

MASS MEDIA DEVELOPMENTS IN BULGARIA¹

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To understand the profound changes in the mass media system and its development trends in Bulgaria, one should go back to the roots of political upheaval after the fall of the Berlin wall.

The collapse of the totalitarian regime in the country brought about significant changes throughout its whole social system. For more than four decades the Communist Party dominated the functions of the State, curtailing the rights and liberties of the people. An atmosphere encouraging social obedience in line with propaganda requirements reigned in the country. Normal political life was practically non-existent in Bulgaria. Freedom of expression was limited. The public swam in an informational fog.

After 45 years of communism, Bulgaria held its first democratic elections in May 1990 following an inter-party coup that had ended the totalitarian rule in November 1989. A new Bulgarian Constitution was adopted in 1991. During the following years, a normal political environment was gradually established. The transition period of nearly twenty years witnessed four presidential elections (in 1992, 1996, 2001 and 2006), six parliamentary elections (in 1990, 1991, 1994, 1997, 2001 and 2005), five local elections (in 1991, 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2007), one EU parliamentary election (2007) and the appointment of ten governments. An encouraging sign is that the last two governments successfully completed their mandates.

However, as a result of the fierce political fights, all of the legislative and economic processes were crawling at low speed. This entailed new social and economic problems, and their solutions were nowhere in sight. Thus, the country lost the momentum generated by the quick start of the democratic reforms, missed the chance to become integrated with the Central European countries into the important European structures, and entered the twenty-first century under the already launched Currency Board.

In the meantime, important changes were taking place in the mass media system. In a very short time, without gate keeping or ideological control, the style and content of the press and the broadcasts departed very much from former patterns. Political pluralism brought about

the establishment of diversity of party organs, causing political marketing to boom in Bulgaria early in 1990. The same year marked the beginning of the political advertising telecasts in the country. The first live TV debate between presidential candidates was aired on 10 January 1992. The strong press, radio and TV involvement in defining the final choice of the voters played a significant role during the pre-election campaigns from the very beginning of the democratization of political life. Thus, mass media brought about a high polarization of the people in Bulgaria. Journalism in those first years of democratization operated as a mirror: frequently distorting the political processes in the country, and yet still exerting considerable influence over public opinion.

Nevertheless, the tendency towards democracy became irreversible. Among the major achievements during this period were the country joining NATO in 2004 and entering the European Union in 2007.

Prior to the democratic changes in 1989, the Bulgarian mass media system was centralized, state-owned and subordinated to the priorities of the Party-State system. Thus, for a good forty years, journalism was monotonous, instructive and politically controlled. The censoring institution prompted the development of self-censorship, the lack of information entailed misinformation, and the absence of pluralistic press and broadcasting resulted in newspapers, magazines, radio and television programmes of marginalized profile.

The democratization processes in society strongly influenced mass media developments in Bulgaria. The new Bulgarian Constitution guaranteed freedom of expression for any citizens. Article 40 (1) specifically defended freedom of mass media: 'The press and the other mass information media shall be free and shall not be subjected to censorship' (Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria 1991).

Of all other institutions, it was the mass media which were the quickest and most flexible to react to the transformation of democracy after November 1989. It went through profound changes in structure, management and social functioning during the transition to a civil society and market economy.

The liberalization and deregulation of the whole mass media system led to its decentralization and to the emergence of pluralistic print and electronic media. Different patterns of media consumption and new advertising strategies were introduced. The establishment of a mass media market stimulated the development of new formats and styles of expression, thus fostering the higher selectivity standards of the audiences.

The spirit of pluralism and the understanding that the importance of each medium was bound to its contribution to social change became a pragmatic guideline for survival and development. Audiences forced journalists to assume the role of heralds of political, economic, cultural, and social change. Reality, however, proved quite different in style from 'wishful democracy' and the media world accordingly produced parallel pictures of reality in times of critical hardships, contests, and challenges.

