AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MASS-MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA


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The events of 1989 helped Romanian mass-media to escape from the prison of censorship and conformism, of imposed but also self-imposed servitude. The changes happening in the political area also brought along a revolution of communication means. But not all was nice and good since in the new political framework, which featured a democracy in search of its own identity, the evolution of the mass-media also experienced such phenomena as the monopolisation of the public space, the cartelisation of the mass-media or the usage of media trusts as tools serving political interests.

Of course, these phenomena caught the attention of specialists from various fields. In this respect, this book aims at offering an interdisciplinary perspective on the evolution of the relationship between mass-media and democracy in post-1989 Romania.

Starting from the research activities developed within a project titled The Knowledge-Based Society – Research, Debates, Perspectives, the two editors, Daniel Şandru and Sorin Bocancea, gathered within the pages of this book the contributions of a series of specialists from various fields who are concerned with the multiple dimensions of the relationship between mass-media and the Romanian political regime from the past 20 years. This interdisciplinary venture, characterised

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by the diversity of the perspectives relating to the book’s main topic, comprises five parts which aim to capture and to analyse the numerous valences of this relationship.

The first part, titled Configurarea spațiului public în democrația postcomunistă / The configuration of public space in post-communist democracy, focuses on the process which configured public space in the context of a Romanian democracy which was just set on its course. Starting from the theory developed by the American cognitive science specialist George P. Lakoff, related to the manipulation of thought by means of stereotypes, Adrian-Paul Iliescu, analyses the myth of privatisation in the Romanian mass-media. The author criticises the attitude of the mass-media in this respect, and he blames them for the creation of a public mindset that he names „privatisation at any price”. The author launches a warning about the need to protect the diversity of interpretations within the public space because they guarantee the respect of institutional norms and the multiparty system.

George Bondor starts from Habermas’s concept of public sphere and identifies the pathologies of the public space such as they are sketched in mass-media, showing that the existence of the free market does not necessarily imply freedom of speech in the public space. Cristian Bocancea deals with the issue of the „democratisation of opinion” which is seen as a quantitative-oriented solution that has been used by the post-communist press in order to get over its inevitable growing pains. In the author’s opinion, this solution places Ortega y Gasset’s mass man at the centre of the mass-media’s concerns, bringing along, besides a positive dimension, which is not rejected by Professor Cristian Bocancea, an equally important set of disadvantages, such as the impoverishment of the quality of media products, the fact that audiences are rendered infantile or even the instauration of a tyranny of dominant opinion. Constantin Ilaș approaches the topic of the politically and economically biased press – predominant in the market of public opinion –, which legitimates given opinions
based on repetition and not on truth and which leads to a numbing of public opinion. In the chapter entitled „De la „datoria de opoziție” la cultura maniheismului politic în postcomunism” / „From „opposition duty” to the culture of political Manichaeism in post-communism” Ana-Maria Ambrosă starts from the role of the mass-media system in the evolution of the public space under the circumstances of relative transparency and respect for public good but also in the blocking of authoritarian deviations, a role which is nevertheless shadowed by the support given by the mass-media to a culture of political Manichaeism by virtue of which the Other (the political opponent) must be destroyed, ruined. Ionela Carmen Boșoteanu deals with the process of democratisation in the context of digitalised communication and analysed democracy such as it manifests itself in the online environment.

The second part of the book, entitled Evoluția mass-media în tranziția politică / The evolution of mass-media during political transition, binds together the contributions signed by Daniel Șandru, Sorin Bocancea, Tudor Pitulac, Ivona Burduja, and Alina Hurubean and focuses on the evolution of mass-media within the context of transition.

In the study titled „Mass-media, spațiul public și ideologia comunistă” / „Mass-media, public space and communist ideology” Daniel Șandru starts from the hypothesis that democratic deficit, characterised by the lack of a democratic ideology within the social body and among political leaders as well as by the absence of a civil society capable of giving birth to a discourse alternative to that of the „political society”, has influenced in a decisive manner the evolution of mass-media and democracy in post-communist Romania. The author approaches the issue of the understanding of democratic ideology as a „habit of thought” shared by media institutions, society and its leaders; another issue discussed is the manner in which media institutions have contributed to the articulation of the Romanian post-communist public space and the author
analyses the mass-media’s claim of objectivity and political discourse, which, in his opinion, exert pressure on the public space.

