that one can compare transitioning countries. Democracies anywhere, he says, can be established through choices and do not require years of cultural change which Rustow explained by examining the role of individuals and agency in creating institutions. Because the transitions school focuses on human agency in place of historical tradition, its emphasis on individual action in any setting lends itself better to making comparisons among East European countries and Latin America countries.

Hungary, a country in transition, and geographic neighbor of Romania, also had a history of a press subservient to the government well before the Communist takeover. In the 1930’s, the Government Party created the official newspaper *Fuggetlenseg*, which was not allowed to criticize the government.²³⁵ By 1939, the government instructed the

²³⁴ Andrew K. Milton, *The Rational Politician: Exploiting the Media in New Democracies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 16.

²³⁵ Milton, 66.

press to support German war aims and its invasion of Poland. After 1945, the Soviets used the press to further Party aims which were to agitate and create propaganda.

Employing Marxist-Leninist theory, the Hungarian nomenklatura promoted a press controlled by the workers whose opinion the media reflected, while also furthering the revolution. After World War Two, the Party mobilized the peasants through a media that encouraged political action in Hungary and the other occupied countries of the Eastern Bloc. After Stalin's death however, Hungarian intellectuals and journalists questioned the Soviet system and played a major role in the Revolution of 1956. Afterwards, the media still had freedom to discuss most issues except for the Revolution. Janos Kadar's regime had some flexibility with the Soviets whom he told, "he who is not against us, is with us." The Party supported this "goulash Communism" where anybody not opposed to it was accepted. The media was moderately open, with certain journals and television programs holding discussions on a variety of topics.

Hungarian *samizdat*, (underground publications) first appeared in 1976. VCR's, computers, and satellite dishes followed in the 1980's to provide international news and other programming. Publications emerged such as *Beszelo* (The Speaker), and *Hirmondo* (The Newsletter). Underground journalists such as Janos Kis, Ferenc Koszeg, Otilia Solt, and Laszlo Rajk later became leaders of the Free Democratic Party. Rajk, the son of a former Foreign Minister executed by the government in 1949, even offered his apartment as a "bookstore" for samizdat. The overall involvement in underground publications however, was small in number, about fifty to sixty with several hundred supporters and several thousand readers.²³⁶ By 1987, the official press had liberalized with *Magyar Nemzet* even publishing an interview with Imre Poszgay of the Democratic Forum, a non-Communist political party. The paper sold out everyday for the next two years.²³⁷ The underground media also continued to provide readers with alternative ideas while criticizing the system. Civil societies such as Hungary's FIDESZ, also added diversity to society and party politics after 1989. Romania, by comparison, had no organized non-Communist movement and no alternative media during this period.

²³⁶ Milton, 66.

²³⁷ Ibid, 67.

Ray Hiebert estimates that in Hungary ten new publications started up in 1987 and by 1990, 2,500 newspapers reached the stands though only one-third of these survived.²³⁸ During this period, Hungarian journalists were choosing different associations and alliances with most, about 6,000, staying with the former Communist Hungarian Association of Journalists, while 500 others joined the new pro-government and nationalistic Alliance of Hungarian Journalists.²³⁹ Likewise, in Romania, journalists created several associations as they tried to establish the right professional organizations. Still, government ownership of newspapers was as extensive in 1995 as in 1990 when the state finally began to sell off journals.²⁴⁰

After the 1989 Revolution, there were complications over the new mission of the media. Political parties took the place of the Communist Party and politics complicated leadership appointments to the broadcast media.²⁴¹ In 1990, a major debate erupted over the role of public television regarding managerial control and personnel. Governing bodies wanted greater state control over the regulating bodies while opposition parties wanted more Parliamentary control. Later that year, the government took control with the President assuming authority for appointing heads of media but subject to the Prime Minister's concurrence. This led to further wrangling between the government and media.²⁴²

In 1995 the government passed a new media law that addressed some of the problems though the regulatory National Radio and TV Body (ORTT) was still highly politicized.²⁴³ The government then announced that the hegemony of the public stations had ended while delaying privatization as long as possible. The National Radio and Television Board called for the independence of public service programming and frequent battles for control over the state-owned radio and television regulatory boards occurred between the conservative government and left-leaning opposition.²⁴⁴ As of 2003, there are 220 commercial television stations and 30 radio stations privately owned. There are five national television stations, three of which are state-owned, and the other

²³⁸ Ibid, 95.

