

PART ONE: DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE

AFTER TRANSITION: THE MEDIA IN POLAND, RUSSIA AND CHINA

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Introduction

It is now nearly twenty years since the great crisis of Communism that led to the struggles, revolts and revolutions of 1989–92. The outcomes of those events have differed widely from place to place. Probably only North Korea survives today as a museum of a fully functioning Stalinist state. Elsewhere, even where the Communist parties continue to hold monopolies of political power, for example, in China, there have been changes, more or less extensive, to the nature of social and economic life. At the other extreme, eight of the European former Communist countries have changed sufficiently as to join the European Union, and two others are preparing for accession. Between the extremes, there are different types of political and economic systems established with a greater or lesser degree of stability.

The variety of different patterns of social organization is mirrored by the different patterns of media system. The rankings of 'Global Press Freedom' produced annually by Freedom House score Estonia and Latvia as "Free" at 17 points (equal 24th with the USA and Canada and one point better than the UK). Poland is "Free" at 20 points (equal 37th with France and two points ahead of Spain). Russia is "Not Free" at 68 points (equal 145th with Afghanistan, Egypt and Ethiopia and one point ahead of Malaysia). China is "Not Free" with 82 points (equal 177th with Vietnam, one point better than Syria and two points better than the Israeli-Occupied Territories/Palestinian Authority). Right down the bottom, number 194 in rank order, definitely "Not Free" and scoring 97 points is North Korea, one point below Burma, Cuba and Turkmenistan (Freedom House 2005). Whatever one makes of the value of the methodology employed to construct these rankings, and it strikes the current author as crude and frankly ideological, there is no doubt that the overall order does illuminate important differences. Other, equally limited, surveys, for example, that produced by *Reporters Without Frontiers*, differ in detail but produce similar rank orders, although everyone seems to agree that the Nordic countries are tops (*Reporters Without Frontiers* 2005).

Given that there were some strong similarities in the political and economic systems of all of these states at the start of the process of change, explaining the different outcomes, for the media no less than for the societies as a whole, is a major theoretical and empirical challenge. This paper suggests that the dominant political science tradition of understanding post-communist social change, which is usually, and inelegantly, called 'transitology,' is mistaken in its fundamental approach. Since most studies of the mass media rest, either implicitly or explicitly, upon the same assumptions, it is also the case that much of the writing about media in post-Communist societies has proved unable to theorise the very interesting empirical material it has generated. An alternative approach, that of 'elite continuity,' developed to account for changes on the western fringe of the former Warsaw Pact, is presented as an alternative to explain media change in three major cases: Poland, Russia and China. It is argued that this way of theorizing the processes at stake provides a more satisfactory account of the evidence, and also provides a possible basis for extension to other instances of transition.

The crisis of 'transitology'

The collapse of European communism in 1989–1991 was widely seen as part of the 'third wave' of democratization whose most famous proponent was the US political scientist Samuel Huntington (1991). Scholarly thinking about the events has largely been conducted within the intellectual current often known as 'transitology.' This had been developed a decade or so previously, and had focused most of its attention on the end of European fascism and the military dictatorships that dominated South American politics up to the mid 1980s. The concepts and methods developed to address those processes were extended to try to analyse the new wave of changes. The aim of transitology is to explain explicitly political change from dictatorial to democratic regimes and for them; 'What we refer to as the "transition" is the interval between one political regime and another' (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 2). With this intellectual background, it is hardly surprising that there has been an underlying assumption that post-Communist change was a process of which led from totalitarian communism to democratization. The bulk of this writing can fairly be termed 'teleological' since it assumes that there was a definite end, democracy as practiced in the 'originator' countries of north-west Europe and North America, towards which countries in transition are inevitably tending. The processes of change can therefore be understood, and judged, by measuring how far along the trajectory towards democracy the countries in question were. Despite the fierce theoretical debates that the term 'democracy' continues to provoke, the consensus amongst authors working in this tradition, however much they disagree about other things, is to follow Schumpeter and to stress a 'minimalist' conception of democracy (O'Donnell 2000, 6–11). As one author put it: 'a transition to democracy is complete when: (1) there is a real possibility of partisan alternation in office, (2) reversible policy changes can result from alternation in office, and (3) effective civilian control has been established over the military.' (Przeworski 1992, 105). In the purer forms of transitology, issues of social structure are an obstacle to a proper understanding of political transition: as one writer proudly proclaimed, transitology 'deliberately excludes from [the] basic denotation of democratic government, as a tactic of inquiry, any references to social structures and socioeconomic relations, believing that their inclusion is likely to obscure rather than facilitate the scientific comparative probing of political regimes' (Shain 1995, 47). Even rather more critical writers, who do acknowledge that democratization has the potential of profound social implications, distinguish these issues from the consideration of democratization per se (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 11–14).

This bold intellectual project immediately confronted an obvious and distinctive feature of post-Communist transition, which is that alongside the political changes consequent on the collapse of the Communist Party's monopoly of power, there were also thorough-going economic changes. The political changes were characterized as democratization and the economic changes as marketization. It was, thus, necessary to modify the absolute insistence on isolating the political level from any other kinds of factors, and to argue that these two processes are interdependent. With some honourable exceptions, the project of democratization was, in most cases, held to be theoretically impossible without the concurrent introduction of a market economy (Przeworski 1991; Linz and Stepan 1996, 11). The bulk of writing may be fairly characterized as "teleological" in this second aspect, too, in that it assumes that end of the process is already set and determined as a market economy and that these societies can be studied from the point of view how far they have progressed upon the path leading towards the economic relations that exist in the 'originator' countries, or more specifically the United States of America. The pure teleology of the original formulation of transitology was modified into a 'twin teleology' of democratization and marketization. Social change in post-Communist countries has thus been scrutinized for evidence of the fact that the societies in question are both becoming more democratic and more market-oriented, with the two processes dependent, one upon the other.

Discussions of the mass media play a surprisingly small part in political science accounts of transition or, indeed, of democracy. Logically, a theory derived from the view of democracy advanced by Schumpeter fits well with Lippmann's view of public opinion. But this connection is seldom or never explicitly drawn, although, of course, however unpalatable in theory and objectionable on normative grounds, in practice it provides a good working account of the situation in the originator countries. In general, it is stated that a free and independent media is a necessary condition for democracy, but the discussion remains innocent of any of the issues concerning such a statement that have been raised by research into media and communication. There are one or two honourable exceptions (Pei 1994; O'Neil 1998) but: 'Students of democratization often assert that a free press is one of the key 'pillars of democracy', but this idea is rarely developed any further' (O'Neil 1996, 3).

Communication scholars have naturally been more attentive to the problems of the media in transition, although it is fair to say that in the West the topic has received far less attention than other media phenomena, like the avatars of *Big Brother*, which are perhaps of lesser world-historical importance. They have, however, generally been more or less directly influenced by the twin teleologies of democracy and marketization developed by the transitologists. Again, there are important exceptions (Splichal 1994; Downing 1996; Zhao 1998; Reading 2003; Koltsova 2006) but the mainstream, while differing substantially over the pace of progress, more or less wrote the history of transition in terms of the struggles for media freedom and market economics (Lee 1994; Mickiewicz 1999; Gross 2002; Jakubowicz 2003a).

Nearly two decades later, this account of the trajectory of both society and the media no longer seems at all convincing. As one of the key critics of the 'transition paradigm' pointed out, only some of the societies that had begun a process of political change in 1989 had, by 2002, established what political scientists recognize as stable democracies (Carothers 2002). If the foundation of the paradigm had placed a very strong emphasis upon elections as the defining feature of a democracy, later scholars had wished to qualify that by adducing other factors. The end state was redefined as a 'liberal democracy', which was differentiated from a variety of other states, variously classified by different authors as 'electoral democracy',

'feckless pluralism', 'dominant power politics', 'sultanism' and so on. The seemingly endless proliferation of different intermediate stages between democracy and dictatorship not only reduces the elegance of the paradigm but also calls into question its explanatory power. In place of the belief in a straightforward and more or less linear transition to democracy as the ideal type of transition, with all instances of imperfection being regarded as anomalies, Carothers argued that theory and practice should: 'start by assuming that what is often thought of as an uneasy, precarious, middle ground between full-fledged democracy and outright dictatorship is actually the most common political condition today of countries in the developing world and the post-communist world' (2002, 17–18).

There are some signs that a similar conclusion is being drawn within studies of media in transitional societies even by some of those writers earlier associated with the transition school. Thus, Jakubowicz writes after a detailed account of the failure to establish public service broadcasting in the region that: 'It could be said, as with post-Communist transformation in general, that from one point view, media system change will be achieved once what is happening in Central and Eastern European media no longer has anything to do with overcoming the legacy of the Communist system – and that is quite some time away' (2004, 68). Similarly, recent studies of the press in China have tended to stress the extent to which the supposed contradictions between journalists and state have been resolved in the construction of 'Chinese Party Publicity Inc.' (Zhou 2000; Lee, Zhou and Huang 2006). In the case of Russia, of course, the consolidation of the Putin presidency is seen as establishing a new form of authoritarian control over the media (Belin 2002).

The evident failure of the 'transition paradigm' to provide a satisfactory account of political and economic development, either at the general level of political science or in the narrow but central field of the media, necessitates a reconsideration of our theoretical orientation. One option is to attempt to modify the paradigm, à la Tycho Brahe, in order to account for the observational anomalies. An alternative is to re-examine the problem and seek to discover whether there might be a better paradigm to explain it. It is the latter course that is adopted here.

The theory of elite continuity

As an alternative explanation of the dynamics of post-Communist media systems we may consider the theory of elite continuity. When studying the complex and protracted evolution of the media in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the first years after the fall of Communism, it quickly became apparent that the course of events was not following the programmes outlined either by the former dissidents who were now in power nor by the legion of consultants from Western Europe and the USA who were offering them advice as to how to restructure broadcasting and the press. The very worthy aim shared by almost everyone involved in the early years of transition might be summarized not too inaccurately as an attempt to create newspapers like the *New York Times* and broadcasters like the BBC (Sparks 2001). In fact, what emerged were newspapers that were highly partisan in their orientation and broadcasters that remained closely aligned with the state rather than the public (Sparks 1998).

In an attempt to offer a theoretical explanation for these realities, seven major components were identified:

- The events in Central and Eastern Europe were genuine revolutions. In many cases these revolutions were negotiated between a section of the dissident opposition and the reform

wing of the Communist Party, and very fortunately few of these revolutions involved any violence, but even in those cases they represented a clean break in the organization of political life. The monopoly of political power held by the Communist Party was broken both formally and substantially and new political parties were formed and contested for power.

- There was considerable continuity in both institutions and personnel between the old regime and the new. Institutions like the civil service, the army and the broadcasters remained substantially intact, both in their social position and in terms of their internal structure. In broadcasting, for example, the old state broadcasters were nowhere broken up or privatized. They remained central to the media systems, and they retained a very high proportion of their existing personnel.
- The shift towards a market economy was a highly political process, with the award of favourable opportunities being very closely connected to political power. The licensing of the new commercial broadcasters was a case in point, where political connections were essential to the winning of franchises.
- The media institutions that emerged from the process of transition were everywhere strongly influenced by the political elite. This was particularly obvious in the case of the broadcasters, where regulatory bodies were recomposed to follow the shifting results of elections. The media had changed from being one locus of power to being one of the stakes of power.
- The revolutions were, following this logic, certainly political revolutions, in that they transformed very rapidly the ways in which the countries in question were governed, but they were not social revolutions in that they did not pose any fundamental challenge to the social order in industry or the state machine.
- The main dynamic of the revolutions was that it permitted the old elite (roughly, the *nomenklatura*) to transform itself from one that rested upon the collective ownership of state property, which it guaranteed through its political monopoly, to one that rests on private property, acquired formally or informally through the exercise of political power, but sustained economically in the manner familiar from western capitalist societies.
- Democratization, still less the degree of democratization, is not a necessary part of this model. While the shift to individualised private capital certainly implies a pluralization of power in the society compared with the concentration of power in the old order, it does not automatically follow that this pluralism will be articulated through a democratic framework. In the cases studied during the 1990s, there was indeed a considerable degree of democratization, notably in elections, in establishing rights to free expression and political association, but theoretically this remained a contingent feature of the new order, not its essence.

