

Jan Zielonka (ed.). (2015). *Media and Politics in New Democracies: Europe in a Comparative Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 322, ISBN 978-0-19-874753-6.

This book is a much needed contribution to the study of media and media change in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). It focuses on the relationship between the media and politics, and seeks to overcome the Anglo-American bias characteristic in both analyses of media-politics in the non-Western world, and in the study of the transformation of media systems in post-communist Europe. The need to de-Westernize media studies in the new European democracies has been repeatedly articulated in the literature ever since the first decade of the post-communist transformations (see e.g., Sparks, 2000; Lauk, 2015). In the 2010s there appeared several valuable collections that contributed significantly to this task (Gross & Jakubowicz, 2012; Downey & Mihelj, 2012; Głowacki et al., 2014; Dobek-Ostrowska & Głowacki, 2015). For several reasons presented below, this volume has a special place on that list.

Media and Politics in New Democracies emerged as a result of the Oxford-based research project Media and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe (MDCEE). An outstanding feature of the project and the book itself is that it is a joint work of scholars from various academic backgrounds. Up to one-third of the chapters of the volume was written by researchers from outside media studies, predominantly from political science. The integration of the efforts of media scholars and political scientists within this project was very beneficial for its results, and here is why. *Media and Politics in New Democracies* was created at a time when the state of press freedom in some CEE countries, along with negative tendencies around media-politics relations, were causing increasing concern among scholars. As Štětka pointedly noted:

After a period of gradual improvement, peaking around the time right before EU accession, media freedom started declining again, with the 2011 average score matching the value from 1998. This clearly represents a setback for the hopes that EU membership would safeguard the protection and further extension of this important component of democracy, and points to the limits of the EU conditionality when it comes to maintaining achieved standards in the post-accession period. (2012)

The case of Hungary, where the victory of the right-wing *Fidesz* Party was marked by a substantial rowing back on democratic reforms (including media reform), as well as the less spectacular, albeit significant negative developments in other countries, stimulated discussions on the risk of backsliding among the newly democratized CEE countries towards authoritarianism (Balčytienė et al., 2015). In these circumstances the engagement of political scientists into the study of media developments in the region was highly reasonable: first, because media and politics are too tightly interconnected in the new European democracies, and therefore the

understanding of media change there is hardly possible without knowledge of the tendencies in their political life. Secondly, different from media studies, whose major theoretical toolkit was imported from democratic media theories rooted in the experience of the mature democracies of the West (McCargo, 2012; Jebril et al., 2013; Lauk, 2015), political science (in particular, comparative politics and regime change studies) has at its disposal rather advanced theoretical and conceptual instruments for the study of the societies under transformation, or even in-between democracy and authoritarianism. Some of these instruments (such as the concepts of state capture, politicization of the state, informal institutions, and informality) were successfully integrated into the research in the framework of the MDCEE project. The “injection” of these conceptual instruments into media and communication studies is, however, not devoid of risks. Scholars in political science acknowledge that some of these terms, which as a matter of fact appeared or were introduced in mainstream studies relatively recently, are used in different ways, which leads to conceptual ambiguity (Köllner, 2012, 2013). They also warn against using these concepts as residual or catch-all categories (Köllner, 2012; Lauth, 2012).

Contributors to *Media and Politics in New Democracies* see the political context in which the media in CEE countries operate as highly volatile and unstable. The volatility of political parties and their weak social roots, according to Paolo Mancini, incite a desire on the part of politicians to control the media, or even “capture” them to ensure themselves access to and mobilization of voters. Political volatility also enhances the risk of state capture by political parties: as Bajomi-Lazar points out, referring to the works by O’Dwyer and Kopecky, the parties seek to secure a grip over the public sector to compensate for their feeble position in society, as access to state resources gives them a chance to trade these resources for political support.