²³⁹ Ibid, 112.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 147.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 122.

²⁴² Ibid, 129.

²⁴³ Ibid, 145.

two private stations are owned by European consortia and dominate 85 per cent of the viewership.²⁴⁵ Continued political manipulation has weakened public broadcasting in Hungary and these problems in are similar to those of Romania.

Like Hungary, Poland had a historic tradition of an elite supporting the ethnic-national identity through use of the media. Prior to the Socialist period, Polish political parties and the government used the media for its purposes. The Nazis took over this press using it for their ends, then the Soviets inherited it in 1945. During de-Stalinization in the 1950's, Polish journalists, through their Prasa Polska professional association, began to criticize the socialist ideological training of journalism students.²⁴⁶ This marked the beginning of a tradition of independence and professionalism. Henryk Korotynski, a prominent journalist, voiced the need for journalistic skills rather than political reliability.

After the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, President Wladyslaw Gomułka warned journalists to control themselves to avoid reprisal from Moscow. During his rule, he tolerated criticism of himself and also ignored much of it. He focused on maintaining the status quo in Poland and did not need the press to mobilize opinion for any programs.²⁴⁷ During these years Polish samizdat or underground journalism emerged. Underground publications had a long history and the Committee for Worker's Self-Defense (KOR) established in 1976, helped create the modern underground media with publications such as *Information Bulletin*, *Glos (Voice)*, and *Robotnik (Worker)* creating a future core of Solidarity advisors.²⁴⁸ One estimate suggested that 15 per cent of the working class had access to the Solidarity press in the 1980's. By contrast, Romania never had any samizdat. VCR's with pirated news and informational tapes along with millions of radios brought Western news, including Radio Free Europe to the Poles.

In the subsequent years under Eduard Gierek, Poland began economic modernization which required better media-government relations. The government made it clear that journalists who supported the new policies could join the Party and benefit

²⁴⁴ Gross, 77.

²⁴⁵ International Journalist's Network www.ijnet.org (Cited 1 Jan 2004)

²⁴⁶ Jane Leftwich Curry, *Poland's Journalists, Professionalism, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 45.

²⁴⁷ Curry, 63.

²⁴⁸ Jerome Aumente, Peter Gross, Ray Hiebert, Owen W. Johnson, and Dean Mills, *Eastern European Journalism: Before, During and After the Communists* (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 1999), 44.

from hefty salary raises. When these policies failed in the 1970's, the government pressured the media to present the debacles in the best light.

With the official announcement of the price hikes in 1980, the Gierek regime doomed itself and some criticized the media for its message of a “propaganda of success,” it had promoted.²⁴⁹ After the formation of Solidarity in the same year, a more critical press began to operate. Journalists and editors discussed topics that Bloc governments elsewhere prohibited. Solidarity helped form an independent media that went underground after the government declared martial law in 1981. The government tried to compensate with official spokesman Jerzy Urban and others opening up the dialogue.²⁵⁰ This began a tradition of dual political cultures before the fall of Communism, an official and an opposition or unofficial culture. The party, state, and government controlled the official media which practiced self-censorship.²⁵¹

Solidarity gained credibility and authority and influenced the media from the beginning. The seeds of the post-Communist media began with non-Communist Solidarity and journalists were important actors in this movement though the government disbanded their professional organization in 1982 because of their independence and professionalism.²⁵² The Catholic Church continued to help Solidarity and work against the regime publishing two journals prior to the Revolution, *Pax* and ZNAK.²⁵³

After the revolutions of 1989, the communist and anti-communist media elite in both Poland and Hungary emerged to become spokesmen for the new political powers in their partisan efforts.²⁵⁴ Because these countries moved faster ahead privatizing their economies than Romania, their relatively more commercial media provided the diversity needed for a free press. The commercial media, as Peter Gross pointed out, had the resources to make technological advances and provide journalistic training while the old state presses with their antiquated technology were also expensive to replace.²⁵⁵

²⁴⁹ Curry, 67.

²⁵⁰ Aumante, *Eastern European Journalism: Before, During, and After Communism*, 29.

²⁵¹ Peter Gross, *Entangled Evolutions: Media and Democratization in Eastern Europe* (Washington, DC, 2000), 17.