This theoretical model, which lays its primary stress upon the social continuity in societies in transition, rather than assuming that the process was essentially one of democratization, provided a good fit to the events in the first decade after the fall of Communism in the western-most of the European Communist states. The weakest parts of the model were, first, that there was then little sociological evidence as to the personnel shifts in the elite; and, secondly, that the examples studied did not provide any evidence to test the hypothesis that democratic rule was a contingent factor rather than an integral part of the process. In all four cases considered, the outcomes were sufficiently close to at least the Western European model of democracy as to permit the countries successfully to apply for members of the EC.

In addition, it was not clear whether the model was specific to its particular time frame and geographical focus, or whether it could be extended to explain the features of transitions away

from established dictatorships more generally, for example, in East Asia or in other comparable transitions in Europe itself. Given the unique economic and political structures which lent credibility to the description of these regimes as “totalitarian”, it was not at all clear that similar tendencies would be observable in societies with an “authoritarian” structure: that is, where economic power was more widely dispersed in private hands and the ruling elite did not have the same degree of control of every form of social organization. In such cases the expectation would be that the process would exhibit a different dynamic since the nature of any change would necessarily have a different scope.

Poland, Russia, China

One cause of the problems facing the transition paradigm is the heroic scope of its ambitions. It seeks, at least, to attempt to offer an explanation of events as distinct as the fall of the Franco regime in Spain in the 1970s, the replacement of the military dictatorships of Latin America in the 1980s, the aftermath of the fall of Communism, the end of the Apartheid regime in southern Africa, and so on. In its grander form, it would stretch back to include decolonization, the reconstruction of the former Axis powers after 1945, possibly the fall of the Kaiser, or even the 1832 Reform Act. We cannot here attempt anything so ambitious. Indeed, we cannot even hope to cover the huge variety of experiences arising out of the crisis of 1989–1992. Rather, we restrict ourselves to an attempt cautiously to extend the range of the theory through the consideration of three national cases: Poland, Russia and China. This at least reduces the scope to something more manageable, but such a drastic restriction does demand some justification.¹ We need first to consider the extent to which these societies can be considered comparable, and secondly to ask how far they can be considered as representative of wider trends in the post-Communist world. If we can construct a case for the comparability of the three countries, then it remains to specify exactly what aspects of the media systems we intend to examine in order to make the comparison.

The countries chosen are widely separated geographically and culturally, but there are sufficient similarities in the starting point of their transition for them to be considered together. They were, 30 years ago, all variations of a recognizable ‘communist’ (or, if you prefer, ‘Stalinist’) type of society. They were marked by state control of the major leavers of the economy, and Communist Party control of the state machine. Further, in none of the cases was the rule of the Communist Party subject to any kind of democratic sanction, whether formal or informal. The leadership of the Party exercised complete control over the senior levels of all aspects of society, including the mass media. The existence of independent organizations, or the establishment of independent organizations, even pursuing very innocuous ends, was very strictly regulated where it was not completely forbidden. In short, the leading elements of the Party, through the ‘*nomenklatura*’ system, controlled all areas of economic, political, social and cultural life in the societies they presided over, for which they handsomely rewarded themselves with goods and services that were not available to the mass of the population. Their exact status and the central dynamics of the societies which they ruled have been the subject of intense and protracted debates, to which we will return later.

Having identified sufficient similarities in the initial system states to warrant comparison, we should also note important differences. The first of these was that while neither Poland nor Russia was ‘totalitarian’ in the original sense, since they were no longer characterized by constant social mobilization, nor did they possess an elite with markedly utopian historical goals. China in the 1970s was just emerging from the Cultural Revolution and, thus, did have recent

experience of mass top-down mobilization and of a leadership with grandiose ambitions to transform the world.

Secondly, the societies differed greatly in their level of development. All three had large agricultural sectors, it is true, but Poland and Russia were significantly more urbanised and industrialized than was China. Similarly, and largely as a result of these demographic factors, Poland and Russia, while not wealthy by world standards, were qualitatively richer than China.

Thirdly, the regimes had come to power in different ways. The regimes in Russia and China had come to power through autochthonous revolutions and struggles against foreign invaders. The Polish regime, on the other hand, had come to power essentially as an extension of the Soviet military victory of 1945 and the subsequent political settlement. While the Communist Party did enjoy some popular support, there can be no doubt that the regime was imposed by foreigners rather than resulting from resistance to invaders. As a result of these different paths to power, the regimes enjoyed different degrees of legitimacy. The Russian and Chinese Communist Parties could claim the mantle of national defence alongside any other claims they might make, while the Polish Party was widely perceived as an alien imposition lacking in any national mandate. Partly as a consequence of this, the nature and scale of popular discontent with the system varied widely, being by far the most explicit and militant in Poland.

Fourthly, Poland was (and remains) a remarkably homogeneous country, ethnically, linguistically and religiously, largely as a result of horrible barbarisms of the Second World War and its aftermath, including most notably the Holocaust. China, while predominantly homogeneous in ethnic terms, contained (and continues to contain) important ethnic, religious, linguistic and national minorities, some of which, in Tibet and in north-western China, are politically sensitive. Russia, on the other hand, was then embedded in the Soviet Union, in which ethnic Russians were the dominant national grouping. The population of the USSR was enormously diverse, ethnically, religiously, linguistically and nationally, and politics in the successor states remain very strongly marked by the working through of those divisions.

If there are grounds for careful comparison between the countries, it is important to ask whether the cases we have chosen are at all representative of broader trends, or whether they are unique and the results, therefore, ungeneralizable. We began by noting the differences between the degree of media freedom in different countries, and it is important to recognise that all cases have unique features that defy the theorist's desire to abstract and categorize. However, at a certain level of abstraction it is possible to undertake some tentative categorizations which allow us to consider our chosen cases as more or less representative of different classes of countries. There are no agreed standards by which we might undertake this classification, and we are not in a position in this paper to offer a rigorous typology of post-communism, but one study, which reviewed a range of indicators for European countries, including the rankings produced by Freedom House and *Reporters Without Frontiers* mentioned above, came to the conclusion that although they individually lacked any genuine scientific basis, the extent to which their judgements tended to converge lent some confidence to attempts to categorize (Berg-Schlusser 2004). His categories, which are interestingly reminiscent of a professor grading students, and certainly suggest an underlying teleological model, run through A (Full Democracy), B (Almost Liberal Democracy) C (Electoral Democracy) to D (Not Democratic). Poland, rated at A-, is in the top tier of formerly Communist countries, along with the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and Slovakia, and Italy. Russia, rated at C, along with Turkey, is near the bottom, which is populated by places like Belarus with a score of D (Berg-Schlusser 2004, table one). The geographical scope of this article does not include China, but

it would presumably rate a D, or perhaps a new special category of E (Exceptionally Not Democratic). The countries we have chosen, we can therefore reasonably claim, can be taken to stand for at least some of the different social and economic media arrangements in actually existing post-Communism. We might also add that these three countries happen to be the largest in each of the groups to which they are assigned and, thus, we can discount some of the differences that arise from disparities of scale. (Even within Group A, where issues of 'democracy' are not really at stake, differences of scale obviously result in significant differences in the media systems, as a comparison of RTE in Ireland with the BBC, for example, would undoubtedly illuminate).

Comparing Russia and Poland would be accepted more or less without demur by the proponents of the 'transition paradigm', however, they might balk at China, since this has not yet made any noticeable progress towards democracy. That objection is valid if, and only if, we accept the view that there is a democratic teleology at work in the world that will produce similar outcomes in China to those elsewhere. But this is precisely the assumption that is now in crisis. As is common knowledge, China has for the last quarter century been undergoing a transformation of enormous scale and depth, and including China in the comparison allows us to consider what the mechanisms of transition actually are, rather than prejudging the question by assuming that we already know the answer. There are therefore adequate grounds for a cautious attempt to compare the three cases, while making all due allowances for the inevitable differences that history, geography and culture will necessarily introduce into the analysis.

If we accept that examining these three countries will yield at least some insights into the nature of post-Communist transitions, it is necessary to identify those aspects of the media systems that we intend to compare. Contemporary discussions of comparative media systems are heavily indebted to Hallin and Mancini's work, which was developed in order to consider the media systems of Western Europe and North America. Their book has provoked considerable interest and debate, and it is impossible to accept their views without reservation, particularly with regard to its functionalist theoretical dimensions. It is, however, worth attempting to make use of as much of their framework as possible as a useful starting point for considering how to operationalize our own, geographically and historically distinct, concerns, partly at least because such an effort will illuminate parallels and differences between the media systems they survey and the ones which lie at the centre of our interests.

Hallin and Mancini identify four key dimensions of media systems along which they may be compared:

- (1) the development of media markets, with particular emphasis on the strong or weak development of a mass circulation press; (2) political parallelism; that is, the degree and nature of the links between the media and political parties or, more broadly, the extent to which the media system reflects the major political divisions in society; (3) the development of journalistic professionalism; and (4) the degree and nature of state intervention in the media system. (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 21)

These four categories provide a useful starting point for a comparison of post-Communist societies, although they cannot be adopted without reservation, and we consider them in turn.

Political parallelism is a way of thinking about the extent and manner of the links between media and political forces that are central to our concerns, but it rests on the assumption that

there are both a plurality of media and of political forces between which there might be a greater or lesser degree of parallelism. We do not wish to make this assumption, either on theoretical grounds or for reasons of simple empirical observation: there are cases in which since well-established alternative political positions are not able to establish their own links with media and while there is a plurality of media they are all closely linked to one political force. In practice it is better to term the phenomenon we are examining political alignment, of which parallelism is one distinctive version.

Journalistic professionalism, in the sense of journalists being a distinct occupational group able to act 'autonomously', free from direct intervention from outside the newsroom, is again a valuable consideration in our three cases, but it obscures some very important features of the cases we are considering. As we shall see, in the Russian case, journalists 'autonomously' took a range of decisions to align themselves with various economic forces without any external coercion. Again, in the Chinese case, some of the key negotiations over professional autonomy we will note are conducted within the newsroom itself between journalists.

The utility of considering state intervention is, we think, self-evident in this context since none of the evidence we are examining can be understood without reference to the state. The concept of state intervention, however, can cover a huge range of different activities, and it is, of course, essential to distinguish, at least in theory, between 'state' and 'government' (Sparks 1986). Some aspects of state intervention can have benign effects for the media, for example, the decision to exempt newspapers from value added tax, and others, obviously including sending the police to close down newspapers, can be very detrimental, so it is always essential to specify the kinds of state intervention under discussion rather carefully.

The issue of the development of a media market, and particularly a mass circulation press, seems problematic even in their own account and does not provide much insight for our purposes. The issue of the development of the media market further needs to be clearly distinguished from issues of press circulation. The development of a media market is logically independent of the existence of a mass press: the USSR was famously home to a mass circulation press that was, as we shall see, decimated by the introduction of the 'market'. Press circulation has been subject to such rapid changes, in different directions, in all three of our cases, that it is difficult to see how it might be taken as a distinctive, or even a stable, feature for comparison. The rise of press circulation in China, and the change in its composition, stands in such sharp contrast to the collapse of press circulation in Russia and Poland, and is the result of such different economic and political factors that it makes no sense whatsoever to make it a key comparator.