In its turn, state capture by private interests as well as the politicization of the state, or political parties “taking over a supposedly neutral state bureaucracy and public administration, using the state as a source of private rents” (Grzymala-Busse, 2003), is detrimental for the consolidation of media freedom. Mancini draws attention to how the condition when the state is an object of competition between various groups, influences the regulatory framework for media freedom, as well as the professional culture of journalism in CEE societies. He shows that this condition implies the possibility of unstable laws and administrative structures shaping the media. Indeed, as the reports from MDCEE project describe, they undergo frequent and often dramatic changes in many CEE societies. The changes are, however, driven not by a priori policy objectives, but rather ad hoc objectives and the particular interests of various groups seeking to influence state structures and rules to their own favor. As Krygier’s chapter on the law and its impact on media and politics in CEE illustrates, this may result in “bad” laws or/and absence of any coherence in media regulations, which impedes the media’s ability to effectively perform their democratic functions (the most extreme cases of the former could be observed recently in Hungary and Poland). Besides, as Mancini points out, incessant changes

in legal frameworks for media and politics, as well as the volatility of political system are unfavorable for shaping the professional culture of journalism: they produce uncertainty in the field of journalism and its interactions with political figures and thus prevent an establishment of clear professional norms and routines.

The particular value of the book (and the MDCEE project in general) is that besides focusing on the relationship between the media and politics itself, it also provides a nuanced and in-depth analysis of various contexts (such as economic, legal, or cultural) within which the media operate in CEE, and which in some countries happen to make what Jakubowicz and Sukosd once called “a disabling environment” for media freedom. This concerns, for example, the issue of the legal environment for media independence, which previously was often discussed in media studies in terms of “new democratic media laws” contraposed to the inimical “old political culture”. However, as Rantanen and Belyakova reveal, the development of democratic media legislation has often been undermined in the CEE by policymakers’ lack of interest or incompetence in the field, not to mention deliberate attempts by some politicians to adopt laws designed to muzzle independent media or to block the passing of necessary media laws pointed out by Krygier.

The chapters by Balčytienė and Lasas demonstrate that, as in the case of media regulation, a more complex picture than was earlier assumed is presented by today’s political culture in CEE societies, which previously was seen chiefly through the lenses of the “cultural heritage” of communism/pre-communism. Balčytienė proposes a dynamic “historic” approach to the study of the cultures of post-communist societies: according to her, though indeed such inherited cultural features as clientelism and favoritism are still characteristic of these societies, the uncertainties, instability, and challenges faced by them in the transformation period additionally brought other cultural qualities, ones which are no less a threat to democratization, and to the media’s democratic performance in the region. The list includes: extreme individualization, ignorance, self-interest, and the loss of community feeling, with the danger that civil involvement which was characteristic for many CEE countries soon after the Singing Revolutions will be replaced by alienation and “social withdrawal” or/and “admiration of mainstream discourses and visual representations mainly through TV-saturated political scandals, spin, spectacle, and populism”. The findings by Lasas are consonant with Balčytienė’s conclusions: he points out that interest in political affairs in CEE dropped since the 1990s. Lasas, who uses three European Social Values surveys (1990–3, 1998–9, 2008–9) to examine democratic culture in CEE countries, points out that it has remained largely unchanged over the last twenty years of the transitions.

The uncertainty characteristic to the transitions heightens the role of agency. Unsurprisingly, one of the sections of the book is devoted to key actors involved in mediating power in new democracies: political parties, media owners, and journalists. Similar to political parties, which, as Bajomi-Lazar points out, tend to “colonize the media” in CEE, media owners may seek to make them serve their par-

ticularistic political/business interests. The findings by Štětka, who focuses on the shifts in economic and ownership structures in the region, are alarming: he warns that after foreign investors withdrew from media markets in Central and Eastern Europe following the 2008 financial crisis and their assets went into the hands of local “tycoons” or “oligarchs”, there has been a threat that what he calls the oligarchic model of media ownership may outgrow the (Western) commercial model.

Compared to the above-mentioned two types of actors, journalists seem to be the least autonomous and homogeneous group in CEE. Indeed, as Mocek shows in his chapter, the period of transformation has raised multiple barriers between journalists in CEE countries resulting from political, ideological, and ownership divisions — as well as generational shifts. This fragmentation of journalism inhibits its professionalization, and prevents it from weakening the links with external forces — namely, the worlds of politics and business. On the bright side, however, is that CEE journalists, according to Mocek, do not prefer the model of journalism practiced in authoritarian countries like Russia or China. A certain indicator of the vitality of (Western) journalistic standards in Central and Eastern Europe is the emergence of various online news outlets, partly founded by journalists who seek to avoid pressure from above (p. 96).