²⁵² Curry, 2.

²⁵³ Doris Graber, Denis McQuail, and Pippa Norris, *The Politics of News and the News of Politics* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1996), 37.

²⁵⁴ Gross, 93.

²⁵⁵ Gross, 152.

Understandably, there were problems. Much of the reporting that came after 1989 was not objective but more sensational to boost profits. They also copied the Western European model of partisan reporting. These papers sought advertising to gain a financial base and independence from the state, but it took time. Meanwhile, the state reduced print media subsidies and journalists found themselves writing to compete in the market. Newspapers also faced higher distribution costs from the post office that was government controlled.²⁵⁶ The training of many journalists also posed problems because it was difficult to replace journalists or change the mentality of a generation trained on reporting the party line with fact-based reporting and investigative skills.²⁵⁷

In spite of these difficulties, the print media began to expand and diversify. In Poland, Solidarity's Adam Michnik established *Gazeta Wyborcza* as its official paper until 1990, which as Gross suggested, practiced objective journalism. Polish and French investors funded *Rzeczpospolita*, another popular paper that the Social Democrats (former Communists) bought.²⁵⁸ Some of these journals were independent of the state but were not practicing "elite journalism" yet because they were too closely allied with partisan politics.²⁵⁹ Aside from these major journals, about 2,500 publications started after the fall of Communism in Poland and about half survived. Privatization of the press was very slow. *Gazeta Wyborcza* provided good coverage of the 1989 elections which helped it succeed and the newspaper *Nie* sold copies because it also offered a dose of pornography and sensationalism.²⁶⁰

Today, privatization of the print media is almost complete and almost 5,500 newspapers and magazines are published. Major dailies include the *Gazeta Wyborcza* with a circulation of 508,000, *Super Express* with 446,000 daily copies sold, followed by *Rzeczpospolita* with an average 269,000 copies sold.²⁶¹ Foreign ownership is evident with several popular Polish weeklies published by German owned companies, while

²⁵⁶ Aumente, 67.

²⁵⁷ Aumente, 80.

²⁵⁸ Gross, 39.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Aumente, *Eastern European Journalism*, 94.

²⁶¹ Article 19-The Global Campaign for Free Expression www.article19.org

America's Cox Newspapers has a 10 per cent interest in the *Gazeta Wyborcza*. *Reader's Digest* and *Playboy* also publish editions there.²⁶²

If print media was initially slow to professionalize and privatize in East Central Europe, so too was the process for broadcast media. In Poland, the state did not issue licenses for private broadcasting until 1991, resulting in a dearth of television and radio stations.²⁶³ Gross attributes this lack of development in broadcasting to political issues of control between the old nomenklatura and the anticommunist elites.²⁶⁴ In broadcast media, as well as print media, the political parties tried to own or control the media and influence journalists because they believed that the media existed to serve their needs.²⁶⁵ Public broadcasting in these countries was generally pro-government.

In Poland private broadcast media arrived in 1993. In 1993, the first private television station began broadcasting in Poland and broadcast laws stipulated that the transmissions adhere to a "Christian value system."²⁶⁶ The Catholic Church, controlled many radio and television stations and ensured its influence in the market that allowed the National Council of Broadcasting to stop transmission of any program that violated the rule.

Media law in East Central Europe moved unevenly toward an open media. Non-Communist governments took control in Poland and Hungary after their revolutions and the laws reflected this. In 1994, the Constitutional Court in Hungary ruled the libel law unconstitutional and that the public had the right to criticize public officials. Hungary adopted a Freedom of Information Access law in 1995 that was balanced or restricted by a secrecy law as in Romania. However, commentators at Article 19, a freedom of expression NGO, have suggested that Hungarian officials ignored the freedom of information act.

Criminal libel laws have remained in place in Poland. While Article 14 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of the press, Article 270 stipulates that anyone who insults the nation or the political system could face between six months to eight years imprisonment. Poland also lacks a law ensuring full public access to information, under

²⁶² Hiebert, 105.

²⁶³ Gross, 39.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 42.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 58.

the freedom of information standard. Liberals in Poland and Hungary wanted fewer restrictions and conservatives wanted more. In these Eastern European countries, there was a conflict between those who wanted journalists to be licensed and others who believed that professionals should adhere to their own code of ethics, free of laws.

