

SILENCED JOURNALISTS

New Ways of Censorship in Romanian Media

Romania ranks poorly in quality media criteria *

Polarized and politicized

Development of the press	Low
▶ Political polarization	High
▶ Professionalism	Low
▶ State intervention	High

* Based on Table 9.1 Pattern of Variation in Four Media Systems Dimension (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 299), Gross (2003) in Media and Democracy in CEE, Report on Romania by Pater Bajomi-Lazar

Dominant role of the television

- ▶ 80% of the population use TV as their main source of information
 - ▶ 600 TV licences (source: National Audiovisual Council)
 - ▶ Advertisizing market shrinkage:
 - ▶ 2008 – 350 million Euro
 - ▶ 2012 – 200 million Euro
 - ▶ (source: Media Factbook)
- 

Media ownership concentration

- ▶ Media oligarchs with political links
- ▶ **Intact Media Group** owned by Dan Voiculescu and his family: a former Securitate member, the founder of the Conservative Party currently in power in coalition with Liberal Party and the Social Democrat Party
- ▶ **Realitatea TV** – owned by Sorin Ovidiu Vantu (now in prison); sold to former politician Cosmin Gusa
- ▶ **Romania TV** – owned by Sebastian Ghita, MP SDP
- ▶ **OTV** – owned by Dan Diaconescu, founder of the People's Party elected to Parliament in 2012 (now closed by National Audiovisual Council–CNA)
- ▶ **B1 TV** – owned by Paunescu family: known right-wing links

Economic pressures

- ▶ **Salary cuts**
 - ▶ **Journalists' job losses**—about 6000 since 2010, mostly in the written press
 - ▶ **Economic pressures** on journalists by companies or business figures to suppress publication of certain information
 - ▶ **Journalists working for free** on the Internet
- 

Labor Contracts

- ▶ **How Romanian journalists are paid**
 - Minimum wage on a legal labor contract (about 200 Euro per month)
 - Variable fees for articles, TV or Radio reports etc.

Advantage: minimal taxes paid by employers

Disadvantage: minimal rights for journalists (pensions, social support etc.)

The labor contract as an instrument of pressure and control

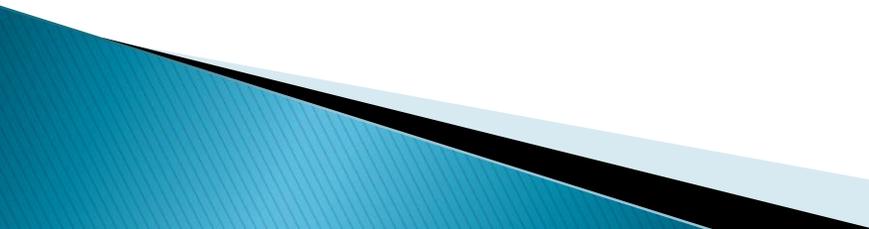
- ▶ E.g. Stelian Negrea, editor-in-chief of Investigations Department of Intact Media Group–Antena TV 1,2,3, and Jurnalul National newspaper (owner: Dan Voiculescu), was forced to gather negative information about political competitors and owners of rival businesses for use in TV programs.
- ▶ He refused, and was fired and sued by the company
- ▶ *"We are slaves on the plantation"*, he said
- ▶ **Art. 3.7** of the labor contract: a journalist must fulfill **all the requirements of the owners** or be liable to pay a fine of 100,000 Euro

- ▶ Exceptions: editors-in-chief, directors and favored journalists are paid handsomely for serving the interests of owners.
- ▶ E.g. The owner* of Antena TV channels pays the most loyal journalists between 5,000–15,000 Euro per month. They are also used in elections to influence voting
- ▶ * Dan Voiculescu, a former Securitate member, the founder of the Conservative Party currently in power in coalition with the Liberal Party and Social Democrat Party

Political threats

Politicians are more and more aggressive in colonisation of the press

- ▶ (* Peter Bajomi-Lazar "the party colonisation of the Media", 2011)

 - ▶ 1. Press law projects in Parliament
 - ▶ – Senator Ion Ghise (liberal)– Law on ‘positive news’
 - ▶ – Senator S.Prigoana (dem.liberal) –extension of the CNA (regulator) control over the Internet and newspapers
 - ▶ – 3 soc.–dem. Deputies – Law on ‘indecent publications’
 - ▶ 2. Government decisions in the audiovisual field
 - ▶ – recent changes to the audio–visual law
 - ▶ 3. Press described as a “national vulnerability” in the National Defense Strategy (2011)
 - ▶ 4. Political appointments to PSB and CAN posts
- 

