

# Variations in media freedom: Why do some governments in Central and Eastern Europe respect media freedom more than others



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**ABSTRACT:** It is argued in this paper that the relative deficit of media freedom in most of Central and Eastern Europe as opposed to the relative freedom of the media in most of Western Europe is ultimately rooted in the specificities of the former communist countries' party systems. Young parties in young democracies lack the resources needed for party building and organization, which they compensate for by colonizing the state and the media and by exploiting state and media resources; party colonization of the media necessarily inhibits media freedom. It is further argued that temporal and spatial variations in media freedom in and across Central and Eastern Europe are explained by different patterns of media colonization. The more centralized the governing party's or parties' decision-making structures, the greater the likelihood of one-party colonization, and the more fragmented the governing party's or parties' decision-making structures, the lesser the likelihood of such colonization; one-party colonization of the media leads to lower levels of media freedom than multi-party colonization. In other words, the weaker the government, the more freedom the media have.

**KEYWORDS:** clientelism, media capture, media freedom, party colonization of the media, party systems, state capture



## **INTRODUCTION: THE PUZZLE OF MEDIA FREEDOM VARIATIONS**

The liberation of the media was an axiom of the democratic oppositions in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, and the demise of communist regimes in 1989–91 put an end to the monopolistic control of party states over the media. Media freedom was declared during the changes, but in subsequent years it failed to be consolidated in many of the former communist countries (Bajomi-Lázár, 2008). Despite the adoption of formally democratic media laws, the establishment of institutions designed to protect public broadcasters' independence, and the widespread privatization of the media, media freedom was repeatedly challenged throughout the 1990s and 2000s in the former communist countries. Many of the political elites exerted pressure on the media, often in close collaboration with

domestic business groups. Analysts describe a deficit of media freedom in many of the region's countries and agree that the performance of the news media has fallen short both of normative expectations and the standards set by the media in more advanced democracies (Paletz et al., 1995; Sparks & Reading, 1998; Gunther & Mugham, 2000; Gross, 2002; Sükösd & Bajomi-Lázár, 2003; Paletz & Jakubowicz, 2003; Czepek et al., 2008; Klimkiewicz, 2010; Jakubowicz, 2012). Of all media, public service television appears to have been particularly exposed to political pressures of varying intensity (Dragomir, 2005).

Quantitative measurements of media freedom confirm the qualitative assessments above. The historical press freedom indexes published by Freedom House for the period 1993–2012<sup>1</sup> suggest that the status of media freedom was poorer in the majority of the Eastern member states of the European Union than in the majority of Western ones. Of course, media systems in general and the status of public service broadcasters in particular vary across the former communist countries; analysts frequently speak of “multiple post-communisms” (Jakubowicz & Sükösd, 2008, p. 25) or “divergent paths” (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013, p. 40). Rather than constituting a homogeneous model, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe display “miscellaneity and hybridity, heterogeneity, and even flux as a region” (Balčytienė, 2013, p. 32).

According to Freedom House, media freedom was at a relatively high level in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, while it was at a medium level in Hungary (until 2010, when it was downgraded), Slovakia and Slovenia, and at a low level in Bulgaria and Romania. The Freedom House historical press freedom index also reveals major changes in the level of media freedom over time in the former communist countries, which usually occurred after new governments had assumed office. New parliamentary majorities (and, sometimes, minorities) in Central and Eastern Europe tend to adopt new broadcasting laws that transform media landscapes; the status of media freedom may greatly improve or decline from one year to another. The deficit of media freedom in these countries is frequently attributed to the poor design of media regulatory frameworks and the deficient implementation of media laws (Dragomir, 2005; Jakubowicz, 2012).

What explains, one might ask, the relative deficit of media freedom in most of Central and Eastern Europe as opposed to the relative freedom of the media in most of Western Europe? And what explains temporal and spatial variations in the level of media freedom in and across the former communist countries?