Foreign ownership, has penetrated these East Central European countries more quickly than it did in Romania, especially in print media. When the price of newsprint went up, circulation dropped, and the costs of production and distribution soared, the solution was for the embattled enterprises to encourage foreign investment.²⁶⁷ In Hungary by the mid-1990's, foreign investors such as Robert Maxwell (*Magyar Hirlop*), Rupert Murdoch (*Mai Nap*), and the Bertelsmann group (*Nepszabadsag*), owned 80 per cent of the dailies. *Nepszabadsag* was a leading daily which its new German owners allowed editorial independence as well as separation from commentary for fact-based news. Robert Maxwell's *Magyar Hirlop* benefited from a new printing plant in Budapest, a new look, and Western-style content aimed at attracting a professional readership.²⁶⁸ As of 2000, there are over 1,600 registered print publications in Hungary with over 80 per cent privately owned.

For the future, Professor Peter Gross sees the need to professionalize and offer the best journalistic product possible to their audiences. To accomplish this Romania, Hungary, and Poland, have all set up new university programs for journalistic training since the early 1990's. In Hungary there are programs at Attila Jozsef University in Szeged (1990) and at Eotvos Lorent University in Budapest, established 1992. In Poland, the Catholic University of Lublin started a school of journalism as did Jagiellonian University at Crakow. The Romanian government started centers in Timisoara, Cluj, Brasov, and Iasi. Western-sponsored journalism centers also exist in these countries, backed by such organizations as the Soros Foundation, the Freedom Forum, the International Media Fund, and the Independent Journalism Foundation, which offer courses and training.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Hiebert, 100.

²⁶⁷ Hiebert, 104.

²⁶⁸ Hiebert, 108.

²⁶⁹ Peter Gross, *Eastern European Journalism: Before, During, and After Communism*, 158.

Westerners have been partners in helping the East European societies develop a free flow of information by working with local publishers as well as the other efforts. The Central East European Publishing Project (CEEPP) developed out of a belief that independent publishing, which would further pluralism, is a central part of civil society.²⁷⁰ Several groups, but principally the Ford Foundation, supported this project.

The CEEPP began in Brussels in 1986 and ended its efforts in 1994. The object was to promote a free flow of culture and ideas between East and West Europe. The group focused primarily on the Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary. The designated countries participated in the publishing of samizdat, exile, and official publications. The group made grants to the Fund for the continuity of Independent Polish literature and Humanities, chaired by Nobel Laureate Czeslaw Molosz. The group made grants based on quality not politics, extending help to the samizdat publishing houses of *Nowa* and *Krag* the liberal Catholic house *ZNAK*, *Krytyka* of the left, and *Arka* of the right.

The group also funded work in Hungary supporting the samizdat journals *Beszelo* and *Hirmondo* as well as literary journals *Bukz*, *Holmi*, *Gond*, and a student magazine *Atlantisz*. In Romania, the CEEPP helped several independent journals such as *22*, *Contrapunct*, and *Interval*. Funding included \$3.3 million raised of which \$2.65 million went to grants, workshops, internships, and translations.²⁷¹

The recent history of publishing and market tastes, based on Timothy Garton Ash's experience with CEEPP, is instructive and mirrors some of the issues that print media faced in the early years of the transition. Ash commented that in the case of Hungary, subsidies dried up for the publishers, production costs rose to near Western levels, and small amateur publishers appeared and disappeared. The first books to appear were histories about the Stalin years, the prison camps, and the Revolution of 1956. Shortly thereafter, readers began to buy popular fiction, romance, and pornography from the West. The market "became a jungle" with people ignoring copyrights, stealing translations, etc. The intelligentsia, once a major consumer and cultural arbiter, lost its

²⁷⁰ Timothy Garton Ash, *Freedom for Publishing, Publishing for Freedom: The Central East European Publishing Project*, (Budapest: Central European University, 1995), 11.

²⁷¹ Ash, 44.

economic clout and status while the new consumers and business elites replaced it with their new cultural tastes.