In the chapter entitled „Mass-media şi puterea politică în România postcomunistă. Forme ale unor relații anormale” / „Mass-media and political power in post-communist Romania. Forms of some abnormal relations” Sorin Bocancea refers to the tensed relationship between political power and the press, a relationship that he sees as a sign of normality, specific to all democracies. Yet, his enterprise focuses on the „abnormal” facets of this relationship and he puts forth three versions of this abnormality: the press as a tool of political power (the early ’90s), the press under political power (the period 2000-2004) and the press as political power (in recent years, from 2007).

Tudor Pitulac proposes an incursion into the functional superimposition of political parties and mass-media. The author believes that the Romanian society has experienced the negative impact of the situation created by the transfer of political prerogatives to the mass-media on the background of a downfall of the political parties’ credibility and of numerous struggles for power. Ivona Burduja analyses, from a journalist’s perspective, the 2.0 type of political communication in the Romanian area, focusing on the relationship between parties, the mass-media and the public in a chapter titled „Politica românească şi new media” / „Romanian politics and the new media”. The promotion of negative gender stereotypes and of simplest and commercial patterns of femininity / masculinity are central themes in the chapter signed by Alina Hurubean.

The third part, Comunicarea mediatică în postcomunism / Media communication in post-communism, which gathers the contributions signed by Sabin Drăgulin, Livia Durac, Ioan Milică and Sorin Cristian Semeniuc, focuses on themes such as: the relationship between the means of mass communication, the political sphere and the citizen (Sabin Drăgulin, in „Puterea cuvântului versus puterea imaginii” / „The power of words vs. the power of images”), the „movement” of the lexis towards
phraseological renewal (Livia Durac, in „Continuturi, semnificații ale comunicării în presa scrisă postdecembristă” / „Contents, significations of communication in the post-December print media”), the techniques used to attack people in the press (Ioan Milica, în „Agresarea numelui în discursul public” / „The aggression against names in public discourse”), the use of stereotypes as propaganda strategies (Sorin Cristian Semeniuc, in „Clișeul în politica și în presa românească posttotalitară” / „Cliché in post-totalitarian Romanian press and politics”).

The fourth part, titled Contururi ale pieței media în postcomunism / Outlines of the media market in post-communism, encompasses the chapters signed by Liviu Antonesei, Adrian Marius Tompea, Andrei Cucu and Anca Teodora Tompea. In the chapter „O concisă privire istorică și o „analiză spectrală” a presei românești după 1989” / „A brief historical view and a „spectral analysis” of the Romanian press after 1989”, the writer and publicist Liviu Antonesei sketches the coordinates of the analysis of the evolution of the press after 1989 and of its relationship with Romanian democracy while emphasising the co-evolutionary link between the degradation of the press and that of the political class during the past decade. The issue of audience surveys in electoral campaigns (Adrian Marius Tompea, in „Audiența mass-media în campania electorală” / Mass-media audience in electoral campaigns”), media shows (Andrei Cucu, in „Măsurători de audiență în mass-media românești. Cazul arestării lui Becali, show mediatic” / „Audience measurements in the Romanian mass-media. The case of Becali’s arrest, a media show”) as well as the analysis of the evolution of newspaper layouts are other topics approached in the fourth part of the book.

The last part of the book focuses on the relationship between democracy and mass-media in a European context and approaches it from a perspective centred on the theory of international relations, which emphasises the informative role played by the mass-media in the reduction of differences.
among the member states of the European Union (Bogdan Ștefanachi, in „România postcomunistă – percepții și realități din perspectiva statutului de stat membru al UE” / „Post-communist Romania – perceptions and realities from the perspective of a EU member state”) as well as from a legal viewpoint, offered by Dan Drugă and Larisa Demeter, in „Dimensiunea constituțională a delictelor de presă. Incompatibilitatea între dreptul libertății de exprimare și incriminarea insultei și calomniei” / „The constitutional dimension of press-related crimes. The incompatibility between the right to freedom of speech and the incrimination of slander”.

As emphasised by its two editors, this book is therefore an „X-ray” of the status of the relationship between the political regime, with its decision-making and institutional mechanisms, and the media institutions of post-communist Romania.