Political pressure on journalists and media companies

a) by aggressive statements

- ▶ E.g. Correspondents of El Pais, CNN, Deutsche Welle, FAZ declared as "enemies of Romania" and "secret agents" for criticizing conduct of the referendum in July 2012

b) by punitive measures

E.g. Case of foreign correspondents of Public Radio subjected to stringent 'voice test' leading to dismissal of some critical reporters

Case of President of the Romanian Public Radio taking action against a trade union leader

▶ c) by justice harassment

- ▶ *"Perceived as the main instrument for electoral coverage, news television channels are not free from political editorial bias. With several channels owned by politicians or parliamentary candidates, it is clear that editorial content is vulnerable and less trusted by average citizens. The report highlights the case of the INTACT media group owning several channels and under the control of Dan Voiculescu, former MP and MP candidate during elections. Several examples of the sort were offered as in the case of OTV channel" (OSCE Report on Media, 2012)*

▶ **USA State Department Report, 2013**

- ▶ **Freedom of Press:** While the independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without overt restriction, politicians and persons with close ties to politicians and political groups either owned or indirectly controlled numerous media outlets at the national and local levels. The news and editorial tone of these outlets frequently reflected the views of the owners. There were also allegations that owners suppressed stories at odds with their interests or threatened the authors of such stories.
- ▶ **Violence and Harassment:** During the year there were instances of public officials and politicians insulting or harassing journalists. In July Senator Dan Sova of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) pressured Radio Romania to withdraw correspondent Carmen Valica from Brussels, claiming she had misinformed EU Justice Commissioner Vivian Reding about the turbulent political situation in Romania through the questions she allegedly posed in an interview. Member of the European Parliament Norica Nicolai also threatened to take measures against state-controlled Radio Romania if it kept Valica on the job in Brussels. Several NGOs asked for Sova's resignation. Addressing the case, a European Commission spokesperson stated that the commission had no tolerance for any attempt to sanction journalists for free and independent reporting on events in Brussels. Similar pressure was exerted against other Romanian and foreign correspondents working for international outlets such as *El Pais*, the *Economist*, CNN, RFI, the *New York Times* (blog), Deutsche Welle, and *Le Monde*.

”Media ownership in regions is quite fuzzy and not sufficiently transparent. Journalists are often underfunded, poorly trained, divided and disoriented. All this makes it difficult for the media to act as independent and unbiased providers of information...

- ▶ It is not by chance that foreign investors have progressively abandoned the media field in CEE countries: they have seen their investments generating less and less profits while pressures from politicians and governments have become more intrusive.
- ▶ *That said, the media are not just innocent victims of political and economic manipulation. Rather than acting as an independent watchdog and provider of non-biased information, they have often sided with their business or political patrons, indulging in propaganda, misinformation, or even smear campaigns”.*



(MDCEE Final Report 2013–Mancini, Zielonka)

- ▶ **Joseph Daul, European Parliament, EPP leader**

- ▶ *"I am appalled. I cannot believe that in a European Union Member State, after more than 20 years since the fall of Communism, freedom of expression is again under threat... This new development in Romania breaks all normal democratic boundaries and sends an extremely negative signal with regard to the recently affirmed commitment of the Romanian authorities to fully respect the rule of law and democratic principles"*

- ▶
- ▶
- ▶

(2012, July 23)

Effects on journalists:

- opportunistic behavior**
- low ethical standards**
- loss of professional autonomy**

- ▶ *"When journalists are silenced, whether through violence or laws, we all stand to lose because perpetrators are able to obscure misdeeds, silence dissent, and disempower citizens... The battle to control information is an assault on public accountability that cannot go unchallenged. Governments must prosecute perpetrators and stop those seeking to incapacitate public oversight by blunting critical and probing reporting"*
- ▶ **Robert Mahoney**–Committee to Protect Journalists

▶ **Thank you!**

- ▶ Prof.Dr. Brindușa Armanca
- ▶ Journalist and professor of Media Ethics
 - ▶ Romania