Nevertheless, the media found themselves fulfilling the dual function of transmitters and catalysts of political change. This dual function was manifested in several critical situations, including: the TV attack against President Petar Mladenov in 1990 that compelled him to resign; the resignation of the Bulgarian Socialist Party Government headed by Andrey Loukanov in 1990; the mass media war launched by the Union of Democratic Forces Government of Filip Dimitrov, which led to its toppling in 1992; the exit of the Government of Lyuben Berov

(under the Movement for Rights and Freedom mandate) in 1994; the withdrawal of the BSP government of Zhan Videnov in 1996; the siege of the House of the National Assembly during the governmental crisis of 1997, which led to a radical power shift; and the forced restructuring of the UDF government of Ivan Kostov in 1999, based on corruption allegations. In 2005, media pressure accompanied the ministerial shifts in the government of the National Movement Simeon the Second – the Centrist, leader-type party, with Simeon Saksoburggotski (the former king of Bulgaria) as the sole leader. Following media attacks, some ministers in the current coalition government (BSP, NMSS and MRF) of Sergey Stanishev were forced to resign in 2007 as well as in 2008 due to corruption allegations and failure to fulfil the EU accession requirements.

Among the major challenges of the transition period were the general insufficiency of financial and technological resources and the lack of professional standards. Nevertheless, media competition stimulated the first dynamic open markets in the country, which established well-developed media consumption patterns.

However, although the public was offered a highly varied media menu, expectations that the media would aid the processes of democratization in a purposeful and effective manner proved unrealistically high. Media were in need of transformation themselves. Change of property and the departure from single-party control was not sufficient for rendering them professional. Although the guild had adopted its ethical code in 2004 (Ethical Code of Bulgarian Media 2004), it failed to build the mechanisms for sustaining it, and in many cases still reacts inadequately to important and publicly significant issues, as well as to a number of professional problems. In fact, in 2005 the Foundation National Council for Journalistic Ethics was registered with the major aim to establish a system for self-regulation of the media by implementing the *Code of Ethics* and resolving arguments between the media outlets and the audience. Co-founders of the foundation were the Association of the Bulgarian Radio and Television Operators ABRO, the Union of Publishers in Bulgaria, the Union of Bulgarian Journalists, the Bulgarian Media Coalition, and the foundation Media Development Centre. The foundation has two standing bodies – an Ethics Commission in the Print Media Sector and an Ethics Commission in the Electronic Media Sector, which deal with complaints lodged against infringement of the Ethics Code (National Council for Journalism Ethics 2004).

After two years of functioning, however, the Ethics Commission did not register significant results in encouraging the public debate on issues of journalistic ethics and professional standards.

Several journalistic unions were established, but they failed to defend basic professional rights and responsibilities. The activities of the civil society structures and professional organizations proved insufficient as well. Deprofessionalization and tabloidization trends accompanied the transformation period. Similar to the politicians, former and newly hatched, journalists were not ready to fully shoulder their new role and the subsequent responsibilities of a Fourth Estate in a society under transformation.

Although, according to the Reporters Without Borders third annual report, Bulgaria occupied the 36th place (among 167 countries in the world) in the freedom of expression index, freedom of speech and independent journalism provided convertible phraseology for many a non-governmental organization disbursing the funds of European and transatlantic institutions (Third Annual Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2006). Their activities, though, proved erratic, limited

and ineffective in the long run. Thus, in the 2007 Reporters Without Borders annual report Bulgaria had dropped down to the 51st place (among 169 countries in the world) in the freedom of expression index. The report noted that '[a]ll of the European Union member countries made it into the top 50 except Bulgaria (51st) and Poland (56th). In Sofia, journalists can be physically attacked because of their work. The climate got even worse after charges were withdrawn against police officers who beat up a journalist in May' (Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2007).

While there is no law that regulates the print media in Bulgaria (slander and libel are enacted through the Penal Code), electronic media are regulated under the Radio and Television Act, adopted in 1998, and the Telecommunications Act, adopted the same year. Both of them have been amended frequently. Bulgaria joined the Television Without Frontiers Directive (1989) and later ratified the European Union's Convention on Transfrontier Television (1997). Current media regulations have been closely aligned with EU legislation.