When displaying the tendencies in the relationship between the media and politics in the region, the contributors to this volume underline that CEE countries are anything but uniform in their post-communist development (see especially Mancini, Balcytiene, Rantanen & Belyakova). An innovative for post-communist media studies approach to analysis of heterogeneity of transformations in the region is proposed by Greskovits. Based on Polanyi’s theory of capitalism, he singles out three types of capitalist democracies which appeared in CEE together with the respective media models: neoliberal (characteristic for the Baltic States), embedded neoliberal (the Czech and Slovak republics, Hungary, and Poland), and neocorporatist (Slovenia).

Another way to deal with the heterogeneity of new European democracies is to refer to the concept of hybridity to signify the difference between the few countries which successfully followed the Western path and many others which, as it is often assumed in political science, have developed hybrid forms of democracy. Voltmer criticizes the political-science notion of hybrid regimes because it confuses, as she assumes, the normatively desirable form of democracy with the actual practices of Western democracies. She points out that what is often seen as divergence from democracy in CEE models of media and politics is in fact a convergence, but not with the ideal model, but today’s realities of Western Europe, such as an erosion of predictable electoral behavior which induces attack campaigning and spin in politics, or expansion and commercialization of media systems leading to “hyper-adversarialism” and sensationalism in journalism practices. Voltmer argues that hybridity of practices and institutions is inevitable because adopted institutions do not operate in a historical and cultural vacuum, and even necessary, because they need to “grow roots and become an accepted part of everyday life” (p. 220). At the

same time she remarks that hybridity is not always conducive for democratization: sometimes domestication of transplanted Western institutions may be “taming the wild” (as with domestication of animals) thereby stripping democracy and media freedom of its emancipatory potential (p. 221).

As indicated by the title of this book, it presents media and politics in new European democracies in a comparative perspective. A separate section of *Media and Politics in New Democracies* sheds light on new democracies outside Europe, with particular focus on experiences in Africa, Latin America, and South East Asia. This broadening of the scope of comparison in CEE media studies is particularly revealing as it helps to identify common patterns in different countries and regions (such as, for example, vulnerability to political populism, party/media polarization, and informal networks of patronage), as well as the particularities of transformations in Central and Eastern Europe. It also makes the whole volume a notable contribution to the study of protracted consolidations around the world.

This book, featuring contributions from a global team of authors, is an extremely valuable collection, which brings in new models, perspectives and conceptual frameworks to the study of media and politics in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond. The ideas, theorization and findings it presents will undoubtedly define the development of the field years to come. At the same time, it opens new avenues for further research: as Rantanen and Belyakova pointedly note in the concluding chapter:

The worst thing that could happen would be for the topic of the media and politics in CEE to be seen as fully covered by this volume and then wait a decade for the next book. (Rantanen & Belyakova, p. 318)

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Gary Graham, Anita Greenhill, Donald Shaw and Chris J. Vargo (eds.). (2015). *Content Is King. New Media Management in the Digital Age*. New York and London: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., pp. 256, ISBN: 978-1-6235-6545-9.

In everyday life we experience the effects of the rapid changes that we owe to new technologies. The Internet has changed not only our approach to communication, but also the form of enjoying our free time, or even, as argued by Carr, ways of thinking and learning. Adjusting to these changes is not only necessary to feel more “up-to-date”, but sometimes a way of survival, especially for the media that can no longer function in the world without the Web. The book *Content Is King. New Media Management in the Digital Age* can be considered a guide to those changes and dealing with them designed for news managers.

The book was written by experts and scholars whose main research field is communication, management, journalism, and media. It is addressed to “those who manage, or hope to manage” newspapers and other news media. While for most people the so-called *Digital Era* means more opportunities and fading importance of geographical boundaries, media enterprises face many problems trying to work