The term 'market' itself is central both to Hallin and Mancini and to transitionology, and it is thus a central question for our investigation. It is used by almost all writers to cover three quite distinct processes, leading to three quite distinct end states, which may not occur together in any given instance, and it is important to distinguish between them. While in the case of the Western European and North American cases considered by Hallin and Mancini, discussion is mostly about the nature of the end states; in our cases most of the discussion is around the processes whereby these end states are brought in to being. The first process is commercialization, which consists of the subjecting of part or all of the media system to revenue-raising goals, whether through subsidy, sponsorship, circulation or advertising. This subordination of media to commercial imperatives can occur in any system and is independent of ownership or market: RTVE, which for a long time held a monopoly on television broadcasting in Spain, and Channel 4 in the UK, for example, while both clearly state-owned, have always raised their revenues

primarily from the sale of advertising space. The second is privatization, which in our case concerns the transfer of ownership from the state to companies or individuals, which is independent of commercialization or market: the French state, for example, sold off the channel TF1 in 1986. The third is marketization proper, which involves media entering into competitive relations for revenue, which can exist independently of ownership but not of commercialization: an example is that of commercial terrestrial broadcasting in the UK which, from the inception of Channel 4 in 1982 to the implementation of the 1990 Broadcasting Act, had two competitive channels financed by advertising, but only one group of companies selling advertising, the revenue for which was divided between the two, one privately and the other state owned, on a basis determined by a political decision. It is the interplay of these three processes, rather than an abstract judgement of the "market" that is the important feature of the media in the countries we are examining.

In using all four of these categories, we are not attempting to apply them in exactly the same way, or with exactly the same content, as do Hallin and Mancini. On the contrary, we think there are significant ways in which their categories are, no doubt unconsciously, dependent upon a teleological conception of the media very close to that of the transitologists, and they seem expressly to believe that there is a process of evolution towards one of their models underway. But it makes sense, in the interests of developing a common body of knowledge, to follow them as far as is practicable in the very different environment that we wish to consider, to which we now turn.

Poland

The distinctive feature of Poland during the Communist epoch, which distinguished it from all of the other cases under consideration, is that there was open, protracted and intense opposition to the regime. The opposition was widespread, often erupting in mass movements, and was primarily working class in social character. While opposition never reached the pitch of intensity of Hungary in 1956, resistance in Poland was a relatively frequent phenomenon, culminating in the Solidarity period in 1980 and 1981. According to one authoritative account, this opposition succeeded in constructing an alternative public sphere from at least 1976. The Catholic Church had enjoyed, since 1956, the right to publish its own newspapers, and from the mid-1970s onwards there was an increasing tide of illegal publications, rising from around 15 in 1977 to 50 in 1979 (Jakubowicz 1990, 339). It has been argued that there were, in effect, three public spheres in Poland by the end of the 1970s: the "official" run by the party-state; the alternative run predominantly by the Roman Catholic Church; and the opposition in the underground periodicals and books (Jakubowicz 1991, 158–61).

The great popular mobilization during the Solidarity period gave rise to very radical proposals for restructuring the principal mass media (Jakubowicz 1990, 341–42; Goban-Klas 1994, 165–82; Jakubowicz 1995b, 130–33)). The intention was to establish a media system in which a whole range of social groups would both participate in the management of the mass media and in directly expressing their ideas and beliefs in and through the mass media. The number of illegal, although now quite open, publications rose to around 1,500 in 1981 (Jakubowicz 1990, 339). There was a genuine and wide-ranging debate about the media and media freedom. The participants included journalists and broadcasters but also involved huge numbers of newly aware people from outside the media industries. In an intense debate taking place over a compressed time span in rapidly changing social conditions, these plans were far from complete and systematic, different sections of the movement clearly had different interests,

and the shape of the desired outcomes shifted over time, but the common desire was for a radical break with the existing structures of media power.

In December 1981, martial law was declared in Poland, allegedly as the price for preventing a Soviet invasion, and Solidarity was driven underground. Excluded from the electronic media and the press, from which more than 1,200 journalists were purged, it established a wide range of underground news-sheets. According to one estimate a total of 2,077 underground periodicals were produced during the martial law period (Jakubowicz 1991, 159–60). The Party, or at least its reform wing, recognized that they would need to strike a deal with their intransigent opponents and by 1988 they were engaged in direct negotiations with Solidarity representatives. These were formalized in the next year into Round Table discussions that included the mass media (Goban-Klas 1990; Jakubowicz 1990, 345–46).

The Solidarity stance in these negotiations represented a more moderate approach than that developed in the preceding period. The proposals called for Solidarity to gain representation in broadcasting and for a degree of empowerment of civil society in broadcasting in the longer term (Jakubowicz 1991, 169–70). In the event, both the proposals of the reform Communists and the suggestions from Solidarity proved unworkable when the result of the first reasonably free elections resulted in a massive popular mandate for the latter. By 1990, they had the power and the support to remake the media according to their own prescriptions.

Ideas about the media inside Solidarity were developing very quickly away from theories of ‘direct communicative democracy’ towards theories of ‘representative communicative democracy’ (Jakubowicz 1993, 44–50). In practice, this quickly came to mean the representation of political forces in the media. In the press, some of the old underground papers survived and prospered, notably *Gazeta Wyborcza*, and dozens of new titles were launched by parties and social groups alike. The existing party press was rapidly privatized. In some cases (71 out of 170) titles were handed over to their staff, thus at least going some way towards empowering civil society, although in the longer term most of these were so undercapitalized that they were sold on to private interests. In others, they were sold according to political rather than commercial criteria (Jakubowicz 1995b).

In broadcasting, however, there were no proposals for civil society to have a role in running radio or television. Faced with a choice between a ‘German’ and a ‘French’ system of governance, politicians of all stripes opted to empower themselves through choosing the latter. The National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT) was set up to reflect the will of the President, the Lower House and the Senate. The clear aim of government, then and later, was to dominate broadcasting in order to dominate the national political debate (Jakubowicz 1995a, 40). Private broadcasting, which might potentially challenge this, was only introduced very slowly.

The media system that emerged from these changes was, by the mid-1990s, one that was thoroughly politicized. The media were certainly plural, but they could not in any real sense be classified as ‘independent’. Rather, in the printed press, they reflected a wide range of ownership, both Polish and foreign, but they were overwhelmingly ‘political’ rather than ‘commercial’ in orientation (Goban-Klas 1996, 26–28). Many journalists, too, were far from seeing themselves as neutral reporters and observers on a situation: rather, they considered themselves to be representing a particular point of view. The result, according to Jakubowicz, is that the press: ‘...helps air diverse views and opinions, but usually of party elites, rather than their rank-and-file members or of groups in society in general.’ (2003b, 237).

Broadcasting was, and is, even more clearly politicized. The KRRiT, which appoints the supervisory boards of public broadcasters, which in turn appoint the boards of management,

has been the subject of continual battles between political parties keen to ensure that their views have been represented in the overall control of broadcasting, and through that into the management of the dominant, state-owned radio and television broadcasters. One detailed study of the regulation and operation of Polish broadcasting concluded that: 'The composition of the KRRiT has been systematically politicized, not only in the sense of who appoints its members, but, more importantly, in the fact that members have been more or less clearly affiliated to political parties (Krajewski 2005, 1144).

This politically determined media landscape does not appear to be a temporary phenomenon related to the immediate aftermath of Communism. Whether it constitutes the 'stable state' of subordination to the power structure, and to particular political forces inside it, that Jakubowicz identifies is a matter of debate (2003b, 241). The evidence from recent events appears to show that politicization is, if anything increasing as a result of the actions of the new Law and Justice (PiS)-dominated government following the elections of 2005. This passed a new media act in December 2005 that reconstituted the KRRiT, again on the basis of political appointment, and promptly filled the new board with its own supporters. After a number of legal challenges, the new board went on to appoint a Supervisory Board for Polish Television that reflected the parties of the governing coalition (PISS 19 May 2006). Subsequently, members of one of the coalition parties (Sambroona or SD) sought a distribution of management posts in both radio and television to reward its members. The third member of the coalition, the League of Polish Families (LPR), appointed one of their leaders to the management board and defended him (successfully) when it was revealed that he had edited an anti-Semitic newspaper in the 1990s.

This, one of the most successful examples of the 'democratic teleology', has therefore not seen the emergence of an independent media as called for by the transitional paradigm. What exists in Poland today is certainly a plural media, but it is hardly one that can claim to stand for society rather than interest groups. The other dimension of the transition paradigm, however, can be dealt with much more simply: the 'market teleology' was substantively realized from very early on. The press was cut loose from subsidies very early on, and with a declining circulation was forced to rely on developing advertiser support from the beginning, although this was far from fully developed. Broadcasting, for its part, also depends very heavily on advertising. Even the state broadcasters gain the vast majority of their revenues from the sale of advertising space, and the commercial broadcasters are completely dependent upon this revenue stream. There is no question that Polish media have been subject to a process of marketization. This is not, of course, unproblematic, and it is a matter of debate what effect it has had on the conduct of the media, but there is no doubt that it has taken place. Large sections of the media, in both press and broadcasting, have been privatized, although public broadcasters remain central to the system. Both the state-owned and the privatized media have become thoroughly commercialized. Finally, they have been subject to a process of marketization proper, in that they have entered competitive economic relations with each other. In terms of the other categories adapted from Hallin and Mancini, the Polish media today are marked by a high degree of political parallelism, by a low degree of journalistic professional autonomy and high, direct and frequent state intervention into the media.

Russia

The Communist Party in the USSR certainly faced discontent and dissidence, but unlike Poland this does not seem to have taken a mass form in the recent past. The initiative for social change

came from within the Party itself and it was this that drove media changes (White, Gill and Slyder 1993; Ryabov 2004, 175). While there was an interchange between the Gorbachev section of the Party and some dissidents during the 1990s, there is little evidence that this was on the scale of Poland (Horvath 2005, 50–80). Rather, a wing of the Party attempted to restructure the system and later to open it to more debate. This was immediately reflected in the media, which was effectively divided between three groups of the nomenklatura: the radical Yeltsin wing, who wished to make substantial changes; a conservative wing opposed to change, grouped around Ligachev, and the Gorbachev centre that oscillated between perspectives (Gibbs 1999, 60–61 and 66ff). The situation that developed by 1989 was, according to many observers, one of relative freedom, indeed, a 'golden age', in which the media were free to pursue self-determined journalistic objective, while at the same time enjoying subsidies that made them free from financial constraints (Hagstrom 2000, 200–206; Ryabov 2004, 178).

In the press, employees started to take over their papers as the crisis of the regime intensified after 1990, and the failed coup of 1991 accelerated this process (Zassoursky 2004, 15–16). The press now enjoyed a substantial degree of journalistic freedom, but its economic position was much weakened. Politically, however, the new Yeltsin regime, which came to power after the 1991 coup, faced a hard struggle against the defenders of the old regime, who constituted a large bloc in the parliament. They threatened to seize back control of their party's alienated assets, so the press found itself, in self-defence, aligned politically with Yeltsin's side in an increasingly tense conflict rather than acting as a neutral reporter.

Privatization had its economic price as well. Costs of production and distribution rose rapidly while circulation fell dramatically, and the new revenues from advertising were very slow to develop. As a consequence, most of the newly-independent newspapers found themselves in severe financial difficulties and in need of subsidy in one form or another. State subsidies, however, were dependent upon political support for the Kremlin and not adequate to cover rising costs. The only other source of financial support was the newly-rich business class (the 'oligarchs') and it was to them that the press was forced in the main to turn (Belin 2002a, 140–41). During the first years, there developed a "market for influence" as one independent newspaper after another was bought up by one of the oligarchs. (Zassoursky 1999, 162–63). The oligarchs used their new properties to promote their own causes and interests (Fadin 2002).