Print media

The Bulgarian press dates back to 1844 when the country was still under Ottoman domination. Between then and World War II, the Bulgarian press went through a number of changes similar to that of other Balkan countries. After the establishment of the Eastern Bloc in the late 1940s, however, mass media developed along the lines of the party-state system. Censoring by the Party prompted the development of self-censorship in journalism. The lack of information and manipulation of the news, along with the absence of an alternative press, resulted in newspapers and magazines of marginal value.

Many challenges were encountered in the process of establishing the new press. By the early 1990s, state ownership of newspapers and magazines was abandoned and the first opposition daily newspapers *Svoboden Narod* [Free People] and *Demokratzia* [Democracy] appeared. In the post-1989 years many new publications came and went. The absence of any mass media regulations led to a boom in pornographic publications, virtually unheard of before 1989. Prices of newspapers soared in step with general inflation, and subscription, as had been the common practice before, was gradually abandoned.

Right after the political changes, extreme media partisanship was developed. Different parties established their own periodicals giving rise to a new, politically affiliated journalism. Newspapers of the then leading political parties became quite popular: *Duma* [Word], which was supported by the Bulgarian Socialist Party and *Democratzia*, the newspaper of the Union of Democratic Forces. The ideological heralds of the various political parties engaged in a newspaper war with no regard for the interests of public welfare. The broader public was often fed tailored information and interpretations. Superfluously, political media outlets seemed to offer an enormous quantity of information, but unfortunately the information was too biased and slanted to provide the reader with a consistent picture of on-going social change. In pursuit of daily stories, such partisanship segmented the audience reach. Thus, the process resulted in a steady decline in newspaper readership.

A wide range of highly varied editions quickly took shape: political, popular, quality, topical, and specialized publications. However, it was discouraging that people began to perceive and assess the processes of change via media models. Without being held politically or socially responsible, the mass media actually shaped the dynamics of public social and political space.

In the meantime, in the process of privatization, powerful forces consolidated the print media. A new press emerged which declared itself politically independent. These periodicals quickly gained the largest audience share. Their content corresponded to the pragmatic needs and attitudes of the economically active part of the general audience. They adopted a new, popular pattern of graphic layout styles in tabloid format, news presentation and new language and syntax, close to the everyday speech of the readers. These newspapers took over the expanding volume of advertising.

However, the general low credibility of the politically based and sensational independent tabloids posed a problem for trustworthy information sources. Newspaper readers lacked higher quality press – the serious broadsheets, presenting unvarnished hard news, interpretive and opinion journalism; a press which does not blur together the news and the interpretation. The first quality dailies, *Continent* and *Pari* [Money] were established in 1992, followed in 1993 by *Cash* and *Capital*. The general public, however, enjoyed the simple, hard and even sensational practices of the popular press. The quality press was not considered a serious competitive threat to the large-circulation papers, and therefore, it was difficult for it to gain regular, consistent readership.

Another group of independent publications encompassed a broad diversity of topically specialized periodicals; leisure, culture, fashion, feminine issues, health care, religion, entertainment, sports, eroticism, hobbies and so on. Today, most of them have a low circulation; some enjoy professional design and original content. The same holds true for the periodicals aimed at age and gender. World renowned titles, such as *National Geographic*, *Business Week*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Playboy*, are published in their Bulgarian version. Also, a special group of publications was established to target foreign information consumers with periodicals issued in English, French, German, Russian and Turkish.

Given the fact that the web versions of the printed periodicals are created mainly as a supplementary source of information, their layout is still simple, unsophisticated, and focused on the core information. Nevertheless, they enjoy a slow, but steadily growing readership.

Several main press groups were founded by professionals close to private banks, insurance companies, political and trade union establishments, thus starting the concentration process. The rigorously developing media market attracted foreign investors. In 1997, the German *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (WAZ) bought controlling interest in the two leading newspaper groups in Bulgaria: 168 Chassa and Media Holding.

The monopolist position of the state-owned Bulgarian Telegraph Agency (established in 1892) was broken by new private press agencies, such as Balkan Agency, BGNES and online agencies.