International commerce also brought many new titles to Poland while a once powerful interest in national and European history, vital to Polish culture, has waned. Interest is up in harlequin romances, popular science, self-help, and foreign language instruction. Poland represents a potentially large market with a population of 38 million, the largest in Eastern Europe, along with a vast infrastructure of libraries.²⁷²

While Poland, Hungary, and other Eastern European countries have benefited from Western aid, Latin American countries that shared histories of dictatorships and controlled media, have not benefited from European Union help or NATO-building politics. A 1994 survey of Latin American counties, Argentina and Mexico, revealed transition problems similar to those seen in Eastern Europe at that time, while Cuba, a socialist state, resembled the more totalitarian states like Romania before 1989.

As of 2003, all the republics in Latin America, except for Cuba, were constitutional democracies. Cuba, which has party-controlled newspapers, government controlled broadcast stations, and jails dissidents, is the lone totalitarian state. Outside of Cuba, there is a growing tolerance toward independent journalism though dozens of journalists are slain every year by people in power, both public officials and private citizens. Argentina, like the Bloc countries, emerged from dictatorship in 1983 with the difference that its former government was a rightist military junta.

Since 1983, Argentina has had a free press with the exception of a criminal libel law which allowed for imprisonment of anyone impugning the reputation of a judge in writing. Argentine law does protect the confidentiality of sources and provides immunity from liability for false reporting if the journalist was unaware of an inaccuracy. However, a 1993 U.S. State Department report showed a high level of threat against reporters, radio, and television stations.²⁷³ Ninety-one journalists “disappeared” during the military dictatorship that lasted from 1976 to 1983. During the democratic transition in 1993, unknown assailants attacked Marcelo Bonelli, a reporter at *Clarín* and Radio

²⁷² Ash, 108.

Mitre, twice, two days after interviewing the Secretary of State, Alberto Lestelle, suspected of increasing his worth \$500,000 while a government official.²⁷⁴ In the same year, someone killed journalist Mario Bonino and dumped his body into a river. He was in charge of the files that documented attacks against journalists and worked for the Press Workers Union in Buenos Aires (UTPBA). Officials claimed that they couldn't find anyone involved in the crime.²⁷⁵

Omar Lavieri, an Argentine journalist, maintains that overall, the Argentine press is free though it practices self-censorship, especially regarding poverty and corruption. The press has the constitutional right to cover any issue, however, according to the American Convention for Human Rights, which forbids censorship and rejects any controls on freedom of speech.²⁷⁶

One serious problem is the issue of low salaries that encourage bribery. Politicians, businessmen, and others can subtly influence coverage of certain subjects by offering envelopes of cash, a common practice.²⁷⁷ American researchers of the Argentine media, Crauford Goodwin and Michael Naucht, also found that businessmen complain about reporters asking for payoffs to keep negative articles from appearing about their enterprises, as part of the "shakedowns." The print media generally is diverse enough though so that it offers readers a selection.

Clarín and its media group is a large newspaper located in Buenos Aires, where the media is concentrated, and it is not afraid to challenge the government. *La Nación* and *La Prensa* are conservative and fairly staid while *Página/12* openly challenges government leaders and discusses corruption issues. The financial newspapers, *Ambito Financiero* and *El Cronista* supported President Menem without reporting on the problems in his government.²⁷⁸ In television, there is one government channel and the rest are private. The news shows generally cover crime and violence while barely covering poverty, hunger, or government corruption. To get sources and information on

²⁷³ Omar Lavieri, "The Media in Argentina: Struggling with the Absence of a Democratic Tradition," *Communication in Latin America: Journalism, Mass Media, and Society*, ed. Richard R. Cole (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1996), 184.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Lavieri, 185.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 187.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 190.

²⁷⁸ Lavieri, 192.

these problem areas, journalists had to rely on personal contacts because, as of 1994, there was no freedom of information act at that time though that would change as the democracy solidified.

In March 2002, Argentina's House of Representatives gave preliminary approval to a bill on freedom of access to information by the public. Journalists, academics, non-governmental agencies, civil servants, and business people jointly worked on the bill. Legislators simultaneously worked on secrecy laws which as exceptions to freedom of access, complimented to the proposed information laws. Civil servants resented the extra demands the exercise of the law brought and others saw it as intrusive in an area currently off-limits to the public view.²⁷⁹ Generally speaking, Argentina has developed a free press in its democratic political setting.