The process in television, on the other hand, was much more controlled, with different groups of politicians holding on to parts of the old broadcasting apparatus. One observer argues that 'the process of commercialization and restructuring of television in Russia were orchestrated in the early 1990s by senior state officials' (Rozanova 2006). When private television and radio did develop, it was from the start in the hands of the same oligarchs as had come to control the press. In the early part of the 1990s, these were almost all very closely allied with the Kremlin, to whose influence many of them owed their fortunes (Klebnikov 2000; Hoffman 2002; Freeland 2005). State television was also altered to a more commercially driven model concerned with audiences and advertising. In addition, the strength of the conservative opposition, who controlled the Duma and attempted a counter-coup in 1993, posed a constant threat of re-appropriation of the oligarchs' dubious fortunes and the private broadcasters, as much as the state broadcaster and the press, welcomed the bloody defeat of the parliamentarians (with more than 100 killed). It is, thus, a mistake to see the private broadcasters as having fundamentally different orientations than the state-controlled broadcasters. It is true that the Gusinsky-owned NTV did engage in reporting that was independent and critical of the Kremlin during the first Chechen war, beginning in 1994, but

by the time of the 1996 presidential election all of the oligarchs had struck a deal with Yeltsin and gave him systematic and enthusiastic support that helped him to win an election which he had entered very much as an outsider (Lipman and McFaul 2005).

What occurred in the first five years after the fall of Communism in the USSR was thus a process whereby a highly politicized media system evolved. Alongside the national broadcasters who remained directly controlled by the Kremlin, the large national private media had fallen in to the hands of big businesses. These businesses had differing interests, and used their media to pursue them, but they were all allied in one way or another with the Kremlin. In the provinces, the links between business and the local political leadership were even tighter (Hagstrom 2000, 231). Thus, while there was a limited plurality of views present, the media functioned not to represent the diversity of society but the interests of their paymasters. As Koltsova put it: 'what differentiates this situation from the previous Soviet regime is that various power groups compete in their struggle for resources, thus providing some pluralism of interpretations that sometimes grows into fierce 'information wars' (2001, 322-23). With very few exceptions, the mass media were all highly politicized, even though most of the leading national print media and radio had been privatized. Compared with the last years of Communism, things seemed to some observers have got worse. Ryabov argues that, taken together, the influence of the Kremlin and the oligarchs meant that 'The replacement of the media's democratizing mission with the more narrow goal of supporting Yeltsin, compounded by their economic dependence in the new market economy, explain the notable decline from the early transition period' (Ryabov 2004, 182-83).

This, however, is not the end of the story. The collapse of Communism had seen a collapse of the Russian economy (worse than the Great Depression in the USA according to most accounts) and a severe crisis of the Russian state. Although there was a bargain between the Kremlin and the new oligarchs, the terms of that deal were not equal. If anything, in the years up to Yeltsin's re-election in 1996, the terms were very favourable to the oligarchs who obtained, or seized, former state assets at remarkably reduced prices. As the state machine began to recover from these reverses, it attempted to reign in the worst excesses of the oligarchs and to reassert its definition of the public, national, interest as against the private interests of businesses. Yeltsin and his chosen successor Putin launched a campaign aimed at bringing significant sections of the media, and in particular television back under their own close control (Belin 2002b). Through complex manoeuvres, Putin was able to seize NTV in 2000, effectively re-nationalize Channel 1 and force ST-6 to wind up in 2002 (Lipman and McFaul 2005, 62-64).

Although private ownership of the media has grown in Russia in recent years, the range of owners of large-scale media politically independent of the Kremlin has certainly been reduced since the mid-1990s, and their degree of operational freedom has certainly shrunk since the beginning of that decade. The media in private hands are either dedicated to non-political entertainment or, if they continue to have a political dimension, are very closely linked to the Kremlin. The second Chechen war, despite its horrors, has seen little critical reporting of the kind that NTV conducted in 1994. On the other hand, it is wrong to see this as a structural change from the first Yeltsin presidency. It is a change and a retreat from the years around 1991, but the realities of privatization forced the media into the hands of oligarchs long before Putin came to prominence, and the bargaining between the Kremlin and business is a common theme of the whole period. The media are, therefore, more plural today, but they are no more responsible to the interests of society as a whole than they were in 1996.

Again, we have a situation in which the democratic teleology has not worked through as required by the transition paradigm. The media are plural, but they are even less free and

independent than those in Poland. The market teleology, on the other hand, appears to have been rather thoroughly implemented, at least at the formal level. If we unpack the category, however, we discover that while much of the media has been privatized, although some of it has remained in state hands and some has been purchased back by the state or state companies, both in the press and in broadcasting. The media have been thoroughly commercialized but it is much more problematic to say that they have been marketized. One of the major factors that drove the press into the hands of the oligarchs was that when they were forced to turn to the market it proved impossible to generate the revenue needed to sustain the press, and they had to look to politically motivated subsidy in order to survive. It is, more generally, very questionable as to whether we can claim that there is yet a developed media market in Russia. The concept of political parallelism is also difficult to apply directly, since although the media have been politically engaged, the large national media have since the early 1990s been overwhelmingly on the side of the Kremlin, even when political opinion in the elite was deeply divided. It is better in cases like this to say that the media in Russia display strong political alignment with the dominant power rather than they have paralleled political divisions. Very low journalistic independence, however, and marked state intervention are clearly strongly present in this case.

China

The obviously distinctive feature of China is that the Communist Party there is in rude health (with more than 70 million members) and continues to enjoy a monopoly of power. There has been no transition, however problematic, at the political level. What there has been, however, is a rapid and very successful movement towards a market economy. In terms of the twin teleologies, there is no doubt that there has been no interrupted march to democracy but there does seem to have been a very successful implementation of the market teleology. The same paradox is visible at the level of the mass media: the Party, through the Central Propaganda Department and its local equivalents at every level of society, continues to control the mass media, not simply negatively in terms of censorship but much more positively through issuing instructions about what to cover and how to cover it (Brady 2006). At the same time, as all serious observers would agree, the overwhelming majority of Chinese media have become increasingly market oriented along with the rest of the economy (see, for example: Polunbaum 1994 Zhao 1998; Wu 2000, 57–60; Lee, He and Huang 2006, 582–84).

The route to this state of affairs began with the defeat of the survivors of the Cultural Revolution and the 1978 decision by the Deng Xiaoping leadership to start opening the Chinese economy to elements of the market, apparently impressed by the success of ‘market socialism’ in Hungary and Yugoslavia (Meisner 1999, 451). The 1980s saw a steady opening of the economy, the ending of the commune system and start of private enterprises in the countryside together with the ending of many of the social guarantees provided by the state, notably the erosion of lifetime employment for workers in state industries (Leung 1988; Weil 1996; Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2005, 34–61).

These economic and social changes produced an intellectual ferment, particularly amongst journalists. Some sections of the Party encouraged a more critical and investigative reporting, partly perhaps from conviction and partly to strengthen their hands in factional battles with the opponents of reform (Pei 1994, 179–204; Polunbaum 1990). Not only do journalists working in the official media look back on this period as a golden age when there was a degree of freedom both from political control and from market pressures, but there was also the

establishment of a number of titles, notably the *World Economic Herald* (Hsiao and Wang 1990). Even sections of the leadership argued for serious media reform in the direction of press freedom (Lee 1994, 7-9).

The effect of economic reform and political liberalization was the social discontent that triggered the Tiananmen events of 1989. Beginning as an unofficial memorial service for one of the leading reform Communists, Hu Yaobang, who was closely associated with the argument for greater press freedom, this initially student-led event quickly broadened to include a wide range of supporters, including journalists. On 4th May, an important political anniversary in China, journalists marched with banners saying things like 'Don't force me to spread rumours, news must speak the truth' (Gittings 2006, 233). A total of 500 journalists from the official central party newspaper, *People's Daily*, marched behind a banner demanding 'Freedom of the Press'. Two days later, the official press began to report the demonstrations (Goldman 1994, 33). The December 1989 strike by Czech TV workers that forced the state channel to broadcast the events in Wenceslas Square is an obvious parallel, albeit with a different and happier outcome.

Just like Poland and the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and like Russia two years later, China had its 1989. The horrible difference was that the hard-line faction in the CCP leadership defeated the reformers and, on 4th June, the opposition was crushed by the military. Alongside the many deaths at the hands of the military, and the executions that followed, thousands were arrested and beaten, many were jailed and others driven in to exile (Gittings 2006, 241-49). The media did not escape the general purge. The *World Economic Herald* and similar papers were closed down. The troublemakers on the staff of *People's Daily* (those who had demanded press freedom) were fired and replaced by loyal recruits from the provinces (Goldman 1994, 34). Zhao Ziyang, the reformist Prime Minister, was placed under house arrest, where he remained until his death in 2005.

On the face of it, it looks as though the outcome in China was the direct opposite of what occurred in Russia and Poland. The Communist Party had hung on to political power, and the process of economic reform was stopped in its tracks. In fact, in 1992, Deng Xiaoping went to Shenzhen Special Economic Zone in south China and announced the launch of a new phase of economic reform. The hardliners were defeated and marginalised. The consequence, as is well known, is that the Chinese economy launched into a new phase of marketization and export-led economic growth.

The media have been marked by the settlement of 1992 every bit as much those of Poland and Russia. The paradox of a market orientation combined with political control is a more or less direct reflection of the general situation in China. As the economy has expanded, so the media have grown along with it, catering to the varied tastes of their audiences in much the same way as any other newspapers and magazines that are driven by advertising and circulation income. Alongside the official Party-approved news, television stations show imported dramas (Korean, for preference) and game shows and talent contests derived from the West (Hunan TV's *Super Girl*, remotely derived from Thames TV's *Pop Idol*, has been the most successful to date). There is also, however, a well-developed tradition of investigative journalism that survived the crackdown and re-emerged with the renewal of economic development. This journalism, although always directed at abuses of the system rather than the system itself, is not merely tolerated by the Party but was and is actively encouraged by it. As Zhao put it: 'In contrast to Western media portrayal of maverick Chinese journalists challenging the Party line from below and from the outside by discussing hot social issues and exposing

official corruption, the most significant step towards the rise of watchdog journalism was initiated at the top of the party's propaganda hierarchy' (2004, 55). It is, of course, functional for the Party leadership to allow the exposure of outrageous abuses, like CCTV's *News Probe* investigation into the local police murder of a worker in custody on the instigation of the factory manager (de Burgh 2006, 123).

The co-existence of market-driven media and political authoritarianism has lasted now for more than a decade, without any signs of a loosening of the Party's hold. On the contrary, the last two or three years have seen a tightening of control under Hu Jintao's regime as part of the effort to defuse the gathering social crisis of unequal development. Whether this constitutes a stable system is a matter of some controversy but Zhang was undoubtedly correct when she wrote recently that 'TV current affairs programmes in China have been exploited to play a key role in shaping public discourse and creating social or psychological climate favourable for political stability' (Zhang 2006, 734). Certainly, the current evidence seems to suggest that, at least so long as macroeconomic growth continues at the current pace the Party can find ways of staying in power in the country as a whole, but the longer term future is completely unpredictable. There is, for example, massive popular discontent amongst peasants and urban workers who have not benefited from the boom, and have lost their previous social safety net (Chan 2001). Within the field of the media, however, it is possible to identify a number of possible points of tension that have attracted the interest of researchers, although here again there is considerable controversy.