The status of media freedom in Central and Eastern Europe has been found to be affected by a number of factors, including the institutional framework of the media, politicians' attitudes toward the media, citizens' commitment to media freedom, the level of journalists' professionalism, investors' attitudes toward the media, the size of

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<sup>1</sup> See Freedom House. Retrieved October 24, 2014 from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-press#.VEpLdiKsVnM>.



and have therefore been lacking the resources needed for party building and organization (Biezen, 2000; Lewis, 2001; Jungerstam-Mulders, 2006; Enyedi & Bértoa, 2010). In order to compensate for their weakness and to stabilize their position (cf. Michels, 1911/2001), many parties have captured the state and exploited its resources. Cartel-style party politics (cf. Katz & Mair, 1995) is widespread across the region (Rupnik & Zielonka, 2013).

Political parties' efforts to capture the state have often been coupled with attempts to capture the media (Corneo, 2005; Petrova, 2005; Besley & Prat, 2006; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2013). Parties have frequently shaped and implemented media law with the motivation to extract resources from the media and to channel these to their cadres and clients as a reward for past and future services. As a result, the composition of the boards of regulatory authorities and of the public service media — the bodies in control of most media resources that constitute the key targets of party colonization — is usually a “direct extension” of the political power structure (Jakubowicz, 2012, p. 16), which has enabled parties to exert informal pressures on these institutions.

Media regulation is often the outcome of inter-party and of intra-party struggles and bargains and is therefore shaped by parties' needs, relative powers and positions as well as their internal structures. Beyond the usual rhetorical references to media freedom and pluralism, parties widely consider media law a means to redistribute resources among supporters. Rather than promoting the public good, media policy often serves particular interests. As Sparks observes (2012, p. 44), “the allocation of [media] resources was very often directly the product of political factors,” the most evident example of such practices being the allocation of commercial television licenses in many of the region's countries.

While the widely used concept of media capture suggests that parties exert control over the media in an attempt to manage information in order to deliver their messages to voters and to influence public opinion and voting behavior, interviews conducted with senior politicians in ten former communist countries as part of “Media and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe,” a European Research Council project based at Oxford University (2009–2013), suggests that these may not be the only motives that parties have to control media. Several senior party politicians have noted that the media's impact on public opinion and voting behavior is at best doubtful and may possibly be counter-productive in that it may alienate, rather than mobilize, voters. For example, a senior member of the Politics Can Be Different party in Hungary observed that “the past twenty years are evidence that those who submit public service media to tight government control will lose the next elections,” and a leading politician of the Polish Peasant Party suggested that “there is more proof that those who control the media are more likely to lose the elections than win them.” In Romania, an interviewee representing the Democratic Liberal Party said that “my party, like any political party, overestimates the role of the media,” and a senior politician speaking for the Social Democrats in Slovenia suggested that “excessive media control eventually backfires.”

Hence the concept of party colonization of the media associates a variety of motives with political control over the media, including — in addition to the management of information, as suggested by theorists of media capture — the exploitation of media resources such as airtime, radio and television frequencies, senior positions in the media authority and public service broadcasters, funding allocated for program production and advertising, and newspaper subsidies (Bajomi-Lázár, 2013). For example, a former senior member of the Hungarian Socialist Party has noted that “the media are big business. Certain [public service] programs can be commissioned from certain companies [...] You can call it indirect party funding, even though the money is not spent on party events, but on building a clientele.” In Poland, a senior representative of the League of Polish Families has observed that “Polish Television is surrounded by a network of companies, which earn big money on production using the money of Polish Television. It’s not the market competition but networks that decide who has the opportunity to produce, using the money of Polish Television,” and added that “it is the parties that need the contacts with the people of these networks, rather than these people who need contacts with the parties.”