Currently, the public enjoys a rich print media milieu including 446 newspapers (63 dailies) with an annual circulation of 325,733,100 and 778 magazines and bulletins with annual circulation of 22,158,900 (NSI 2008a). The two dailies with largest circulation are *Trud* [Labor] and *24 Chassa* [24 Hours], both owned by WAZ.

Professional development was encouraged by national nominations for high journalistic accomplishment. The annual ratings of the top newspapers in Bulgaria became a telling indicator of public and professional evaluations, as well as a significant index for the advertisers. Over 90 print media are represented by 28 members in the The Union of Publishers in Bulgaria (2000) – an independent, non-governmental association united by the principles of defending

the freedom of the press, the independence of journalists and the encouragement of their work so that society is objectively informed. The Union of Publishers in Bulgaria is a member of the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) and of the European Newspaper Publishers' Association (ENPA) (The Union of Publishers in Bulgaria 2008).

The process of forming an independent, diversified and pluralistic press in Bulgaria after the political changes of 1989 demonstrates the following trends:

- *Privatization* leading to establishment of a print media market at national, local and international levels.
- *Proliferation* of press, accompanied by concentration of ownership.
- *Diversification* of political, popular, quality and topical periodicals.
- *Introduction of new styles, formats and standards.*
- *Establishment of Internet versions* of the newspaper content.

Broadcasting media

In contrast to the turbulent transformation in the press, the changes in the broadcasting media were slower, incomplete and lacked general consistency. They started and were carried out in an atmosphere of deregulation – the Radio and Television Act was adopted only in 1998 (RTA 1998).

The new Bulgarian Constitution adopted on 12 July 1991, was the first legislative act that abolished the party-state monopoly in electronic media. Thus, along with the other East European countries, Bulgaria moved to regulate the licensing of private radio and TV stations. At first, The Parliamentary Commission for Radio and Television and the Provisional Council for Radio and Television became the controlling body of radio and television structure and functioning.

Although the former structures of the party-state in the state-owned electronic media were abandoned, the executive boards continued to be open to direct political pressure, causing overall personnel instability and a lack of continuity in programming policy. Problems regarding freedom of expression, agenda-setting issues, and journalistic investigative reporting gave rise to conflicts between professional managers and bureaucrats.

Nowadays, the two national institutions that regulate the electronic media are the Council for Electronic Media (CEM) and the Communications Regulation Commission (CRC). They issue radio and TV licenses and register cable and satellite broadcasters. CEM (formerly The National Council for Radio and Television) is the regulatory body that monitors compliance with the Radio and Television Act, including issues such as advertising, sponsorship, copyright and protection of minors. The Council also considers complaints by citizens and organizations. CRC (formerly The State Commission of Telecommunications) manages the radio spectrum. It also enforces the Electronic Communications Act, adopted in 2007, which lays the legal basis for the digital switchover (ECA 2007).

Radio

Radio broadcasting in Bulgaria was a state monopoly right from the very beginning of its existence in 1932. Until 1991 there was only one, Sofia-based, central broadcasting station (operating four channels) and five regional stations. The liberalization of radio broadcasting was a much slower process than that of the print media.

The liberalized rules for licensing of local radio and television stations stimulated a rapid development of private radio (Ordinance No 1 of the Committee for Postal Services and Telecommunications 1992). The first licenses for private radio stations were issued to several foreign radio broadcasters: Voice of America, BBC-World Service, Free Europe, France International, and Deutsche Welle. They were selected because of their sensitivity to the democratization process in Bulgaria. The first domestic private radio station, FM+, went on the air in October 1992. The first and the only license for a private radio broadcasting on a national level was issued in 1993 to Darik Radio. The new radio stations developed more flexible and attractive formats and styles, targeting different audience niches. They quickly gained popularity. The necessary conditions (financial, technological and personnel) for differentiation of the private broadcasting on a national scale were at hand. Nevertheless, the state-owned and operated radio network still holds a commanding lead in audience share.

