

Editorial

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This third and final issue of 2015 begins with a special section that is intended to reflect on the quarter of a century of so-called transition in the countries of the former communist Eastern Europe and the successor states of Yugoslavia. It was inspired by a conference entitled “25 Years After: The Challenges of Building the Post-Communist Media and Communications Industries” organised in November 2014 at the New York University in Prague by a coalition of partners that now make up the Prague Media Point. Parallel to the massive technological and other changes in television and what we now call audio-visual media services over the last two and a half decades, the media systems in these countries have also faced political upheavals, rapid privatization and liberalization of their markets, and complete overhauls of the legislative frameworks governing them. The late esteemed scholar Karol Jakubowicz once wrote that the transition in this part of Europe would be over when the media systems of the east resembled those of Western Europe. He did not deny the problems of commercialization, erosion of public media, and of the increasing financial insecurity facing Western European media systems. He simply defined the end of transition in the east as the moment only those problems remained, without the additional ones that he saw stemming from the single party communist past.

Regrettably, as one can see from the articles in this special section, many of the problems that Jakubowicz associated with the state of transition persist, and are still crucial topics for scholarly investigations. For good reason there is still concern about the independence and effective functioning of national regulators and the transformation of formerly state owned broadcasters. Like those included in this issue, many scholars continue to examine public institutions, legal frameworks and Europeanization processes in an effort to understand the

roots of the problems they continue to observe in their media systems. One theme stands out as a fundamental element of this state of transition: political will, or more precisely the lack of will on the part of political elites to resist trying to control the media.

Krisztina Rozgonyi and Gabor Polyak start off this issue with an examination of the work of the Hungarian audio-visual media regulator, the Media Council. Building on previous work that established indicators for measuring formal and informal independence, Rozgonyi and Polyak bring in the concept of accountability as complement to independence. They look at outcomes and consequences of regulatory action in the context of the principal-agent relationship between the state and the regulator and those to whom the regulator should be accountable, rather than just the condition of independence for the media regulator's functioning. This contribution should inspire us to think about regulation, independence and accountability – the relationship between the state, the regulator and the public/stakeholders. The authors present findings that show significant problems with the Hungarian regulator's level of transparency and responsiveness to the public, and its treatment of players in the market. They also go further proposing ways to measure accountability and regulatory performance and making concrete recommendations for European media policy.

The next two articles deal with the transformation of public service broadcasting. The process of converting formerly state-controlled broadcasters into modern public service broadcasters across the region has been a great challenge and has been much more than an issue of upgrading technology or reorganizing institutions. Katerina Spasovska and Iveta Imre compare the transformation of public service broadcasting in Croatia and Macedonia thus far looking specifically at the consequences of the multiple changes to the legal frameworks for the broadcasters over time. Their accounts provide clear evidence for some of the ways political elites used media law changes to solidify influence over the public broadcasters, despite these laws being ostensibly in line with the European standards sought in the EU

accession processes in which both countries were engaged. Davor Marko's account of the transformation of Serbia's public broadcaster RTS also gives evidence of political manipulation and a struggle for independence, but is somewhat more optimistic. Marko's piece investigates the role of international assistance in RTS's transformation. International assistance for public broadcaster reform or other media development initiatives were common throughout the former Yugoslavia after the conflicts. While Marko argues that transformation will take more time because of the political culture and that the effectiveness of assistance has been limited because of a lack of coordination and strategic planning at various times, he appears optimistic that the technological advancement and 'empowerment of management' made possible by international support, and training will help RTS make progress.

In the first of the two commentaries that are part of this special section, Indrek Ibrus offers a positive alternative to the stories of political influence and struggling transformation by suggesting that public broadcasters in the region should be treated as coordinators of innovation in the audio-visual sector. He draws on the situation in Estonia, which is known for being advanced in terms of ICT use and e-services, and argues that particularly in small countries like most of those in Central and Eastern Europe, policy and remits for public broadcasters can serve an important role as drivers of innovation and creation where the small markets otherwise lack such drivers. In the second commentary Igor Micevski and Snezana Trpevska highlight another problem facing small media markets in the region, that of close ties and financial dependency on political elites. They argue that in their country of Macedonia, there has been a complete 'colonization' of the media by the ruling political parties and back up their claims with evidence from a series of recently release recordings of phone conversations involving government ministers, media figures and others. The last piece in this special section is a conference report from the 8th Central and Eastern European

Communications Conference (CEECON) that took place in June 2015 in Ljubljana Slovenia. Zrinjka Peruško reports on what can be considered the cutting edge of media scholarship in the region, sharing how the future of journalism in the digital environment and the changing tools and methods of political communication were popular themes.

In addition to the special section, this issue contains two more fascinating articles as well as two Book Reviews that were organized by our Book Reviews Editor Tom Evens. The first article by Leighton Evans, Yan Wu and Elaine Price presents results from an extensive study conducted among deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences in Wales. The authors find that subtitling remains problematic for this population even after migration to digital television and argue that there is much that needs to be done to improve the interface of such services, especially for older people. It is a very useful piece for those working to ensure that broadcasting meets the needs of vulnerable or disadvantaged segments of the population. The second article relates to another disadvantaged public, the population of the small African nation of Lesotho. As author Leboli Zachia Thamae explains, with its small population of just over two million and struggling economy Lesotho's broadcasting sector is weak and appears to be ill-served by the policy-makers responsible for digital switchover. Lesotho gained a slight reprieve by the fact that South Africa, which surrounds it, also missed the July 2015 deadline for analogue switch-off. However, Thamae warns that the tiny country is at risk of effectively losing its free to air television provision if it does not prepare for switchover and offers policy-makers some suggestions as to how to do so better than other countries might also learn from.

The articles in this issue have inspired me to reflect more thoroughly on the role television should play in society and how it should be serving various publics as well as the conditions that might be needed in order for it to effectively play that role. I hope you enjoy this issue and are similarly inspired.