Mexico represents another "transitional" political culture, having experienced until recently, a single, dominant political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI, as it is known in Mexico, which has governed uninterrupted for decades since the 1920's. In the year 2000, President Vicente Fox, a former Coca-Cola executive with the business-oriented, conservative National Action Party (PAN), finally broke the PRI's domination of national control. The long history of control created certain practices which were unhealthy to an open press, negatively influencing a public that has traditionally viewed journalists poorly.²⁸⁰

Major problems included threats to journalists and the government's control over subsidized newsprint. Benefactors have also swayed journalists with envelopes of cash called "la mordida" or the "bite." Two brutal assassinations underscored the danger to journalists in Mexico as well as official complacency in the homicide investigations. On 20 April 1988, two gunmen shot journalist Hector Felix Miranda to death, while driving to work. Miranda was a journalist for the weekly paper *Zeta*, and wrote political satire about local officials in his column "Un poco de algo," or, "a little something," in English. The police arrested two men who admitted receiving a cash payment but failed to pursue the money trail. The other incident involved Dr. Victor Manuel Oropeza, a physician, in

²⁷⁹ Article 19

²⁸⁰ Murray Fromson, "Mexico's Struggle for a Free Press," *Communications in Latin America: Journalism, Mass Media, and Society*, ed. Richard R. Cole (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1996), 116.

Ciudad Juarez, whom unidentified assailants stabbed multiple times, killing him in his office on 3 July 1991. He wrote a weekly column that alleged local police complicity with drug traffickers. The police never arrested anyone in this case.

In broadcast news, the Mexican commercial television conglomerate Televisa, is pro-PRI and it dominates the television sector. In the 1988 and 1994 elections it almost totally ignored coverage of the opposition party. The station even failed to mention the controversy over the widely alleged rigging of the 1988 election where PRI candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari barely won. Billionaire entrepreneur and major shareholder Emilio Azcarraga has said that he too is a “PRI man.” Television reporting in Mexico has been notably one-sided as has radio. In 1994 Radio MIL, a major radio station, scheduled an interview with opposition candidate Cuauhtemoc Cardenas which the station manager cancelled over the objections of the show’s host, Miguel Angel Granados Chapa, who subsequently resigned. In the Mexican print media, the government sells ads disguised as stories on subjects such as the government, the president, and political parties, at two to three times the normal rate with a percentage of the commission going to the reporter. These ad-stories are called *gacetillas* and they support many journalists and newspapers.²⁸¹ Yet newspapers such as *Siglo 21*, *Reforma*, and *El Norte*, have challenged the status quo and report news based on sound journalistic techniques. Commentator on Mexican journalism Murray Fromson believes that the “information superhighway” will bring Mexican journalists closer to the rest of the world, exposing them to other viewpoints and competencies, to their benefit. The PRI’s loss in the Presidential election of 2000 should also reduce the pressure on the media to support the historically dominant party. It is too early to determine how President Fox and his PAN party will deal with the press.

The change of ruling parties in Mexico, after eighty years of the same leadership, should diversify the Mexican press. Cuba however, still has Fidel Castro, the “Maximum Leader,” whose socialist government has tightly controlled the media since 1959. Even before Castro, Cuban governments created and institutionalized a system of bribes to

²⁸¹ Fromson, 130.

control the press which suffered from a deservedly corrupt reputation.²⁸² Since 1989, economic problems have hurt the media. *Granma*, the official daily newspaper, cut back in 1990 from six to five issues a week because of a lack of newsprint.²⁸³ In the same year, *Juventud Rebelde* and *Trabajadores*, the party youth paper and a worker's journal, respectively, went from daily to weekly publication. The state has reduced or eliminated other papers because of the cut-off of Soviet newsprint.

The government has not allowed journalists much freedom to deviate from the party line. It banned the Association for Independent Cuban Journalists (ADIC) in 1990, and its president, Nestor S. Bager, was physically assaulted, jailed, and harassed continually, even at age 72. The state also arrested and sentenced journalists Jerez Marino, Elizardo Santa Cruz, and Hiram Abi Cobas to two years in prison for talking to reporters from the United States. There have been many other cases like these and this repression will likely continue while Fidel Castro controls the country.

Enrique Gonzalez-Manet, a Cuban Communist, argued that Cuba is the potential victim of the free-flow of information transmitted from North America which dominates the media, spreading its private enterprise and free market messages.²⁸⁴ Latin America suffers from cultural dependency, according to him, especially regarding information, advertising, financing, and program content. In his opinion, the United States dominates the Latin American mass media which broadcasts more news about itself than the regions where the people view it. The Non-Aligned Movement has addressed these issues declaring the need for a New Information Order and Communication Order which are part of the struggle for a New International Economic Order and de-colonization from the Western powers.