Field research conducted in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovenia by the Media and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe research team, including the author of this paper, between 2010 and 2013 reveals that party colonization of the media has had at least three forms. One-party colonization implies that the governing party or party coalition is in a position to extract all or nearly all available resources from the media, while all other parties are denied access to media resources. Multi-party colonization with a dominant party means that all parliamentary parties can extract media resources, but the governing party or party coalition has privileged access to these. Finally, multi-party colonization without a dominant party implies that all parliamentary parties can access media resources roughly evenly.

In some countries, the major media resources extracted by parties were found to include, particularly, senior positions for party cadres and clients in the media authority and the public service media (especially in Poland, but to a greater or lesser extent in all of the countries studied), in other countries state advertising (Bulgaria and Romania) and newspaper subsidies (Slovenia) channeled to loyal outlets, and yet in other countries, funds dedicated to programming and transferred to clients’ production companies (Poland and Hungary).

While media resources were traded, media freedom and independence were often lost in the process and news media were politicized in ways that may undermine qualities of democracy such as transparency, accountability and electoral fairness (cf. Diamond & Morlino, 2005). The deficit of media freedom caused by various parties’ excessive control over the media inhibits the media’s ability to perform their normatively expected watchdog function. If party supporters are in control of the media authorities and public service media, they can remove critical editors and

appoint partisan heads to news departments, thus ensuring that news bulletins favor the incumbent parties. They are also able to channel public funding to private media outlets that support their ideologies and policies, as well as to starve critical outlets by means of denying them access to state resources, ultimately limiting the diversity of views and undermining media freedom. Parties that are granted privileged access to media resources, including airtime, frequencies and funding, may paralyze their rivals by limiting their public visibility, which compromises party competition and may ultimately put the fairness of elections at risk.

The specificities of the party systems in the former communist countries and notably the lack of resources which parties attempt to compensate for by colonizing the media and by trading media resources to party cadres and clients may explain the relatively low level of media freedom in Central and Eastern Europe as opposed to the relatively high level of media freedom in Western Europe. But what explains variations in the level of media freedom within and across the countries of Central and Eastern Europe? Why is it that the media are relatively free from political pressures under one government, but more constrained under another? Why is it that some parties while in office compromise media regulation and its implementation and others do not — or do but in different ways, with, perhaps, less manifest outcomes? Put differently, which parties, under what conditions, are more likely to colonize the media in the former communist countries?

In an attempt to answer the questions above, the media policies and the compositions of a total of ten governments have been compared in five former communist countries. The governments were selected on the basis of two criteria. Firstly, that both had a similar share of seats in parliament, which position in theory enabled them to influence the media landscape in a similar way and to an equal extent. Secondly, that both adopted or heavily amended media regulation during the early years of their time in office, which suggests that their election was followed by changes in the media landscape. It was anticipated that similarities in these governments' parliamentary positions and differences in their media policies — if any — would help to identify recurring patterns that help to explain which parties, and under what conditions, are more likely to colonize the media and, if so, how. The studied governments are listed below (see Table 1).

Table 1. Composition of the studied governments (lower house of parliament)

	Ideology	Seats
Bulgaria		
<i>The Kostov government (1997–2001)</i>		
Union of Democratic Forces (SDS)	center-right	137 (of 240)
<i>The Simeon government (2001–2005)</i>		
National Movement for King Simeon (NDSV)	liberal	120 (of 240)
Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS)	liberal	21 (of 240)