The first of these is the status and role of journalists. At one pole there are those who see Chinese journalists as influenced by western journalistic examples and attempting to find ways to reach an accommodation between their professional desires and the concrete reality of their situation. Younger journalists in particular 'interact with the commandist institution and "negotiate" the boundary of the official ideology by broadening the sources of symbolic resources and by diversifying social practices within the official ideology' (Pan 2000, 75). On the other hand there are researchers who argue that the Party has managed to reach an accommodation with journalists so that as they 'became economically privileged in the 1990s, they became increasingly apolitical and contented with the status quo' (Lee, Zhou and Huang 2006, 600). In between is a position that recognizes that while journalists as a group were in the 1990s and 2000s among the beneficiaries of increasing wealth, and that this has led many of them to conform, there remain many others who are prepared to risk punishment in order to carry out investigative reporting and push against the restrictions imposed by the party-state (Zhao 2004, 60-64). Strong evidence for this is the constant series of struggles between journalists and the party-state, which is particularly likely to intervene sharply, closing titles, moving critical journalists away and importing loyal substitutes, and even jailing people on trumped-up charges, if the reports go beyond criticizing individual abuses and expose the weaknesses of the system (Zhao 2005, 66-70). Certainly, that has been the fate of Chen Guidi and Wun Chuntao, who in December 2003 published a book detailing the terrible conditions of the Chinese peasantry in Anhui province. The book was an immediate success, but was banned by the Central Propaganda Department. It has circulated massively in clandestine editions, but the two authors have suffered threats, violence and official persecution, and Chen was told to resign from his job (Chen and Wu 2006). There are numerous other cases of similar repression directed against journalists and titles that have pushed the limits of acceptability just too far. The reality is likely very similar in structure, but certainly not in the severity of the outcomes, to the situation in western countries: many journalists are quite contented with the

system that rewards them so well and see no reason to challenge it; some are discontented but conform to the norms for career reasons; some are either fortunate enough or brave enough to try to publish what they believe to be important truths in defiance of the threat of sanctions.

The second area of debate is the extent to which the Chinese market functions as a genuinely free market. There are two issues here. In the first place, there has been a conscious policy of constructing large media conglomerates in the press and broadcasting over the last decade, partly in anticipation of the effects of entry into the WTO (Hu 2003). According to some commentators, very far from marketization leading to an opening of China to foreign media we are approaching a stage when China will have the potential to become a major international exporter (Keane 2006). This concentration of economic power has not been as the result of an 'organic' process of merger and takeover but as a result of bureaucratic decision-making. The second issue concerns the degree to which there is genuine competition between media. The central party media (CCTV, *People's Daily*, Xinhua etc.) have a privileged position in the Chinese market: other TV stations must carry CCTV's main news bulletin and they are prevented from developing competing services with national coverage. Another example is the broadcasting of the 2006 World Cup (soccer World Cup, that is), the rights to which were held exclusively by CCTV, as the direct result of administrative fiat rather than market competition. The importance of these administrative restrictions continues down the state hierarchy (Chan 2003). These political conditions, which are sometimes compared to activities described by economists as "rent-seeking behaviour", are endemic to Chinese media (Feng 2003). They lead, however, to sharp conflicts both between media outlets and the different sections of the political apparatus to which they are responsible. Control over the media is a powerful asset, both politically and financially, for sections of the bureaucracy, and there are frequent struggles over who has the rights to a particular kind of delivery system reaching a particular kind of audience (Sun 2006). The evidence appears to suggest that a quite well-developed media market operates within strict political limits but that these are the subject of struggle and bargaining between different sections of the elite.

The media are unquestionably subject to frequent, often contradictory and arbitrary state intervention, the degree of journalistic autonomy is in theory very low although in practice there are areas which are open for negotiation, and there is very marked political alignment with the one party that has power. The media in China have not been privatized: they remain effectively the property of the Party. On the other hand, they have been thoroughly commercialized and, to a considerable degree, if not fully marketized, subject to very strong market disciplines.

Explaining the changes

The Chinese case is, thus, one that has many more parallels with Poland and Russia than strikes the casual observer. In all three cases we can observe something which may resemble the operation of a teleology of the market, but this has worked its way through the different societies in very uneven ways. Its presence is most strongly apparent in China, followed by Poland and, finally, Russia. On the other hand, there is no apparent teleology of democracy. Even in the 'best' case, Poland, the media remain intensely politicized and partisan, and there is little pretence at public service in either the press or broadcasting. In Russia, it is commonly argued that there has been a movement away from even the relatively limited democracy of the early 1990s, and those sections of the media that deal with public affairs are dependent either upon the political elite or upon its closest business associates and they use this control for factional purposes. In China, the Party retains control of the media and continues to use it for its own

ends. There is, it is evident, no easy fit between the type of media system and the nature of the economic system. These three examples clearly bear some resemblance to Hallin and Mancini's 'polarized political model' or what Splichal, extending earlier work by Mancini had a decade before, identified as the "Italian" model of media, and this raises fundamental questions of social theory to which we will briefly return in the conclusions (Splichal 1994, 145–48).

The transition paradigm is manifestly inadequate to explain this history. A full discussion of the reasons this failure would require as a starting point a detailed critique of the assumptions upon which the transition paradigm rests, for which we have no space here. If we examine the evidence presented above, it is difficult to sustain any of the three main claims of transitology:

- There is no clear and unequivocal evidence of 'progress towards democracy'. If anything, the Chinese case demonstrates how enduring dictatorial regimes can be even in the face of rapid social change, and the Russian case suggests that there are circumstances in which the increased democratic role of the media can be halted or even reversed.
- There is no clear and unequivocal evidence of 'progress towards market reform'. There has certainly been a great deal of movement in this direction in China, but in both other cases large sections of the mass media do not follow market logic in any serious sense. Again, the Russian case suggests that this process is a reversible one.
- There is no evidence whatsoever of any correlation between marketization and democratization, at least with regard to the mass media. The Chinese case demonstrates that one can have rapid marketization, including the floating of important parts of the media system, although not those concerned with editorial content, on the stock market, without having any relaxation of authoritarian control. The evidence, indeed, is that in the last couple of years, alongside a continuation of marketization, there has been an increase in political control.

To note these realities is not to claim that in any case either the societies under review or their media system have reached any stable and enduring conclusion to the process of change. On the contrary, there is every sign that in all three cases there remain powerful, if contingent factors that could transform the situation. Particularly noteworthy in this respect is the evidence of mass discontent in China, particularly in the countryside and amongst laid-off workers, which regularly and frequently breaks out into demonstrations and rioting. According to one report: 'demonstrations of discontent are on the rise. In 2004, the Public Security Bureau reported that the number of "mass incidents" had risen to 74,000. In 2005, the number jumped another 13 percent' (Kwong 2006; Liu 2005). Similar upheavals are naturally also possible in the other two cases, although the new regimes there have been remarkably fortunate in avoiding mass opposition from the victims of market reform (Ost 2001; Crowley 2001).

Our proposed alternative theory of elite continuity, as outlined above, starts precisely from these social and economic factors, and consider the political arrangements as simply one mechanism for the exercise of social power amongst several. As discussed above, the current author earlier advanced the view that the events in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 constituted political revolutions, but that they did not constitute social revolutions since the same institutions (police, army, broadcasting etc) continued in the new order, and there was a strong continuity in personnel. On this basis, it was argued that the events could best be seen in terms of elite continuity and that the political revolution was necessary in order to create the conditions that allowed the old collective bureaucratic elite to transform itself into a new, individually property-owning, elite (in other words, a classical capitalist class). The political revolution, by

allowing a plurality of parties in all cases, and what is unquestionably an electoral democracy in many cases, permitted the use of political power to transform state property into individual property, either through legitimizing previous act of appropriation, granting exclusive and lucrative rights to individuals, or through privatization schemes that favoured the existing elite.

When this theory was first advanced, its key thesis about institutional continuity was easily supported. In the media, the state broadcasters remained central to the system and many of the old Communist press titles retained a substantial market share. The claims for social continuity amongst the elite, however, lacked a great deal of supporting evidence. In the last decade, however, empirical sociologists have been exploring the nature of the new elites emerging in all three of the countries under review. The main finding is precisely one of continuity.

In the case of Poland, one study based on data from 1999 found that 'the present elite has its roots in the former system'. (Wasilewski 2000, 214). The degree of continuity was particularly marked the case of the business elite, and least marked in the case of the political elite. True, most of the new elite had not held leading positions in the old order but, rather, had been junior figures who had already embarked on professional careers and had most often been associated with the Communist Party. (A similar picture can be painted of other "A-" countries, like the Czech Republic and Hungary – Klavňa 2004; Eyal, Szelényi and Townsley 1997).

In the case of Russia, the degree of elite continuity was apparently even higher than in the more westerly countries: 'In Russia, major segments of the previous elite were transplanted wholesale into the new regime so that, compared with other post-communist regimes, there has been a remarkable degree of continuity in the Russian elite' (Steen 2003, 8). We also have a very interesting account of how this process, which began during the last years of Gorbachev, took place. By the mid-1990s:

The distribution of power on this basis appears to have been completed and with it the 'second Russian revolution' has come to an end. It was a revolution in which a younger generation of the nomenklatura ousted its older rivals. In effect it was a bourgeois revolution, in that it led to a change in the socio-political system in the direction of private property and political pluralism. And it involved a redistribution of political power, towards a group of younger, more pragmatic nomenklaturists, some of whom became politicians and some businessmen. In the economy there was a corresponding shift of power into property, based upon the privatisation of the key sectors of the infrastructure: finance, retail trade, international economic relations, and the most profitable sectors of industry (especially the energy and extracting complexes) (Kryshtanovskaya and White 1998).

In China, too, the evidence suggests that the nomenklatura has provided the bulk of the new capitalist class (Greenfield and Leong 1997). Party officials have systematically used their position of power to enrich themselves, their relatives and their friends (Lau 1999, 61–68). The mechanisms of privatization in the countryside, for example, were systematically organised to ensure that the local political chiefs and enterprise managers were the main beneficiaries (Ho, Bowles and Dong 2003). More generally, Pei (of all people) reports a survey taken after the Party agreed formally to recruit entrepreneurs, which found that

A survey of 3,635 private entrepreneurs in 2002 showed that 35 percent were members of the CCP at various levels. Surprisingly, 30 percent were party members, about six times the percentage of the general population. This represented more than a doubling of the

percentage of private entrepreneurs who were CCP members in 1993. The rapid increase in the number of private entrepreneurs who were also CCP members, however, was not the result of a massive recruitment campaign.

Indeed, the survey revealed that only a tiny minority – 5.6 per cent of private entrepreneurs joined the CCP after they had set up their businesses. Jiang’s famous speech on July 1, 2001, in which he implicitly called for the recruitment of private entrepreneurs, appeared to have had no immediate impact on admitting private businessmen into the party. Only 0.5 per cent of the private entrepreneurs in the sample had joined the CCP after the speech. This showed that nearly all the private entrepreneurs were already CCP members before they became owners of private firms. The privatization of SOEs appeared to be more responsible for the growth of private entrepreneurs inside the CCP than the party’s organizational recruitment. Indeed, of the 3,635 firms surveyed, 837 were former SOEs and collectively owned enterprises. Of these privatized firms, about half (422) were now owned by CCP members who were either party officials or well-connected CCP members who were able to gain control of these firms during the privatization process. The result of the survey implies that roughly half the privatized firms may have ended up in the control of CCP members (Pei 2006, 93–94).

If, perhaps, half of privatized firms ended up on the hands of Party members, we may assume that others were taken over by their relatives, friends and business associates who were not Party members. Liu reports that

A research report entitled “The Present Economic Situation of All Classes of Society” was recently produced jointly by the Central Research Office, State Council Research Office and Chinese Social Sciences Academy. The version for internal circulation reveals that at present China has 5 million people with assets of 10 million *yuan* or more. Of these, 20,000 people have assets of at least 100 million *yuan*. Among those with assets of at least 10 million *yuan*, the report’s survey found that more than 90 percent were from the elite clans of the Chinese Communist Party. Only 5.5 percent were rich by virtue of being related to persons or operating businesses outside of China, and only 4.5 percent became rich from their own efforts. According to scholars who specialize in researching the highest levels of government, more than 200 “Princelings” currently hold positions in the upper levels of the government... (Liu 2003, 75)

The transformation of China appears to be changing almost everything about the country except for the identity of the people who run the country and benefit from its new prosperity.