²⁸² Michael B. Selwen, "The Dark Side of Cuban Journalism: Press Freedom and Corruption Before Castro," *Communications in Latin America: Journalism, Mass Media and Society*. Ed. Richard R. Cole (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1996), 151.

²⁸³ Robert T. Buckman, "Current Status of the Mass Media in Latin America," *Communications in Latin America*," 24.

²⁸⁴ Enrique Gonzalez-Manet, *Informatics and Society: The New Challenges*, transl. Lauren Alexandre. (Norwood: Ablex, 1992), 31.

The goal of the New Information Order is for development, de-colonization, and independence.²⁸⁵ Corporations, according to this perspective, push the “free flow” of information to maintain economic and commercial supremacy. The New Order, he says, threatens North America’s imperialist and colonial objectives and faces constant challenges especially from the United States. Cuban television, however, has certain advantages with its lack of commercials, varied cultural programming, and respect for human beings, according the Argentine observer Ricardo Horvath. Cuba has Channel 6, for culture-education, and Channel Rebelde, for information-education, both of which broadcast twelve hours a day. Cuba, says Gonzalez-Manet, represents a unique case where much of the television programming is national in content and not from the United States.

The new generation of East European journalists would probably take issue with Gonzalez-Manet’s defense of a socialist-controlled media. These countries allow both public and private, foreign and domestic print and broadcast media which offer the public a range of information sources so that individuals may choose their journals and news programs. Aside from the political issues with Cuba, two other important differences exist between Latin American and East European journalism. First, the level of violence against journalists covering drug-related stories, especially but not limited to the Andean coca producing and cocaine processing countries (Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia) is far higher than anything known in Eastern Europe. Secondly, due to literacy and distribution issues, radio is a more important source of news and entertainment, especially for *futbol* matches in Latin America, and the print media is correspondingly less important for Latin Americans than East Europeans. The Romanian media compares well with its peers in East Central Europe and Latin America in most categories as a nation in transition. The future of the transition is clearly important to Romanians and other Europeans who interact together in business, politics, or any context.

The Romanian media share attributes with the media of other countries in transition. Countries from more advanced East Central Europe such as Poland and Hungary have encountered similar problems such as restrictive legislation, economic

²⁸⁵ Gonzalez-Manet, 80.

pressures, and lack of professionalism among journalists. Two of the Latin American countries reviewed, Argentina and Mexico, share commonalities such as libel laws, low salaries, the danger of violence against journalists, undue government influence on an economically weak media, and the powerful influence of globalized news sources. What the future will bring is unknown but the dissertation concludes with a summary, a discussion of trends, and prescriptive comments based on recent history.

CHAPTER IX

Conclusion

The Romanian transition has been in effect for fifteen years and has made real progress towards democratic rule. In the historical spectrum of continuity and change, the media has made important modifications that reflect an emerging pluralism of ideas and even the willingness of the press to openly challenge the authorities. Some of the more important achievements for the mass media came with the privatization of the print media, television, and radio broadcasting. The powerful and successful commercial radio station, Europa FM, is practicing open journalism and as the number one station in the country, is another success story. Foreign media groups have brought competition into the marketplace along with their technology, financial backing, and management styles and the result is a diversified market of ideas in the media for the public.

Variation in the ruling political party for transitional countries is a sign of democracy and the national elections this year should be competitive. The open electoral process is part of the positive change that is good for the media that has a chance to cover the campaign and show the differences among the candidates in its electoral coverage and promote the democratic process. Political vitality and free elections are another positive in the transition towards democracy in creating a healthy climate for the media.

As the political system diversifies and shows greater flexibility, so do the university schools of journalism. The training of journalists has generally been on-the-job but now there are programs in the university schools of journalism, with the NGO, The Center for Independent Journalism for veteran reporters, and fellowships to study abroad. Low salaries may discourage some who would enter the profession but that should change as the country becomes more integrated into the mainstream European economy. In the area of training, there is hope from both national and international sources.