<b>Hungary</b>		
<i>The Horn government (1994–1998)</i>		
Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP)	socialist	209 (of 386)
Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ)	liberal	69 (of 386)
<i>The second Orbán government (2010–present)</i>		
Fidesz	conservative	263 (of 386)
Christian Democrats (KDNP)	Christian	
<b>Poland</b>		
<i>The Miller-Belka government (2001–2005)</i>		
Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)	social democratic	200 (of 460)
Labour Union (UP)	social democratic	16 (of 460)
Polish Peasant Party (PSL)	agrarian	42 (of 460)
<i>The Marcinkiewicz-Kaczyński government (2005–2007)</i>		
Law and Justice (PiS)	conservative	155 (of 460)
Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland (SRP)	populist/agrarian	56 (of 460)
League of Polish Families (LPR)	conservative	34 (of 460)
Polish Peasant Party (PSL)	agrarian	25 (of 460)
<b>Romania</b>		
<i>The Năstase government (2000–2004)</i>		
Social Democratic Party (PSD)	social democratic	155 (of 345)
<i>The Tăriceanu government (2004–2008)</i>		
National Liberal Party (PNL)	liberal	64 (of 332)
Democratic Party (PD)	center-right	48 (of 332)
Democratic Union of Hungarians (UDMR)	center-right	22 (of 332)
Romanian Humanist Party (PUR)	conservative	19 (of 332)
<b>Slovenia</b>		
<i>The second Drnovšek government (1993–1996)</i>		
Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS)	liberal	22 (of 90)
Slovene Christian Democrats (SKD)	Christian	15 (of 90)
United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD)	social democratic	14 (of 90)
Social Democratic Party of Slovenia (SDSS)	social democratic	4 (of 90)
<i>The first Janša government (2004–2008)</i>		
Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)	conservative	29 (of 90)
New Slovenia-Christian People's Party (NSi)	Christian	9 (of 90)
Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS)		4 (of 90)

Source: author.

There is no room here for a detailed discussion of the media policies of the studied governments. What follows here instead is a brief description of the findings of repeated field trips conducted in these five former communist countries between 2010 and 2013 with a focus on differences between the media policies of the studied governments. The patterns below were established on the basis of a checklist of questions about the distribution of senior positions in the media authority and in public service broadcasters among party loyalists, the awarding of radio and television frequencies to companies associated with party cadres and clients, the allocation of airtime in the news and current affairs programs of public service broadcasters to party representatives, as well as the granting of program production and advertising funds and newspaper subsidies to companies and outlets formally or informally linked with parties. Several questions were also asked about the communication strategies of the governing parties in an attempt to reveal whether they acknowledged political pluralism or sought ideological hegemony. The interviewees included senior party politicians, state administrators, senior journalists, political communicators and academics, totaling over 20 people in each country.

## **PATTERNS OF COLONIZATION**

Below is a summary of the main findings, with a focus on whether media regulation was based on consensus with the opposition parties and stakeholders or not; whether the governing parties attempted to enhance or to reduce the ideological polarization of the country; and whether the ruling parties provided their cadres and clients with exclusive access to media sources or shared the “media pie” with those of the opposition parties.

In Bulgaria, the rules of both Kostov’s and Simeon II’s governments were marked by extensive purging of the senior staff of the media authority, the public service broadcasters and the Bulgarian News Agency. At the same time, however, unlike Kostov, Simeon II, once faced with wide-scale protests against these moves, abandoned interference with the media and sought peace with broadcasters; media regulation was adopted under Kostov without consultation with either the opposition parties or civic and professional organizations, while Simeon II made efforts to involve these in the drafting process; Kostov’s government used the media to impose its ideology on society, thus ultimately only enhancing the ideological polarization of society, while Simeon II’s government attempted to bridge ideological gaps; and Kostov’s government used media resources to honor the supporters of the governing Union of Democratic Forces party only, while Simeon II’s government did not distinguish on such grounds among those who could benefit from media resources, and provided opposition parties with equal access to these. In other words, under Kostov the pattern of multi-party colonization of the media with a dominant party prevailed, with some traits of the one-party colonization pattern also in evidence; Simeon II’s rule, on the other hand, may be described as

characterized by the pattern of multi-party colonization of the media without a dominant party. While the level of media freedom declined under Kostov, it improved under Simeon II.

