




Media and Democratization - Experiences from Eastern Europe, Turkey and Pakistan

An Introduction by Arne Hintz - McGill University, Montreal, and Central European University, Budapest

Media and democratization are closely related. Media can foster open public debate and information exchange which is vital for a democracy to flourish, and a democratic environment, in turn, can lead to the development of better media structures that respond to the concerns of people. However the path towards democratization and media development is rocky, and obstacles can include continued interventions by traditional (often governmental) or new (often commercial) power structures.

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe have experienced both the opportunities and challenges of democratization and the roles of media therein since the radical transformations 20 years ago. Since 1989, a new media landscape has emerged in the region, with new ownership patterns, forms of media organization, journalistic practices, relationships between politics and the media, regulation processes, stakeholders and institutions, modalities of media use. A radically new system was established, predominantly designed according to Western models and with a heavy influence of Western players. Expectations were not always fulfilled, though, with public service broadcasting in crisis, political pressures on the media persisting, ownership concentration increasing, minority access to the media remaining scarce, and nationalist and hate speech spreading.

Based on these experiences and ongoing research on these developments, the Center for Media and Communication Studies (CMCS) at Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, Hungary, held a summer school in June 2008. The main purpose of the school was to examine the interconnections between media and democratization, with a focus on the post-communist transition countries, together with a select group of international student-scholars. A further key aspect in the analysis was the role of civil society, both in media development and in democratization. The course "Media, Democratization and Civil Society" took place on 16-27 June 2008. It was developed and organized by CMCS members Miklós Sükösd, Kate Coyer and Arne Hintz, and co-chaired by



Monroe Price, Professor at the Annenberg School for Communication at University of Pennsylvania and CMCS Chair. The Annenberg School was a key partner in organizing the course, and so was the European research network "East of West: Setting a New Media Research Agenda for Central/Eastern Europe", a "European Cooperation in Science and Technology" (COST) initiative.

Renowned international scholars including Michael Delli Carpini (Annenberg School for Communication), Nicholas W. Jankowski (Virtual Knowledge Studio Amsterdam), Karol Jakubowicz (UNESCO), Beata Klimkiewicz (Jagiellonian University Krakow) and Hakan Seckinelgin (LSE) presented current debates around democratization, transition, civil society and media reform, and explored a breadth of related themes such as citizen and community media, current challenges of public service broadcasting, the application of new technologies, and transnational policy-making.

The course brought together an inspiring and very international group of student-scholars, each contributing in their fields and countries to the increased understanding of the role of media in democratization. With a focus on the transitions in Central/Eastern Europe, the largest group of participants came from this region, but participants from Latin America, Africa and South Asia added crucial experiences from other parts of the world and helped to develop a broader perspective on democratization. Further expanding the spectrum, several participants had a strong background of working with civil society organizations, in journalism, or in international institutions, bringing in practical experiences and contributing to a fruitful scholar-practitioner exchange.

This issue of "Eastbound" features articles by three of the summer school participants. Geographically the contributions travel gradually eastbound - starting in Europe, crossing the borders of the European Union to stop at the edge between Europe and Asia, and moving on towards South Asia. Thematically they highlight different aspects of political and media transformations and, together, provide a broad picture of the challenges and opportunities of media and democratization.

In the first piece, Nikoleta Daskalova analyzes the transformation process in Eastern Europe, using the example of Bulgaria. She offers a three-pillar analysis framework, focusing on the adoption of democratic values and procedures, the opening of the media system boundaries to foreign influences, and the expansion of the media system field by the introduction of new media channels and technologies. She highlights the important role that media in Bulgaria have played in supporting the development of democracy but also shows the flipside of the transformation coin which includes rampant commercialization and ownership concentration, an increasing focus on entertainment and populism, and a lack of transparency which may lead to corruption. According to her analysis, democratization in Bulgaria was flawed in that the adoption of




democratic standards was done selectively and democracy was largely understood as the adoption of Western models.

Daskalova illustrates the multilayeredness of political, economic, social and technological change and analyzes the intersections between these different dimensions. In doing so, she also draws connections with global processes and points to a process of destabilization in the Western democratic systems, which provides the current context for transition in the region.

Moving across the EU borders, Altug Akin offers an impressive case study of transformation in Turkey, focusing on the spread of populism which results from processes of rapid commercialization, liberalization and popularization of the media. According to Akin, a “pseudo-democratic” public sphere has emerged in Turkey. He critically analyzes the links between free market policies, on the one hand, and democratization, on the other. Most significantly, he expands his analysis to the political field and investigates the interplay between media transformation and political change. He shows how the emergence of political marketing, in a context of liberalization, can lead to a new (and problematic) understanding of 'the political' and to drastic power changes in which new political forces - as well as businesses - use the media to gain political influence and occupy key positions in national power structures. The Turkish case thus shows how transformation and democratization may not necessarily lead to broader public participation and diffusion of power but rather to the emergence of new and equally concentrated power centres.

Moving even further east, we reach Pakistan where media transformation and democratization have taken place more recently. Muhammad Aftab Alam focuses on the crucial question of the regulatory environment that media require to be able to play a role in democracy and in fostering an open public sphere. He analyzes the attempts of the broadcast regulator in Pakistan to build an enabling environment for free and independent media, and he identifies a number of challenges, including the lack of autonomy and independence of the regulator, leading to significant political influence; the difficulties of the regulator to deal with emerging technologies, such as mobile TV; and, again, the problematic results of liberalization, particularly media ownership concentration. Alam provides a number of policy recommendations which offer insights for creating an enabling media environment in transition countries.

The three papers allow us to look at different, but closely related, aspects of media transformation in the context of democratization. The academic debate in this field continues to be vital and dynamic. One year after the summer school, 250 leading media scholars gathered at CEU in Budapest for the conference "Beyond East and West: Two Decades of Media Transformation after the Fall of Communism". This event served not only to review media change in Central/Eastern Europe but to draw comparisons with transformations



elsewhere around the globe in order to develop a broader perspective on the connection between media and political change.

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