
 Prikaz

Gabriela Mezeiová
**Postkomunistická transformácia
 médií. Prípadová štúdia
 Chorvátskej republiky
 (Post-communist Transformation
 of the Media. The Case Study
 of the Croatian Republic)**

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In the Slovak milieu, scientific studies exploring influences of the political transformation on the media system are relatively rare. That is especially true regarding comparative research of the type presented in this short but valuable study. In her concise book, Gabriela Mezeiová, a young Slovak political scientist, traces both Croatian and Slovak media transformations and analyses their correlation with the changes in the respective political systems. According to her broadly formulated main research hypothesis, correspondence of the “systematic and characteristic features of a socio-political situation in the selected post-communist countries” is mirrored by the correspondence of “their mass-media systems” (93). The book consists of three chapters. In the first chapter the author gives a theoretical grounding for the conducted research. The second chapter covers the media development in both countries. The third chapter focuses on the description of both similari-

ties and differences of the media transformations in Croatia and Slovakia.

While the author presents a detailed characterization of the changing media environment in both states, her main interest lies with that part of the transition period during which authoritative political parties dominated in Slovakia and Croatia. The two parties, Hrvatska demokratska zajednica (HDZ) and Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko (Movement for a democratic Slovakia – HZDS), influenced the structure of programme, property relations and the freedom of the media in general. In spite of some regional and historical dissimilarities, both media systems show a very high rate of congruence in the period immediately after the fall of communism. Both countries faced the problem of media manipulation by the political elites. Heavily oriented towards nationalist values and interests, the media were used as a tool for political propaganda. That was particularly true in the case of state-owned media. The public space was plagued by numerous anomalies: strong state broadcasting control, high rate of governmental intrusion in media staff politics, attempts to enact laws that legalize suppression of the freedom of speech, and last but not least, deterrence and persecution of journalists. In both countries, extensive governmental media interferences were legitimized by an appeal to the protection of national interests. The most powerful channel for manipulation of the public opinion and for agenda-setting was television. “Television was a key mass-medium in both countries thanks to its ability to reach a wide audience” (83). Nevertheless, there was a number of opposition media that more or less ef-

fectively countered official policy. In the case of Croatia, the bulk of critique came from the left side of the political spectrum, whereas in Slovakia opposition was both right and left oriented. It is noteworthy that in both countries one could find “journalists who had intensively contributed to the popularity of (Slovak) Prime Minister Mečiar or President Tuđman at the start of the decade and who happened to be one of their biggest critics in the later era” (87). The present trends perceptible in the two states suggest that the struggle for freedom of the media has still not ended. One of the main problems is to be found in the growing share of the yellow press that is a consequence of corporatism, media monopolization and intensified connections interweaving political, business and media interests (75-76).

Considerable space in the monograph is given to the Croatian civil war and the media development after 2000. The war period was characterized by the anti-Serbian orientation of the media (67-68). Gabriela Mezeiová illustrates this by concrete examples derived predominantly from the United Nations 1994 Report on the media and the OSCE’s Freedom and Responsibility Yearbook 1998/1999. After the parlia-

mentary elections in 2000 and 2003, the situation in the media improved substantially. There was significant progress in the development of journalistic unbiasedness and impartiality, especially on public television. Similarly, governmental intrusions into broadcasting were minimized. Unfortunately, some negative trends such as threatening investigative journalists have been registered as well (73).

Mezeiová’s comparative analysis of the media systems in the context of dynamic political changes in two young democracies is a considerable contribution to the field of comparative politics and media research. The extent and quality of utilized bibliography, which covers both theory and empirical research published in Slovak, Croatian and English, is commendable. Mezeiová’s analysis of the Croatian and Slovak experience with the media after the fall of communism rightfully provokes watchfulness: due to the permanent peril of ideological manipulation and privatisation of the media by the powerful, which is present also in the most liberal democracies of the globalized world today, we should be vigil in protecting the media, “the fourth power” and “the watchdog of democracy”.

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