In Hungary, the early periods of the rules of both Horn's and Orbán's governments were marked by extensive purges of public service broadcasters. In other areas, however, major differences prevailed in that Horn, after an initial period of interference with the media, sought peace with broadcasters and newspapers and even financed — through a state-owned bank — some opposition outlets, while Orbán maintained confrontation throughout his rule; under Horn, media regulation was adopted after consultations with the opposition parties, while Orbán excluded these from both the drafting and the legislation processes; Horn's government acknowledged ideological pluralism and sought to avoid ideological confrontation, while Orbán's tried to ensure that its ideology becomes hegemonic but only enhanced the polarization of society; and Horn's government channeled media resources to the supporters of all parties, including those of the opposition, while Orbán's favored the supporters of his own party alliance and ignored all other parties. Hence the rule of Horn's government may be described in terms of the multi-party colonization of the media without a dominant party pattern, while Orbán's as a one-party colonization of the media. The status of media freedom improved in the former but worsened dramatically in the latter period.

In Poland, the rules of both the Miller-Belka governments and the Marcinkiewicz-Kaczyński governments were marked by extensive purges in the supervisory boards of public service television. However, the Miller-Belka governments did not exclude opposition party nominees from these bodies, while the Marcinkiewicz-Kaczyński governments did; media regulation under Miller was based on consultation with media owners and non-governmental organizations (but not the opposition parties), while it was amended under the Marcinkiewicz-Kaczyński governments without any consultation with any of these stakeholders; the Miller-Belka governments, lacking a marked ideological agenda, acknowledged ideological pluralism and did not engage in ideological confrontations, while Marcinkiewicz and especially Kaczyński tried to enforce ideological hegemony. In short, the Miller-Belka governments' media policies may be described in terms of the multi-party colonization of the media with a dominant party pattern, and those of the Marcinkiewicz-Kaczyński governments as one-party, or rather coalition parties only, colonization. The level of media freedom declined gradually under the Marcinkiewicz-Kaczyński governments, reaching its low under Kaczyński.

In Romania, major differences distinguished the rules of Năstase's and Tăriceanu's governments in that media regulation under Năstase was based on "simulated consultations" with civil society, i.e. with non-governmental organizations set up to support the incumbent government, while Tăriceanu, especially in the early years of his rule, made an effort to involve real stakeholders in the drafting

process; Năstase's government attempted to put regulatory bodies and public service broadcasters under direct government control, while Tăriceanu's made sure that all parties were represented in these via their nominees; state advertising was under Năstase almost exclusively granted to pro-government outlets, while under Tăriceanu objective distribution criteria were established, and all newsrooms, regardless of their political positions, were granted state advertising, particularly in the first half of his rule; and unlike under Tăriceanu, pro-government propaganda methods were widely applied under Năstase. Hence the rule of Năstase's government may be described in terms of the one-party colonization of the media pattern, while Tăriceanu's as multi-party colonization without a dominant party. The level of media freedom declined in the former period but improved in the latter.

In Slovenia, too, major differences distinguished the media policies of Drnovšek's and Janša's governments in that media regulation under Drnovšek was based on meaningful consultation with stakeholders, while under Janša this was not the case; Drnovšek made sure that personnel associated with both right-wing and left-wing parties occupied many senior managerial positions in the public service media, while Janša conducted an extensive purge of personnel associated with left-wing parties; during the Drnovšek era, media resources such as frequencies, advertising spending and newspaper subsidies were channeled fairly evenly to the associates of all parties, while in Janša's time associates of the governing parties were prioritized; and during the first period all political forces were represented in a proportional manner on supervisory bodies, while in the second the governing parties were greatly over-represented. In short, Drnovšek's rule may be described in terms of the multi-party colonization of the media without a dominant party pattern, while that of Janša as multi-party colonization of the media with a dominant party. While the status of media freedom improved in the former period, it worsened in the second.