Several telling trends in radio programme dynamics could be discerned during this period of transition. Radio broadcasting had displayed an enormous increase. In 1988, prior to the political changes, some 46,810 hours of programming were aired. In 1989 the number had increased to 48,498 hours; in 1993 the inclusion of private radio bounced the total number of on-air hours to 161,278. By 2006 the public was enjoying 591,834 hours of programming, more than twelve times the number of hours broadcast in 1988 (NSI 2008b). Programme supply had been strongly diversified. The local radio stations had developed a clear-cut public profile as well as introduced technological innovations, such as computer-run, RDS and online versions of the regular radio programmes. The introduction of new styles, formats and standards lead to steady segmentation of radio audiences. Foreign investments shaped the strongly developing concentration trends.

Television

Telecasts in Bulgaria first started in 1959 with three hours' programming twice a week. It took about ten years before the whole country was covered by a TV signal. Colour telecasting was introduced in 1972 and in 1975 a second national channel was launched. For years Soviet Television was retranslated and run on Fridays in place of the First National Channel. A correspondent's bureau in Moscow selected, translated and dubbed Soviet TV programmes. It also produced original programmes in Bulgarian.

In the mid-1970s a network of four local TV stations was established. County correspondents provided films and videotapes with local news. The TV news service was backed by foreign correspondents working in Berlin, Paris, Warsaw, Prague, the Middle East and Japan. Most of the foreign news coverage was supplied by Intervision (the former international TV organization of socialist countries) and Eurovision.

Compared to the other media, changes in television came much more slowly. Some major reasons for that included the state monopoly over national telecasting, political pressures resulting in frequent replacements of TV executives (in seventeen years, fourteen General Directors in succession headed the National Television), lack of research and development concepts and strategies, inefficient management, economic constraints and obsolete equipment.

If 1994 is remarkable for the development of the TV market, it is also regarded as a landmark in the liberalization of telecasts in Bulgaria.

The first private television station broadcasting locally, Nova Televizia (New Television) was launched in 1994. Because of the lack of financial, technological and personnel resources, it

was limited to modest programming – primarily movies and imported popular entertainment programmes. The opening of the 7Dni (7 days) local TV station in 1995 signalled the beginning of competition in telecasting in Sofia. In December 1999 Rupert Murdoch’s Balkan News Corporation was the successful bidder to become the first private TV operator functioning on a national scale. The emergence of alternative television encouraged programme diversification on the national TV landscape. Meanwhile, the almost uncontrolled reception of satellite, transborder and cable programmes exerted significant pressure on the domestic channels. Infiltration of foreign audio-visual products had an equally strong impact on national broadcasting policies.

The privately owned TV stations undoubtedly challenged the monopoly of the state-owned TV. A diverse TV market was gradually established in the country. Thus, recently bTV has taken the lead in audience share from BNT in a country where 98 per cent of households have a television set. According to June 2007 statistics, the national audience of bTV is 94.7 per cent; the corresponding numbers for Nova TV (the second private TV channel, broadcasting on a national scale) are 85.1 per cent and 81.6 per cent for Bulgarian National Television – Channel 1 (the public service broadcaster) (Alpha Research 2007). The same order is valid for the advertising revenues of the three broadcasters. However, the public service broadcasters still enjoy the highest audience credibility: BNT is approved by three-quarters of the population and BNR by two-thirds, compared to other institutions such as the police with 49 per cent and the army with 50 per cent (NCPO 2006). So far no tenders for analogue licensing of on-air TV broadcasters have been held in the country.

In 2007, following the Regional Telecommunications Conference RRC-06, the State Agency for Information Technologies and Communications completed a ‘Plan for Introduction of Terrestrial Digital TV Broadcasting (DVB-T) in the Republic of Bulgaria’.

Currently, digital television in Bulgaria is offered via the following technologies:

- DVB-Terrestrial: experimental for the area of the capital city of Sofia.
- DVB-Satellite: by two major operators.
- DVB-Cable: provided by about 10 per cent of the registered cable operators for their subscribers with free-of-charge set top boxes for the contracted period.