Elements of continuity from the totalitarian period remain however as new and old dynamics negatively affect media openness. Financial pressures, something unknown under the socialist state, affect the private sector as they have since 1989. The major commercial television stations have had problems with state influence over the issue of debt owed by the stations to the state. The state in its traditional role as gatekeeper of the news, has exploited this dependency to continue its sway over commercial television as well as its own state television. By controlling the most influential medium, the state has continued to shape an important aspect of the mass media. While print media has printed the news “it saw fit to print,” to steal a quote from the *New York Times*, television has retreated when faced with politically sensitive material.

The government has reformed the Constitution to further guarantee freedom of speech and access to information, though some officials and individuals have resisted and violated these rights. A legal culture of agreed upon rules has not taken hold yet and there is still turmoil and violence. Journalists now face many civil lawsuits over investigative reports of corruption by politicians and businessmen in a system where the judiciary should fairly hear and try these cases apart from political pressures, but cannot because it is not independent. Additionally, media organizations have the obligation to provide legal counsel to defendants who are investigating important news stories. Otherwise, journalists would be better off reporting on “safe” issues if they are not going to get protection from their employers.

The culture of harassment against journalists through beatings and killings has drawn unfavorable attention to the country by European Union officials and press watch NGO’s. This problem appears to be localized, aggravated by powerful individuals who live by a “fiefdom mentality” and feel threatened in their domains by investigative journalists. There is no current evidence of a national coordination of violence against journalists but the government has not taken a strong stand against this. Police authorities must make clear to the media organizations that they will protect journalists to the extent possible or allow the journalist to protect himself especially if the journalist reports suspicious activity. After an incident, the authorities should investigate and prosecute the perpetrators vigorously. An attack on free speech is an attack on everyone’s rights. This issue should receive immediate and sustained attention from the

political establishment and law enforcement. The legal and judicial culture is still very much in transition and will remain so until the judiciary and constabulary enforce the laws.

The history of social antagonism between the extreme nationalists and the national minorities is a cause for concern and may well be an endemic problem with no short-term solution. Reconciliation for conflict may be forthcoming with pressure from the European Union which has an interest in dealing with minority problems for the sake of better commerce and exchange of goods and services in its supranational marketplace. Commerce works better in peaceful, collaborative environments. Quite possibly the attraction and regulations of the EU will help Romania find ways of dealing with its minorities problem to make them more manageable. *Romania Mare's* spokesman, Senator Vadim Tudor recently recanted his newspaper's history of attacks against Jews. It may be naïve to believe him but his statements could have substance. He did not mention a renewed respect for the other the minorities though, so this may be a political ploy.

Put another way, the issue is whether a Western mentalité and capitalism will continue to penetrate the historical traditions of authoritarianism, bossism, and social fragmentation which have resulted in continued total control over state television and radio, commercial television, a high rate of lawsuits against journalists, and beatings of reporters. The crack in the former totalitarian system has come with the advent of an open print media, radio, internet, the education of journalists through the NGO's and journalism schools and birth of civil society. The dynamism of a commercial media and the political pull of the European Union have had an effect on the country.

Overall, Romania has made remarkable gains in the short time it has had since the Revolution. Liberal successes continue in politics and privatization while cultural and social realities formed during the twentieth century slow down aspirations for a truly democratic polity. The mass media shows signs of moving towards diversity and responsible journalism and freedom of expression in its ongoing transition. Ultimately, the Romanian people will determine their future in mass media and democracy but the rest of Europe is watching closely.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Major Basil D. Georgiadis graduated from Lawrence University with a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish literature, received the Master of Arts in history from the University of Memphis, and the Ph.D in history from Florida State University in 2004 under Air Force sponsorship.

He entered the Air Force through Officer Training School in 1987 and worked in Supply assignments at Seymour-Johnson Air Force Base, North Carolina, Howard Air Base, Panama, Aviano Air Base, Italy, and Tinker Air Force Base, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He participated in a six-month peacekeeping deployment to Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo where he provided logistical support to the 1st Infantry Division in 2000 and helped to rebuild the Ali Hadri Middle School in the town of Mirash. He has served at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, where he taught history and worked as an escort officer taking cadets to Mexico and Paraguay on the Academy's Foreign Exchange Program with allied Air Forces.

He is married to the former Gabriela Grigore, has a son, Dimitri, and enjoys his road bike and traveling with his family.