These findings suggest that the one-party colonization of the media pattern leads to lower levels of media freedom than multi-party colonization patterns, which may be explained by the fact that multi-party configurations work as a system of internal checks and balances: when all parties can delegate members to the supervisory bodies of public service media, their representatives can mutually constrain one another's colonization efforts so that no single party has too much influence; as a result, a certain deal of media freedom and pluralism prevail and some outlets or programs preserve their critical approach to the incumbent parties.

Differences were also found between the two patterns of multi-party colonization in that colonization with a dominant party was coupled with lower levels of media freedom than multi-party colonization without a dominant party. Such occurrences were found in only two countries — Bulgaria and Slovenia, which does not allow for valid generalizations. Nonetheless, it may be legitimate to suggest that the more evenly media control is distributed among parties, the higher the level of media freedom (the patterns found are summarized in Table 2).

Table 2. Relationship between party colonization and media freedom

Pattern of party colonization	Examples	Level of media freedom
One-party colonization	Orbán Marcinkiewicz and Kaczyński Năstase	low
Multi-party colonization with a dominant party	Kostov Miller and Belka Janša	medium
Multi-party colonization without a dominant party	Simeon II Horn Tăriceanu Drnovšek	high

Source: author.

With the different patterns of party colonization of the media in mind, the original research question of what explains spatial and temporal variations in the level of media freedom in and across the former communist countries may be rephrased like this: which parties, under what conditions, are more likely to establish one-party colonization of the media and hence to inhibit media freedom more severely?

## VARIATIONS IN MEDIA FREEDOM

In an attempt to answer the question above, here is a brief summary of the status of the ruling party or parties as assessed — where relevant — on the basis of their membership figures, ideology and program, electoral strategies, organizational and decision-making structures, and the role and personal background of the party leader.

In Bulgaria, differences between the media policies of Kostov's and Simeon II's governments (multi-party colonization with a dominant party vs. multi-party colonization without a dominant party) may be attributed to that Kostov headed a single-party government, constituted by the Union of Democratic Forces party in which political decisions were centralized, while Simeon II led a coalition in which the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, the minor coalition ally of the major government party, the National Movement for Simeon II, needed to be consulted before decisions; the ideologies of the two governments differed: Kostov's government was of a marked conservative stance, stressing its strong anti-communist position and enhancing the ideological polarization of society, while that of Simeon II was more centrist and liberal and hence sought to avoid, and even to relax, ideological confrontations; Kostov's government sought to improve its popular support by attempting to destroy former communist networks, while Simeon II's co-opted the representatives of these; Kostov was personally reluctant to accept media criticism and for this reason was ready to suppress critical voices, while Simeon II, with his

Western European socialization, had no personal objection to being criticized by the media; and Kostov was widely considered a charismatic leader, while Simeon II behaved more pragmatically.

In Hungary, the differences between the media policies of Horn's and Orbán's governments (multi-party colonization without a dominant party vs. one-party colonization) may be rooted in that Horn headed a two-party government in which the Alliance of Free Democrats, the minor coalition ally of the major coalition force the Hungarian Socialist Party was, relatively speaking, strong and influential and had to be consulted on most decisions, while in the Fidesz-Christian Democrats party alliance the Fidesz party's minor coalition ally, the Christian Democratic People's Party, having run on a joint election list with Fidesz, could easily be ignored when making decisions, including those on media policy; the two governments' legitimization strategies differed: the major force of Horn's government, the Hungarian Socialist Party sought — in an attempt to overcome a largely perceived legitimacy deficit based on its communist past — to bridge ideological cleavages in society, while Orbán's government stressed its strong anti-communist position and enhanced the ideological polarization of society; Horn wanted to co-opt opposition party networks, while Orbán sought to destroy the persisting networks of the "ancien régime" and denied them access to state resources, including those in the media; both parties in Horn's coalition were internally divided, with competing factions and platforms, while both parties in Orbán's government were united and had an internally unchallenged approach to the media; decision-making structures within both the Hungarian Socialist Party and the Alliance of Free Democrats displayed a high level of internal democracy, while both Fidesz and the Christian Democrats were centralized parties in which party discipline was strong and the premier had the final word on all decisions; and Horn, with his background in diplomacy, was a pragmatic leader, while Orbán was widely seen as a charismatic one.