The market of digital terrestrial, cable and satellite audio and video broadcasting in Bulgaria is liberalized but, nevertheless, no major progress has been marked in the development of terrestrial DAB and DVB.

Several important trends accompany the TV programme dynamics. TV broadcasting had displayed a significant increase. In 1988, prior to the political changes, 5,886 hours of TV programming were aired. A dramatic growth of 500 hours of telecasts was registered during the critical year of 1989. By 1994, when private television was officially introduced, audiences enjoyed 7,178 hours of TV programming, while in 2006 the number of hours reached 599,135 – more than a tenfold increase (NSI 2008c). The diversified programme supply encouraged higher audience selectivity. Digitizing, mobile- and web casting are the current technological challenges to the Bulgarian broadcasters.

In nearly nineteen years a highly saturated radio and TV landscape has been formed. In 2007 a total of 211 television and 154 radio channels were licensed or registered for delivery to the population by terrestrial broadcasting, by cable or via satellite.

The television market includes three national TV channels: BNT – the public service television broadcaster and the two commercial television stations: bTV, licensed in 2000 and owned by Rupert Murdoch's Balkan News Corporation and Nova Televisia, licensed in 2002 and owned by the Greek Antenna Group. Two national radio stations broadcast on-air: BNR – the public service broadcaster and the commercial Darik radio. All five of these national broadcasters are members of the Union of Bulgarian National Electronic Media (2005) – an independent non-government association, unified by the principles related to the assertion of the freedom of speech, the independence of journalists, and the promotion of their creative work aiming to provide objective information to the public.

The programmes of national channels and of other channels are additionally distributed by more than 1,800 cable networks and more than 23 nationwide satellite networks (Current Developments of Radio and Television Activities in Bulgaria 2007).

As of April 2007, over 160 radio and TV stations are members of the Association of Bulgarian Broadcasters (ABBRO), founded in 1997 as a voluntary, independent, non-political and non-profit organization, representing the broadcast industry in Bulgaria (ABBRO 2008).

The current radio- and TV landscape can be described with some important features:

- An established set of *legal regulations*.
- *Fundamental restructuring* of radio and TV systems at local, national and international levels.
- Establishment of *electronic media market* at national and local levels.
- *Segmentation of radio and TV audiences*, striving for a higher degree of credibility.
- *Introduction of new styles, formats and standards*, broadly using the new information technologies.
- Transfer to *digitalization*.

Online Media

The advent of new information technologies strongly influenced the media production cycle. The Internet was officially introduced in Bulgaria in 1997 and its market has expanded at encouraging rates ever since. Access to the Internet is provided mainly via telephone (dial-up) and via cable by specialized providers or as an additional service by the cable television operators. Satellite Internet is practically unused by end users. The Internet penetration in Bulgaria remains relatively low for private households – 19.0 per cent, compared to business companies – 88.1 per cent (NSI 2008d).

The use of new technologies is increasingly regarded as the key survival factor in an overcrowded media space. The newspapers with highest circulation maintain online editions, but some of the online versions require paid access: 24 Chassa (www.24chassa.bg), Trud (www.trud.bg), Standart News (www.standartnews.com), Monitor (www.zone168.com), and Sega Daily (www.segabg.com). National news agencies and broadcast media have also entered the online world: the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency (www.bta.bg), Bulgarian National Television (www.bnt.bg), bTV (www.btv.bg/home/), Nova TV (www.ntv.bg), Bulgarian National Radio (www.nationalradio.bg) and Darik Radio (www.netissat.bg/). Several web-based media exist: www.Mediapool.bg, www.novinite.com, www.news.bg and so on. A steady tendency towards increasing quantity and quality of electronic information and media sites has been observed.

In addition to traditional media and online-only news sites, some citizen-generated content has entered the World Wide Web. The Internet is beginning to be used for so-called 'citizens' journalism'. Even though this is a relatively new phenomenon, blogs on different social and political issues have multiplied. Another interesting phenomenon is a group of websites designed to facilitate public debate, where members of the public can write a story on a social, political or economic topic. These articles are published after approval of the site's staff and its most active users. A telling example of this is <http://www.newsfactory.org/>.

