

MEDIA DEMOCRATIZATION: MEDIA SYSTEMS TWENTY FIVE YEARS AFTER THE REVOLUTIONS OF 1989

Special Issue Guest Editors

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The twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe prompted us to explore the current state of research on media and democratization in the region. It has been clear that some aspects of the media's role in these "new" democracies have been the subject of ongoing investigation – above all the transformation of state broadcasters into public service ones – and hence we decided to turn our attention to research on newly emerging phenomena – such as the relationship between new media and democracy or the emergence of domestic media moguls – as well as to questions that have been under-represented in international scholarly research.

This special issue links to ongoing studies and it comes at a time when scholarly attention to processes of democratization and their relationship to media seems to have shifted to other parts of the world (most notably to "Arab Spring" countries). While in the late 1980s and early 1990s much attention focused on exploring the so-called transition to democracy in East Central Europe and particularly on the role of media in this process, by the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall academic literature on the subject has become scarcer and also more specialized, with little attention paid to the complexity of issues within the frameworks of individual nation states.

It may seem that there no longer remain pressing questions to be addressed in relation to media and democratization in East Central Europe. However, the establishment of democratic governments and the free market combined with the fact that some of the former communist countries joined the NATO and the European Union does not mean that in these countries we do not find phenomena or trends that question the extent to which media fulfil their democratic roles.

The collection of articles in this special issue does not by any means attempt to provide a systematic or thorough overview of recent thinking on media and democratization in the region, that would have been an over-ambitious task for an endeavour of this type. Rather, our aim is to alert to research that is little known internationally and that has potential consequences for our understanding of the complex issues of media and democratization beyond East Central Europe. Inevitably, a number of relevant topics and cases could not be covered in this special issue merely due to practical reasons.

In the opening contribution Lenka Waschková Čísařová and Monika Metyková build on ongoing research to reconsider Czech journalists' understanding of the influence of a new breed of domestic media owner – the billionaire politician. Media ownership and journalists' views on it are also the focus of Lada Trifonova Price's article which explores the case of Bulgaria and the role of nomenklatura – the ruling elite of the communist past – in particular.

Roman Hájek, Jan Vávra and Tereza Svobodová consider changes in the relationship between Czech local politicians and local journalists in the light of the professionalization of political communication and their consequences for the democratic roles of journalism. The role of journalists in the integration of the Russian speaking minority in Estonia is the subject of Maria Jufereva and Epp Lauk's contribution.

The final two articles in the special issue raise more theoretical issues. Jakub Macek, Alena Macková and Johana Kotišová dissect the relationship between new media and political participation while Nael Jebiril, Matthew Loveless and Vaclav Stetka map the emerging sub-field of media and democratization and suggest future avenues of research.

We hope that the special issue will stimulate debate on media and democratization not only in East Central Europe and we would also like to express our gratitude to the anonymous peer reviewers without whose contribution the special issue could not have happened.