In Poland, differences between the media policies of the Miller-Belka governments on the one hand and those of the Marcinkiewicz-Kaczyński governments on the other (multi-party colonization with a dominant party vs. one-party colonization) are likely explained by the following differences in their backgrounds: the Miller-Belka governments' leading party, the Democratic Left Alliance was internally divided along ideological cleavages, while cleavages within the Marcinkiewicz-Kaczyński governments' major force, the Law and Justice party, were less marked and well-managed by the party leader; the internal decision-making structures of the Democratic Left Alliance were highly democratic, while internal democracy was more of a formality in the Law and Justice party; the Miller-Belka governments were based on coalitions of parties whose ideologies differed widely, covering both the left and the right of the political spectrum, and Miller and Belka themselves had little interest in ideology, while the Marcinkiewicz-Kaczyński governments were ideologically more homogeneous, and ideology — that of the "Fourth Republic of Poland" — played a more stressed role in their politics; the two governments' deci-

sive prime ministers were different characters: Miller was more technocratic, while Kaczyński was more charismatic; and Miller personally tolerated critical media better than Kaczyński did.

In Romania, differences between the media policies of Năstase's and Tăriceanu's governments (one-party colonization vs. multi-party colonization without a dominant party) may be attributed to that Năstase's government was composed of a single party, the Social Democratic Party, while Tăriceanu's was a coalition of several parties, including the National Liberal Party, the Democratic Party, the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania and the Conservative Party, and hence decisions had to be consulted with multiple actors; Năstase's government was ideologically homogeneous, while Tăriceanu's consisted of parties with different ideological profiles, ranging from liberalism to conservatism; Năstase's Social Democratic Party was ideologically more united than Tăriceanu's National Liberal Party; decision-making structures in Năstase's Social Democratic Party were more centralized than those in Tăriceanu's National Liberal Party; and Năstase was personally less tolerant of critical media than Tăriceanu, the latter coming from a journalistic background.

In Slovenia, differences between the media policies of Drnovšek's and Janša's governments (multi-party colonization without a dominant party vs. multi-party colonization with a dominant party) may be rooted in that Drnovšek's Liberal Democracy of Slovenia party was internally divided and factionalized, while Janša's Slovenian Democratic Party was unitary; the legitimizing strategies of the two differed: Drnovšek's government wanted to bridge the ideological cleavages dividing Slovenian society, while Janša's stressed its militant anti-communist stance and sought to impose its own, conservative, ideology on voters; Drnovšek tried to co-opt the networks of all parties, including those of the right, while Janša attempted to destroy his opponents by denying them access to media and other resources; and Drnovšek was considered to be pragmatic and technocratic, while Janša was a charismatic leader.

The five country case studies suggest that one-party colonization of the media is more likely to occur:

- under single-party governments,
- under parties with highly centralized decision-making structures,
- under unified parties with a high degree of party discipline,
- under parties or governments with a strong ideological agenda,
- under parties that try to gain popular support by means of denying opposition networks access to resources,
- under charismatic leaders who are personally intolerant of critical media.

These are recurring patterns, and the more these conditions are met, the greater the likelihood of one-party colonization. At the same time, multi-party colonization with or without a dominant party is more likely to occur:

- under coalition governments,
- under parties with democratic decision-making structures,

- under factionalized parties,
- under ideologically diffuse parties and governments,
- under parties that try to gain popular support by means of co-opting opposition networks and of providing these with access to resources,
- under pragmatic leaders who are personally more tolerant of critical media.