The evidence for continuity, both institutional and social is, therefore, quite strong. Whatever else happened, the old Communist elite has in all three cases shifted the basis of its position from the collective control of the economy towards individual control. In political terms, the picture in Poland and Russia is more mixed, but even amongst the Polish political elite there is a surprisingly high degree of continuity: the successor to the Communist Party dominated the political scene for many years in the mid-90s and later. In the case of China, of course, there is no doubt about political continuity.

The second part of the continuity thesis was that a political revolution was necessary to effect the transition from a collective to an individual ownership of economic power. This proposition was clearly wrong. While it explains both Poland and Russia, it is demonstrably not the case

that there has been a political revolution in China. The necessary modification to the theory, in fact, makes it much more elegant. It suggests rather that instead of their being sharp distinction between totalitarian and authoritarian rule (which tend to reflect a single social interest) and democracy (which necessarily reflects multiple interests), it is quite possible for a totalitarian regime to transform itself into an authoritarian regime, and that the latter is capable of representing a range of interests, albeit a carefully controlled range.

The third element of the continuity thesis is that political power and economic power, far from being opposed, are closely linked and that the political power of the state is a central element in the distributing economic power. This, again, seems well supported by the evidence from these three cases. Russia and China are very clear instances of this phenomenon. Koltsova says of Russia in the 1990s that

...nearly all media, including private ones, are owned externally [that is by corporations that have their main interests in other industries, whose interests they might be expected to promote], and the majority of them are unprofitable. Because Russian business and political elites are extremely interdependent, both see media first of all as weapons to gain political capital – a vital resource that later can be converted into all other forms of capital outside the media domain. (Koltsova 2001, 322)

Subsequent developments in Russian media have led to increases in profitability, but the close relationship with political power remains central to their functioning. Similar statements about China's media can be multiplied at will. Meisner, for example, argues that: 'the fact of the matter is that the Communist state, far from being an obstacle to Chinese capitalism, has been its essential agent and promoter' (1999, xiii). Poland presents something more of a difficulty, but the analysis of the privatization of the Polish holding RSW Prasa-Ksiazka-Ruch, which owned the majority of Polish-printed media, was conducted according to political rather than strictly economic criteria. German capital, for example, was unwelcome, while French capital was (Jakubowicz 1995b, 139–40). The scandals surrounding the attempt to obtain a bribe from Adam Michnik, which he correctly exposed in the media, also suggest that the award of broadcasting licences is subject to similar sorts of power transactions (Krajewski 2005, 1097–98).

The final hypothesis, that democratization was only a contingent element in this process has, rather unfortunately, been confirmed. Even if we accept that Russia would meet the formal 'minimalist' definitions of democracy beloved of transitologists, this is certainly not the case with China. The social nature of transition, the shift from state control of productive property to private control of productive property, and the consequent direct introduction of market relations into the internal working of the economy, is clearly a political process in that it is the state that sets the rules for privatization (or neglects to notice wild privatization – a.k.a. theft). What is not the case, however, is that this requires the formal political processes that are entailed in democratic government: in fact, they can be achieved by a more or less informal bargaining process. In China, these have been conducted entirely under the auspices of the Communist Party, and in Russia they took place out of public view in the chaotic years around 1991. Poland, and by extension other Eastern European countries, emerges not as the normal pattern of post-Communism but as one particularly privileged variant of a process that can, and often does, take darker forms.

One criticism that might legitimately be levelled at the continuity thesis should be noted here. While the thesis is correct in emphasizing continuity both of institutions and of elites, it did not

give due recognition to the degree to which there was also renewal. It is obvious from the figures above that the new elites, while heavily drawn from the old nomenklatura, also involve new forces who were previously outside of the circles of social power. Continuity has been strongest amongst the economic elites, while new entrants are more prominent in the political elite. Similarly, while the old broadcasters and newspapers remain central to the media landscape, we can point to new institutions – *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the former underground voice of Solidarity and now the flagship of an extensive media empire, for example, or the metropolitan dailies in China that dominate newspaper circulation and have pushed the old Party papers to the fringes – that have developed as a result of the process of transition. The theory of elite continuity therefore needs modifying to stress the extent to which there is also a subordinate process of elite renewal, which is stronger in some areas, notably politics, than in others.

Conclusions

The attempt to test the relative explanatory power of transitology and the continuity thesis with regard to post-Communist societies demonstrates the superiority of the latter. It is possible to extend the range of the continuity thesis to cover both a broader group of countries and a longer time span than were considered in the original formulations, and it appears to be predominantly successful in explaining important features of transition. It offers a way of understanding change in general, and change in the media in particular, which allows for the range of observable outcomes and provides an explanation as to why they have such strongly marked common features. To the extent that it must be modified to account for the evidence, it is in a direction that strengthens its explanatory power. The fact that the existence of a revolutionary end to Communist power, and the consequent installation of democratic procedures, is not a necessary element in the transitional process gives greater weight to the dimension of continuity. In contrast, the transitology model provides very little purchase on the cases under review, which do not appear to demonstrate the characteristics of steady progress towards a predetermined goal of democratization and fails particularly miserably in its assertion that there is a necessary link between democratization and marketization.

The theory of elite continuity, thus, seems right for extension. So far, it has only been applied to cases originating in Communism, but these are far from being the only examples of transition that require analysis. Indeed, as we saw, transitology was born from the consideration of quite different cases (notably in southern Europe and Latin America) and it is logical to examine whether elite continuity theory can successfully challenge transitology on its own ground, so to speak, or whether the processes are so distinct as to require different theoretical frameworks in order to explain them. At first glance, it is likely that in these cases the fact that there already was a separation of political and economic power before the fall of the dictatorships (i.e., they were, in the jargon of transitology, authoritarian rather than totalitarian regimes) means that evidence of elite continuity in the economic and social sphere would be more prominent than in the cases we have considered here. On the other hand, the end of racist rule in South Africa might pose a different challenge to the theory, in that the political elite in this “one-party democracy” has clearly undergone more or less complete renewal, while the issues of economic and social change are much more problematic.

Finally, the success of the theory of elite continuity raises a very general question of social theory. The majority of accounts, from Brzezinski on the Right to Mandel on the Left, have held that Communism and capitalism are fundamentally antagonistic social systems with nothing significant in common. One might expect to find within a stable, democratic capitalist society, the

USA, for example, that there would be considerable elite continuity over time, since there is no question of systemic change. But if transition means the shift between quite different systems, then findings of elite continuity should be puzzling as, indeed, many commentators have found it: 'To the surprise of most observers, the collapse of communist rule involved no comprehensive turnover of elites. The founding of democratic regimes has instead been accompanied by a marked continuity in elite composition' (Higley, Kullberg and Paklusi 2002/1996, 35).

If, as we have seen, the transition from one to another can be managed, not without great misery and too many deaths, but without fundamental social turmoil, then we have to ask whether the theorists who stressed the fundamental incompatibility between Communism and capitalism were, in fact, correct. Obviously, the systems have differences, but if the main common feature of the transition is that the new elite is derived so substantially from the old elite, then to what extent can it be maintained that the systems are antagonistic? If the Communist editor or producer can so easily become the capitalist editor or producer, if the same stations and the same papers can continue to thrive under both regimes, to what extent are we dealing with fundamentally different forms of society? If, as it transpires, we do not need to hypothesize a revolution for one system to be transformed into the other, perhaps it might be better to consider their similarities rather than their differences? If the media systems that have emerged from the end of Communism resemble so closely the 'polarized political model', which in its exemplary Italian case emerged so clearly from fifty years of militant anti-Communism, then, perhaps, the sharp distinction between these ways of organizing the media requires reconsideration. Answering these questions is far beyond the scope of this paper, but they go to the root of our understanding of the last century and the prospects for this century. Within our narrower field of concern with the media, they strongly suggest that a great deal of the debate over the relative merits of state and market in the provision of democratic information were, not so much mistaken, but certainly over-inflated. The search for a media system that does not, in one way or another, answer to the elites in society demands a different starting point.

Note

1. I should make it clear that I am not claiming to be an expert on all or any of these countries. On the contrary, I must confess that I have relied perforce very heavily on secondary sources in English and on the assistance provided by a wide range of colleagues and students who have much more expert knowledge of the countries in question. Most of my debts are acknowledged in the citations, but I am so greatly indebted to some colleagues, who can claim to be experts in their particular fields, and who gave generously of their time to comment on my drafts and to correct some of my more egregious errors, that I must thank them by name: Dr Karol Jakubowicz, Dr Olessia Koltsova, Professor Miklós Sükösd and Dr Xin Xin. They are not, of course, at all responsible for any remaining errors or for the judgements expressed in this paper.

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THE CONSOLIDATION OF MEDIA FREEDOM IN POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES *

Péter Bajomi-Lázár

1. Introduction: Status of media freedom in the post-communist countries

In the late 1980s, the liberation of the mass media was an axiom of the political transformation in the countries of East Central and Eastern Europe. Yet, throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s, *media freedom*¹ was repeatedly challenged in all countries of the region. From Poland to Albania and from the Czech Republic to Russia, practically all of the new (sometimes old-new) political elites exerted pressure on the media in an attempt to propagate their policies and to suppress critical voices. Many of these attempts succeeded: now a wide range of sources describe, unanimously, *a deficit of media freedom*² in the countries of the region. Analysts agree that the performance of the news media has fallen short of both normative expectations and the standards set by the media in most advanced democracies (cf. Paletz et al., 1995; Giorgi, 1995; Gross, 2002; Gunther & Mugham, 2000; Paletz & Jakubowicz, 2003; Sükösd & Bajomi-Lázár, 2003).

Most analyses of the status of media freedom rely upon qualitative descriptions such as the annual reports released by the Committee to Protect Journalists (McGill Murphy, 2002; Elingwood, 2003; Sweeney, 2005). Quantitative data on the issue are sporadic. Currently, only the NGOs Freedom House (FH) and Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF) provide such data; however, those by RSF cover but the last few years.³ By contrast, the FH annual press freedom surveys cover a longer period of time and allow for a longitudinal comparative analysis of the status of media freedom in the various countries. The organization's quantitative data reveal that, from the early 1990s until the mid-2000s, the degree of media freedom varied across the countries of East Central and Eastern Europe. Table 1 below, based on the FH surveys, includes

* This paper is an updated summary of the author's Ph.D. thesis entitled "Media Freedom in Hungary, 1990–2002", supervised by Miklós Sükösd and László Bruszt, and defended at the Political Science Department of the Central European University, Budapest, Hungary. The full text of the thesis can be found at <http://www.ceu.hu/polsci/dissertations/BajomiThesisEdited.doc> (last accessed 7 June, 2007).