The increasing popularity of the Internet has definitely impacted the media system status quo. However, the online media business model is still problematic. The combination of content sales, subscription fees and advertising revenues can not bring sufficient income to assure content variety for attracting bigger audiences. Searching for their identity in the transforming social and market environment, the online and traditional media are serving more eagerly to advertisers rather than audiences.

Conclusion

Several main trends in the mass media development accompanied the democratization processes in Bulgaria:

- *Politically*, decentralization of the mass media system accompanied by the emergence of a pluralistic press and commercial broadcasters.
- *Legally*, liberalization and regulation of the mass media system, increasingly harmonizing with the mass media regulations in the European Union.
- *Technologically*, introduction of new information technologies in mass media production and dissemination.
- *Economically*, mass media market development in a highly competitive environment at local, regional and national levels.
- *Socially*, fragmentation of the audiences accompanied by higher selectivity standards and better social feedback.
- *Professionally*, departure from former media standards and introduction of new formats, styles and liberal journalistic ethics.

The growing roles of the mass media in the period of transition to democracy and market place economy have changed the status, rights and responsibilities of media professionals. The mass media power has become increasingly viable in social life. The changes have provided journalists with a strong hold on public opinion. Thus, the mass media system often operates as a Fourth Estate, influencing social attitudes, political opinions and decision-making on national priorities.

Note

1. The topic has been analyzed by the author in the following publications: *Television in Bulgaria on the Net*. A chapter in Nikos Leandros (ed.), *The Impact of Internet on the Mass Media in Europe* (2006), Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk (UK and USA): Abramis, pp. 503–13; *Fifteen Years of Televised Political Advertising in Bulgaria*. A chapter in Lynda Lee Kaid & Christina Holtz-Bacha (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Political Advertising* (2006), Thousand Oaks (Ca), USA: Sage Publications,

pp. 359–75; *Bulgaria: The Online Mirror Image of the Printed Newspapers*. A chapter in Richard van der Wurft & Edmund Laut (eds.), *Print and Online Newspapers in Europe. A Comparative Analysis in 16 countries* (2005), Amsterdam (The Netherlands): Her Sprinhuis Publishers, pp. 67–78; *Mass Media's Changing Landscape in Bulgaria*. Co-authored with Todor Petev. A chapter in David Paletz and Karol Jakubowicz (eds.), *Business as Usual. Continuity and Change in Central and Eastern Europe* (2003), Cresskill, New Jersey USA: Hampton Press, Inc., pp. 73–109; *Mass Media in Bulgaria. A Source Book* (2003), Dortmund: ENTIRE – Working Papers in International Journalism, p. 44; *The Challenges of Internet Media to Traditional Media System in Bulgaria*. A chapter in *Towards New Media Paradigms: Content, Producers, Organisations and Audiences* (2003), Pamplona (Spain), pp. 531–45; *Mass Media System in Bulgaria (1989–9)*. Co-authored with Todor Petev. (In English) A chapter in *The Global Network* (2000), Bucharest: No 13, pp. 7–17; *The Dynamics of the Electronic Mass Media System in Bulgaria (1989–9)*. A chapter in *The Global Network* (2000), Bucharest: No 13, pp. 37–57; *The Impact of Television on the Democratization Processes*. A chapter in Newman, B. (ed.), *Handbook of Political Marketing* (1999). Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 485–505; *Turn-of-the-Century Challenges Facing the Mass Media in Bulgaria. Media Development* (1999), No 3, pp. 9–13; *Development of Alternative Broadcasting in Bulgaria*. A chapter in *Drustvo I Tehnologija '96* (1996). Rijeka, Croatia, pp. 154–61; *Mass Communication in Bulgaria during the Transitional Period (1989–93) – Points of Research*. A chapter in *Researching (Investigative) Journalism: A New Model for Public Communication* (1995), Zagreb: Croatian Communicologists Association, Nonacom, pp. 36–42.

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