The more centralized the governing party's or parties' decision-making structures, the greater the likelihood of one-party colonization of the media, and the more fragmented the governing party's or parties' decision-making structures, the lesser the likelihood of such colonization. Veto-points in the government and in the governing parties decrease the likelihood of one-party colonization. One-party colonization configurations are, as already noted, coupled with lower levels of media freedom than multi-party colonization configurations.

The role of other party indicators remains unclear. While in many of the studied countries — such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia — right-wing governments proved more ready to colonize media and to inhibit media freedom than left-wing governments, ideology may not play a decisive role: the case of the Năstase government in Romania shows that one-party colonization may occur and media freedom may be undermined under left-wing parties as well. Party membership figures were also found to be unrelated to colonization practices: parties with both few and many members engaged in the colonization of the media, but conclusions in this field are difficult to draw, given the unreliability of data on parties' membership figures.

## CONCLUSIONS

How could the indicators listed in the previous section be leading to different patterns of party colonization of the media and to different levels of media freedom?

In single-party governments media policy decisions need not be made in consultation with coalition allies and the clients of these need not be provided with access to media resources, which allows for more centralized control over the media and may hence lead to lower levels of media freedom. In a similar vein, in unified parties where decision-making structures are centralized and party discipline is strong, the interests of various stakeholders may be easily ignored and media policy decisions inhibiting media freedom can be made without resistance. Ideologically charged parties and governments have, unlike those with diffuse ideologies, a clear vision of the media which can be translated into practice efficiently through the adoption of new media laws. Also, parties that seek to gain popular support by way of destroying, rather than co-opting, opposition networks may find it legitimate to deny these networks access to media resources. Further, charismatic leaders, whose decisions usually go uncontested within their own political camps and who in the studied cases were found to be personally less tolerant of criticism, may feel an urge to control media, while pragmatic ones tolerant of criticism find it unnecessary to

suppress media; the more a government's decision-making structures are centralized, the more freely the prime minister can translate his or her attitudes toward the media into policy and, consequently, the more restrained media freedom may be.

Overall, these findings suggest that the widely experienced deficit of media freedom in most of Central and Eastern Europe as opposed to the relative freedom of the media in most of Western Europe is ultimately rooted in the specificities of the former communist countries' party systems, among other things. More particularly, the reasons for the deficit of media freedom may be found in parties' lack of resources and parties' practical monopoly over policy making and implementation. Based on these observations, one might distinguish between proximate and ultimate factors responsible for the deficit of media freedom in many former communist countries: proximate factors include, among other things, poor media regulatory frameworks and the deficient implementation of media laws, while ultimate factors include the structural specificities of party systems that urge parties to colonize the media.

Faced with the deficit of media freedom in many former communist countries, several media freedom watch organizations have in recent years formulated media policy proposals aimed at improving media freedom and especially the independence of public service media. However, few of these proposals have been incorporated into legislation and even fewer have been implemented. Cartel-style party politics and parties' colonization of the media (through the capture of media regulation and of its implementation) in the former communist countries may explain why many of these proposals have failed to achieve their aims. The theory of party colonization of the media hence suggests that policy proposals aimed at improving media freedom should not only focus on the institutional framework of the media but also on that of parties and party politics. In particular, proportional electoral laws that favor coalition governments and party laws that improve party funding and internal party democracy may ultimately restrain parties' needs and opportunities to colonize media and hence may be conducive to higher levels of media freedom.

What limitations restrain the validity of these findings? While the case studies reveal recurring patterns in all of the five countries studied, they do not tell much about other former communist countries where preliminary research has not identified evidence of party colonization (while the fact that the interviews did not find evidence of such practices does not mean that party colonization is entirely absent there). Further, elite interviews and the secondary analysis of the literature do not necessarily reveal all the details of party colonization practices, some of which would require an investigative journalist to uncover. Last but not least, parts of the information received through personal communication may be biased, especially when senior party representatives, media professionals and state administrators interviewed could themselves be part of the controversial colonization practices studied.

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