Table 1: Freedom House annual surveys of press freedom, 1994–2006 (selected countries)

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Average
Norway	10	8	5	5	5	5	5	5	9	9	9	10	10	7.31
Belgium	7	7	10	10	10	9	9	9	9	9	9	11	11	9.23
Denmark	11	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	10	10	10	9.31
Sweden	11	10	10	10	10	10	11	10	8	8	8	9	10	9.62
Finland	17	15	15	15	15	15	15	14	10	9	9	9	9	12.85
Netherlands	14	18	14	14	14	14	14	15	15	15	12	11	11	13.92
USA	12	12	14	14	12	13	13	15	16	17	13	17	16	14.15
Germany	11	18	21	11	11	13	13	13	15	15	16	16	16	14.54
Austria	19	18	12	12	12	12	12	14	24	23	23	21	21	17.15
Malta	27	24	17	17	17	17	17	14	13	13	15	18	18	17.46
Cyprus	30	24	16	18	18	16	16	18	18	18	18	22	22	19.54
UK	24	22	22	22	21	20	20	17	18	18	19	18	19	20.00
Estonia	28	25	24	22	20	20	20	20	18	17	17	17	16	20.31
Lithuania	30	29	25	20	17	18	20	19	19	18	18	18	18	20.69
Czech Rep.	20	21	19	19	19	20	20	24	25	23	23	22	20	21.15
Latvia	29	29	21	21	21	21	24	24	19	18	17	17	19	21.54
Poland	30	29	21	27	25	25	19	19	18	18	19	20	21	22.38
France	19	27	30	26	26	27	24	21	17	17	19	20	21	22.62
Slovenia	40	37	27	28	27	27	27	21	20	19	19	19	20	25.46
Italy	25	30	30	27	27	28	27	27	27	28	33	35	35	29.15
Hungary	30	38	34	31	28	28	30	28	23	23	20	21	21	27.31
Slovakia	47	55	41	49	47	30	30	26	22	21	21	21	20	33.08
Bulgaria	43	39	46	44	36	39	30	26	29	30	35	35	34	35.85
Romania	55	50	49	47	39	44	44	44	35	38	47	47	44	44.85
Ukraine	44	42	42	39	49	50	60	60	60	67	68	59	53	53.30
Albania	53	67	71	75	56	56	56	56	48	50	49	51	50	56.77
Russia	40	55	58	53	53	59	60	60	60	66	67	68	72	59.31

Scores: 0–30 = free; 31–60 = partly free; 61–100 = not free
 Source: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=274>
 (last accessed June 2006.)

a selection of countries in Europe, as well as the United States of America, in the period 1994–2006. The higher the score, the more intense the pressure on the media. The nine-year average scores are added to the original table. The post-communist countries that joined the European Union (EU) in 2004 are marked in grey. The ratings under the subsequent years refer to the year when the data were released, i.e., for example, 10 under “Norway/1994”, refers to the period 1 January–31 December 31, 1993.

As the Freedom House studies focus on political interference and pay much less attention to commercial pressure,⁴ one can safely argue that a greater score equals a greater deal of *political* pressure. The average scores in the table thus reveal that from the early 1990s until the mid-2000s (except for the first three years of the 1990s, as there are no data on the Freedom House’s website for the period 1990–1994), the media encountered, as a general rule, *more intense political pressure in the post-communist countries than in advanced Western western democracies*. Of the Western western countries listed in the table, the exceptions to this general rule are France and Italy.

The average scores in the table also show that, as a general rule, *political pressure on the media was less intense in the post-communist countries that joined the EU in 2004 than in the rest of them*. The first-wave accession countries of East Central and Eastern Europe, marked in grey in the table, are the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, while the other post-communist countries listed in the table are Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, and the Ukraine. Of these, Bulgaria and Romania, i.e., the post-communist countries that joined the European Union in early 2007, came right after the first-wave accession countries.

The table also reveals that, despite the greater intensity of political pressure on the media in the East compared to the West, the scores of the post-communist countries in the period 1994–2006 display a gradual improvement, i.e., *a gradual decrease in the intensity of political pressure on the media*. The status of media freedom as measured by Freedom House was approaching that of the advanced democracies toward the end of the period studied. In most of the EU-member post-communist countries, the media in the early 1990s were rated by the Freedom House as ‘partly free’, i.e., scores 31–60 as well as the upper 20s, whereas by the end of the decade most of them were described as ‘free’, i.e., scores 1–30 and especially the lower 20s. In particular, in the period 1994–2006, Estonia displayed a 12-score improvement (28 → 16 scores), Lithuania a 12-score improvement (30 → 18 scores), Latvia a ten-score improvement (29 → 19 scores), Poland a nine-score improvement (30 → 21 scores), Slovenia a 20-score improvement (40 → 20 scores), Hungary a nine-score improvement (30 → 21 scores), Bulgaria a nine-score improvement (43 → 34 scores), Slovakia a 27-score improvement (47 → 20 scores). Even in the countries in which the status of press freedom was qualified as ‘partly free’ or ‘not free’ in the early 1990s, there was a more or less significant improvement in the period under discussion (55 → 44 scores for Romania, and 53 → 50 scores for Albania). In all of these countries, the freedom of the media was improving throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. The exceptions to this general rule, i.e., the post-communist countries where the intensity of political pressure on the media increased, are the Ukraine (44 → 53 scores, a 9-point deterioration) and the Russian Federation (40 → 72 scores, a 32-score deterioration).

2. Key question: Why has political pressure on the media survived the declaration of media freedom?

Based on the data above, the question that has to be asked is why was media freedom repeatedly challenged after the formal declaration of media freedom in East Central and in Eastern Europe? Why have the various forms of hidden censorship survived the abolition of overt censorship?⁵ And what explains the fact that, despite their largely identical historical and political heritage, the status of media freedom was better in some post-communist countries than others? In an effort to contribute to the study of these questions, this paper attempts to set up a theoretical framework that merges two related approaches, namely theories of media transformation and theories of democratic consolidation.

Most authors representing the first approach and focusing on *the transformation of the media* in the post-communist democracies describe the process in terms of Schramm et al.'s classic "four theories of the press" (e.g., Gijsbers, 1993; Kováts, 1995), or in the context of the development of civil society (e.g., Splichal, 1994; Sparks & Reading, 1998; Gross, 2002). They conceptualize the transformation of the media as a gradual and potentially never ending move from the 'totalitarian' or the 'authoritarian' toward the 'libertarian' or the 'socially responsible' models, that is, from complete or partial state control toward the full autonomy, or the full social control, of the media. Despite the growing number of studies devoted to the transformation of the media in East Central and Eastern Europe, however, no widely accepted theory has been elaborated to frame the systematic analysis of the process as yet. The media transformation literature has been criticized for failing to cover all aspects of the process and to explain regional differences (Downing, 1996). The degree and success of media transformation across the countries of East Central and Eastern Europe have been judged on the basis of fragmentary data and, mostly, qualitative descriptions of the various post-communist countries' media landscapes.

By contrast, those representing the second approach and focusing on *the transformation of the political system* have devoted several studies to the establishment of a theory that helps to analyze the various aspects of the political transformation, to assess the degree of democratization, and to explain regional differences (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Plasser et al., 1998; Hollis, 1999; Pridham & Ágh, 2001). However, most of these studies focus on changes in the party system, the economy, and civil society, while – despite the media's central role to democracy – devoting much less, if any, attention to the transformation of the media.

By merging these two approaches one may attempt to set up a theory that helps to explain the puzzles described at the beginning of this chapter. The introduction of a new concept, namely that of *the consolidation of media freedom*, may help to systematically explain the process of media transformation, the deficit of media freedom experienced in the 1990s and the early 2000s, as well as the differences in the status of media freedom across the post-communist countries. It may also help to identify the key factors hindering the stabilization of media freedom in some of the countries of East Central and Eastern Europe.

3. Measuring media freedom

Evident as it seems at a first sight, the concept of media freedom is not easy to operationalize. Whether and how citizens can actually exercise their right to impart and to gather information depends on a number of factors including overt or hidden political pressure on the media, the status of the economy in general and the size of the media market in particular, the development of communication technology, and the performance of journalists. Yet all the concept of media

freedom as defined above (see endnote 1) implies is that the media are either free or not, depending on whether or not the base criteria for media freedom, i.e., the lack of censorship and the plurality of accessible sources of information, are met. The concept of media freedom can primarily be used as a two-value variable. It fails to reveal the actual extent of media freedom and obscures regional differences.

Some analysts overcome this problem by way of using the concept of media freedom as a three-value variable. For example, as mentioned in section 2, Freedom House uses the categories 'free', 'partly free' and 'not free' when describing the status of media freedom in various countries in its annual surveys. Having three categories allows for a more precise assessment of the status of media freedom, and is a great tool for cross-country comparison. The analysts of Freedom House grant scores ranging from 1 to 100 to each country on the basis of a preliminary determined checklist; scores 1–30 qualify a country as 'free', scores 31–60 as 'partly free', and scores 61–100 as 'not free'. However, the lines dividing the three categories are defined on an arbitrary basis: 30 scores qualify a country's media as 'free' whereas 31 scores qualify them as 'partly free'. The consequence is that a one-score difference on a 100-score scale may change the end result.

The Freedom House annual press freedom surveys are designed for the purposes of policy analysis, and their methodology is developed accordingly. However, for the purposes of academic research, a gradual variable seems more convenient. Such a variable can be created by the introduction of the concept of the *consolidation of media freedom*, by way of analogy to the concept of *democratic consolidation*, frequently used by transitologists. The introduction of this concept allows one to make a distinction between the establishment of media freedom on the one hand, and the degree to which citizens can actually enjoy that freedom on the other.

But how to define and operationalize the consolidation of media freedom? Before attempting to do this, I will first briefly recall theories of democratic consolidation.

4. Democratic consolidation and the consolidation of media freedom

Theories of democratic consolidation vary. Some researchers focus on structures or *institutions* (e.g., Hollis, 1999; Ágh, 2001), others on actors or *culture* (e.g., Schedler, 1998; Jones, 2002) as the key factor defining democratic consolidation. Whereas the former argue that democratic political culture is fostered by democratic institutions, the latter suggest that a pre-condition for the establishment of democratic institutions is the existence of some kind of a democratic culture (Gross, 2002). Yet others avoid this 'chicken or egg' problem by merging the two approaches, stressing the importance of both institutions and culture in enhancing the consolidation of democracy (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Diamond, 1997; Plasser et al., 1998). In this paper, I will rely on these more complex theories.

Most of these complex theories are rooted in an influential work by Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan. Linz and Stepan argue that democratic consolidation requires a wide-scale consensus about the basic norms of multi-party parliamentary democracy: no significant groups in society should challenge the whole system, and the citizenry, including the political elites, should be committed to the basic norms of democracy (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Following Linz and Stepan's notion of the development of wide-scale consensus among the actors of democracy, Lerry Diamond describes democratic consolidation as the process by which the rules, institutions, and constraints of democracy come to constitute "the only game in town", i.e., the only legitimate framework for seeking and exercising political power. The name of this game is the transfer of power from one political party or coalition to another through fair competition. This is not to

say that this condition needs to be met all of the time in a consolidated democracy; it merely suggests that this must be the main rule, violations of which must be sanctioned (Diamond, 1997).

In a similar vein, Fritz Plasser et al. argue that political transformation consists of two phases: transition and consolidation. They define *transition* as the transformation of the basic political, legal and economic institutions into a democratic model, i.e., as the establishment of the formal and minimal criteria for a democratic regime, such as competition, participation as well as basic human rights and liberties. Then they define *democratic consolidation* as follows:

Democratic consolidation [...] aims at completing regime change by stabilizing the behavioral and attitudinal foundations of democracy. Consolidation thus denotes the continuous marginalization or elimination of behavior patterns incompatible with the base line of democracy and the stabilizing of those in harmony with it (Plasser et al., 1998: 8).

Transition concerns the transformation of the basic institutions, while consolidation the development of institutions and political culture, the latter comprising both behaviour patterns and attitudes. Democratic consolidation thus has three interrelated and simultaneous dimensions, namely:

- the institutional dimension, i.e., the establishment of democratic institutions and procedures that stabilize social interactions,
- the behavioural dimension, i.e., the rise of consensus among the political elites that democratic institutions and values are legitimate, and
- the attitudinal dimension, i.e., the citizens' commitment to democratic values (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Plasser et al., 1998).

Based on the distinction (political) transition vs. democratic consolidation, one may make an analogous distinction between media transition and the consolidation of media freedom. *Media transition* can be defined as the transformation of the basic media institutions into a democratic model (i.e., the abolition of the state's information, printing and broadcasting monopoly). It is further the establishment of the formal and minimal criteria for media freedom, such as the declaration of media freedom and the creation of a plural media landscape. The *consolidation of media freedom* can be defined as the process which aims at completing the behavioural and attitudinal foundations of media freedom. The consolidation of media freedom thus denotes the continuous marginalization of behaviour patterns incompatible with the base line of media freedom and the stabilization of those in harmony with it. This is not to suggest that there can be no deviations from media freedom in a democratic system, but to say that media freedom must be the main rule, while the institutions, behaviour patterns and attitudes that challenge the freedom of the media either need to be justified by reference to exceptional circumstances such as a war (cf. Sparks, 1998), or are considered undemocratic and are marginalized accordingly. The consolidation of media freedom may be temporally subsequent to media transition, but the two phases may overlap as well.

It is important to note that the consolidation of media freedom is not an irreversible process, i.e., it is an open-ended and potentially never ending one. Evidence from some of the most advanced democracies in the world demonstrates that challenges to media freedom may, at least temporarily, grow more significant even after periods marked with the almost total lack of

such challenges. For example, the annual press freedom surveys by the Freedom House show that in the period 1994–2006, the status of media freedom declined even in countries like the United States and Austria (even though the decline was relatively small and the media in these countries were still qualified as “free”).

5. Three dimensions

How to operationalize and assess the consolidation of media freedom? Based on the analogy of democratic consolidation, the consolidation of media freedom is considered to have three interrelated dimensions, namely:

- the institutional dimension, i.e., the legal establishment of the *institutions* (laws, regulatory authorities, and funds) that safeguard media freedom vis-à-vis political and commercial pressure,
- the behavioural dimension, i.e., the rise of consensus among *the political elites and the journalists* that freedom of the media is the “only game in town”, so that no significant political group challenges the institutions safeguarding media freedom and the legitimacy of that freedom, and
- the attitudinal dimension, i.e., the commitment of *citizens* to media freedom as a legitimate value that is inseparable from a democratic system.

The more these institutional, behavioural and attitudinal requirements are met, the more consolidated, i.e., stable, media freedom is. The question is, of course, how to assess the extent to which these requirements are met.

5.1. The institutional dimension

Although those studying media transformation have not used the institutional, the behavioural and the attitudinal arguments as a complex theoretical framework to explain the deficit of media freedom in the post-communist countries, all three arguments can be found in the literature. For example, in an introduction to a comparative study on the status of the media in post-communist East Central and Eastern Europe, Andrew K. Milton uses the institutional argument, suggesting that

...institutional legacies, left by incomplete legal reform, in which the role and valuation of the news media as an institution are carried over from the state socialist period, constrain the complete democratic re-institutionalization of the news media. In consequence, their performance has fallen short of rhetorical expectations (Milton, 1997: 8).

The institutional argument thus suggests that institutional change does not happen overnight and, after the political transformation, the post-communist countries continued to live with a legacy of undemocratic institutions. Furthermore, the institutional argument suggests that the new institutions safeguarding the independence of the media in the post-communist countries were not established or were established the wrong way. In other words, the argument is that the institutional conditions for the consolidation of media freedom were lacking.

As Milton further observes, the democratic re-institutionalization of the media in the post-communist societies is a two-step process, comprising the deconstruction of the communist structure and the construction of new press and media laws and organizations (Milton, 1997). Various authors criticized different aspects of the re-institutionalization of the media in the spirit

of this argument, pointing out that the reasons responsible for political and commercial pressure on the media lie either in the late deconstruction of communist institutions or the failure of the newly established institutions to guarantee the media's independence vis-à-vis the political and the business elites (Sükösd, 1993; Gálik, 1994; Gellért Kis, 1997; Vászárhelyi, 1998; Szente, 2001).

In an attempt to answer the questions formulated in section 2 of this chapter and on the basis of the institutional argument, the hypothesis can be formulated that *fast and well-designed institutional change in the media fosters the consolidation of media freedom in the post-communist democracies, whereas slow and poorly designed institutional change hinders it*. The existence and quality of the institutional requirements is best assessed in terms of a comparative analysis of media regulation in countries that performed well and poorly in the FH annual press freedom surveys. Regulation improves the predictability of interactions between the media, the political and the business elites, and limits the means that politicians and investors can use when attempting to influence media content. Media regulation aims at eliminating behaviour patterns incompatible with the base line of media freedom. In this respect, special attention should be devoted to the regulation of:

- the supervision and funding of public service broadcasters,
- the licensing of private broadcasters and
- press funds supporting quality newspapers and investigative journalism.

Evidence is consistent with the institutional hypothesis if media regulation in the post-communist countries was either passed late or does not comply with the standards of the advanced democracies. If it was passed early enough, or does comply with these standards, the hypothesis must be reconsidered.

5.2. The behavioural dimension

The behavioural argument can also be found in several studies on media transformation. For example, it is in this spirit that Richard A. Hall and Patrick O'Neil observe that

...because of the legacy of the Leninist political culture, post-Communist governments will attempt to subordinate the media to their wishes; they are not accustomed to the tolerance and freewheeling debate characteristic of a democracy (Hall & O'Neil, 1998: 143).

Barbara Trionfi also notes a certain continuity in the political elites' approach to the media:

Many of the current leaders of the post-Communist countries were a part of the old party states and maintain the same attitudes toward the media, asking journalists to perform ideological and educational task" (Trionfi, 2001: 95).

This version of the behavioural argument suggests that political re-socialization does not happen overnight and, after the political transformation, the post-communist countries continued to live with a legacy of undemocratic political culture. The argument is that the persistence of undemocratic political culture, i.e., of totalitarian or authoritarian concepts regarding the media's role in society among the political elites, hindered the consolidation of media freedom. In other words, the behavioural requirements for the consolidation of media freedom were lacking.

Another version of the behavioural argument suggests that the currently experienced deficit of media freedom is in part explained by the behavioural legacy of journalists who are unable to fight for media freedom and to preserve that freedom. For example, Éva Vajda suggests that

[t]hroughout the decades of [state] socialism, journalists were – with due respect to the exceptions – servants of those in office, loudspeakers of the official communiqués of the party. [...] In this situation, they have not learnt just the thing that would be their basic job in (and, by the way, the basic means of) a democratic society: to ask questions” (Vajda, 2001: 155).⁶

This version of the behavioural argument suggests that many journalists in East Central and Eastern Europe had been socialized in a ‘Prussian’ or ‘Soviet’ tradition of respect for authority and, even after the political transformation, they explicitly or implicitly define their professional role as being the “Party’s soldiers” rather than “watchdogs of democracy”.

In an attempt to answer the questions formulated in section 2 of this chapter and on the basis of the behavioural argument, the hypothesis can be formulated that *the fast rise of democratic political culture fosters the consolidation of media freedom, whereas the endurance of totalitarian/authoritarian political culture hinders it*. The existence and quality of the behavioural requirements is best assessed by means of (1) a comparative analysis of media policy rhetoric and media policy practice before and after the political transformation and (2) a comparative analysis of journalism standards and practice before and after the political transformation. In this respect, special attention should be devoted to:

- media policy declarations,
- political intervention into the privatization of the print press and the broadcast media,
- political intervention into the (re-)distribution of resources, and, in particular, information, advertisements by state-owned companies, and radio and television frequencies,⁷
- political intervention into the appointment and dismissal of leading personnel for the public service broadcasters,
- journalistic standards in journalism school books and codes of ethics.

Evidence is consistent with the behavioural hypothesis if significant uniformities are found between the two periods. If, however, differences dominate, the hypothesis must be reconsidered.

5.3. The attitudinal dimension

Last but not least, there are also examples of the attitudinal argument in the media transformation literature, although this approach seems to occur less frequently. For example, John Downing argues that

[i]t is very doubtful [...] that legislation in a positive direction, in the direction of freedom for the entire public to create its own realm of mass communication, could actively generate these realms. Legislation would have to follow the public’s demand in order to ratify and secure what already had been achieved. It could not initiate it. It is for these reasons that the focus on media laws has not so much been misplaced, but over-emphasized (Downing, 1996: 124).

Although Downing does not elaborate on his point any further, the argument can be made that the lack of public responsiveness has made intervention into media freedom a risk-free political and commercial venture: since the citizenry would not sanction such undemocratic measures, the political and the business elites were ready to infringe upon the media's freedom. Furthermore, the lack of such public reaction may re-enforce political intervention into the media. In other words, the attitudinal requirements for the consolidation of media freedom were lacking.

In an attempt to answer the questions formulated in section 2 of this chapter and on the basis of the attitudinal argument, the hypothesis can be formulated that *public commitment to the freedom of the media enhances the consolidation of media freedom, whereas public alienation hinders it*. The existence and quality of such public commitment can be assessed (1) by an analysis of the various forms of public reaction to the political and the business elites' attempts to challenge media freedom, such as street demonstrations, public petitions, hunger strikes, etc., and (2) by collecting survey data on how the public perceived the importance of media freedom as a core value to democracy.

Evidence is consistent with the attitudinal hypothesis if public outcry in reaction to political attempts to curtail media freedom is found to be lacking. If, however, the public holds media freedom to be a major democratic value, and reacted accordingly to instances of political or commercial pressure, yet the intensity of that pressure on the media did not diminish, the hypothesis must be reconsidered.

6. Conclusion: Perspectives for further research

Introducing the concept of the consolidation of media freedom allows one to re-phrase the first two questions described in section 2 of this chapter (why was media freedom repeatedly challenged after the formal declaration of media freedom in East Central and in Eastern Europe? Why have the various forms of hidden censorship survived the abolition of overt censorship?) like this: *what factors have hindered the consolidation of media freedom in the various post-communist countries?* Thus, the dependent variable is the consolidation of media freedom, whereas the independent variables are the institutional, the behavioural and the attitudinal requirements. A systematic cross-country comparison of these independent variables, based on the FH annual press freedom surveys, may also allow one to find an answer to the question of why, despite their largely identical historical and political heritage, the status of media freedom was better in some post-Communist communist countries than in others.

Notes

1. According to article 19 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), "[e]veryone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information through any media and regardless of frontiers". Furthermore, the European Court of Human Rights declared that "[f]reedom of expression constitutes one of the essential foundations of [a democratic] society for its progress and for the development of every man [...] it is applicable not only to 'information' or 'ideas' that are favorably received or regarded as inoffensive or as a matter of indifference, but also to those that offend, shock or disturb the State or any sector of the population" (*Handyside v. United Kingdom*, 7 December 1976, 1 EHRR 737, para. 49.). Based on these rulings, *media freedom* will be defined as the people's right to impart any fact and opinion, however unpopular, and to gather information on

- matters of public interest through the media. Accordingly, the *base criteria* for the media to be free are the lack of censorship and the plurality of accessible sources of information.
2. The *deficit of media freedom* will be defined as the recurring prevention by political or business pressure of the publication of information detrimental to various interest groups, as a result of which the transparency of the activities of the political and the business elites and, by consequence, their control by the citizenry, is hindered.
 3. For the quantitative descriptions released by RSF, see http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=11715 (last accessed 7 June 7, 2007).
 4. For a detailed description of the FH research methodology, see <http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fop/2007/fopmethod2007.pdf> (last accessed 7 June 7, 2007). For more on this methodology, see also chapter 3 of this paper.
 5. Although the Communist communist regimes did not officially recognize the existence of censorship, the concept of *overt censorship* does apply to the state socialist period because, as a main rule, the state had a monopoly over information that was only occasionally challenged by, among other things, the *samizdat* press. By contrast, the concept of *hidden censorship* applies to the period following the political transformation because, as a main rule, the state has lost its information monopoly, and only occasionally managed to prevent the publication of unwanted information.
 6. My translation – P.B.L.
 7. What matters here is, of course, not the transparent and politically neutral (re-)distribution of resources, but (re-)distribution based on political considerations.

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