Chapter Seven:
The Press in Eastern Europe during the Cold War

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I. Not only the press – all media

Even though the title of this chapter expressly mentions the word 'press', it would be inappropriate to focus exclusively on the print media in seeking to identify the clear differences between the ways in which East and West handled the dissemination of information. Anyone who studies the East-West conflict between 1945 and 1989 will quickly come to recognise that it was the cross-border exchange of information that had a decisive influence on the eventual outcome.

It would perhaps be going too far to link the technical advances made in radio and TV broadcasting during these decades with developments in media politics within the communist-ruled states of Eastern Europe, but it is worth mentioning the following factors: firstly, the introduction of VHF radio – less susceptible to interference and, though limited in geographical range, very influential within the German border areas; secondly, the improvements made in short wave reporting; thirdly, the increasingly effective use of jamming transmitters; fourthly and most importantly, the growth and increased sophistication of programming. Even now, the impact made by the transistor radio on political developments at the time has not yet been fully appreciated by students of the era. The Internet is also a 'child' of the Cold War, or rather a product of the American Defense Department, and we can take heart from the fact that this is now creating problems for party-controlled governments who merely try to pose as being democratic. You could describe the Internet as a pacesetter – if not for democracy itself, then certainly for freedom of the media.

II. The media theory of the socialistic regime

"A newspaper is not just a collective propagandist and agitator but also a collective organiser." This maxim was first put forward almost 105 years ago to the day. It was uttered by a certain Mr Ulyanov who later changed his name to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. He is the true father of the communist theory of the media, even though he deferred to Marx who, because he never held the reins of power, seemingly formulated his own ideas in a more democratic and libertarian fashion.

Nowadays, we all know full well what Marx and Lenin meant: we have seen at first hand a system which interpreted information as synonymous with agitation and propaganda. And yet, these concepts, which have such negative associations for us, were ideologically prescribed under socialism as defined by Lenin, Stalin, Brezhnev and

their criminal ilk and were regarded as evidence of party loyalty. Consequently, the media were subject to rigid state control in all Eastern Block countries. This meant that the instrument of censorship was actually superfluous under most of these regimes. However, wherever loopholes were left by communist centralism, censorship was elevated to an important state institution. According to Paul Roth, Soviet policy on the dissemination of information set the standards for the other Eastern Block countries and was characterised by the following criteria:

1. The basic human right to freedom of opinion and information was rejected as the right of the individual.
2. The Communist Party's monopoly of power was taken to include the monopolisation of the press and all other instruments of opinion and information.
3. The dissemination of the state doctrine of Marxism-Leninism and of foreign policy objectives was exclusively under the competence of the political elite.
4. All resources for the dissemination of information – be they of personnel, economic, or technical nature – including those that could be used for its suppression were strictly centralised and came under party control.

Yet both in its planning and in its effect, this rigid system had a flaw. The relative acceptance or resistance of the population to information is dependent on the existence of competing media.

III. Human beings as instruments for instruction and control

Essentially, communist regimes considered the media as having a duty to educate people in the ways of socialism and thereby reinforce the Party's hold on power. Information was never regarded as a commodity in its own right, but rather as a means to an end. As a result, journalism in the Eastern Block produced a picture that corresponded to the ideas and wishes of the Party but failed to reflect reality, in many cases ignoring or deliberately distorting it.

This observation should not, however, be taken to mean that Western journalism was always thorough and accurate in representing and recording reality. But the very purpose of journalism is to communicate information and the journalist's mission is to serve the needs of society as a whole rather than one particular cause or party political interest. I appreciate that this is not universally the case and acknowledge that, if reality actually conformed to my somewhat idealised portrayal, there wouldn't be any conflict with regard to the balance of programming of the public service broadcasters in our own country. But I'm not here today to talk about internal German media affairs. What concerns me here are the contrasting principles of journalism. This contrast or even conflict had a decisive influence on the way that reporting took place in the media of Eastern Europe during the Cold War.

Back to the socialist times: The communist leaders of the Eastern Block saw their authority threatened by the influence exerted by Western media on their subject populations. I would remind you here of the debate surrounding Basket III in the Final Declaration of the Helsinki CSCE Conference. The inclusion of the principles concerning the improvement of access to information in the Helsinki Accords highlights the close connection between media activities and politics in practice. In retrospect, we can see how decisive the insistence of the Western Block on these principles was for the further course of events. It is to the lasting credit of the Western politicians – in particular the Americans – that they recognised this at the time, although from my own practical experience I can barely conceal my regret that so little attention was paid by the politicians at the time to the importance that Western media, mainly of the electronic kind, had for listeners in the Eastern Block. Those in the West who followed political developments with interest were aware of the existence of broadcasts by Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, but only to the extent that these were American organisations operating on German soil whose presence led to constant protests from the East.

Confidential exchanges with ordinary people behind the Iron Curtain and also with functionaries in the Eastern Block revealed the true impact of these broadcasts. This extended beyond the German-speaking part of Europe and its particular situation with a common language to other countries where the Voice of America, the BBC, the *Deutsche Welle* and the *Deutschlandfunk* were broadcasting foreign-language services to the Eastern Block. In 1980, when the then Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt visited Leonid Brezhnev in Moscow, Pravda published the German statesman's speech made at the evening reception in the following day's edition. Pravda censored the speech, suppressing the clear statements made by Schmidt on the Soviet war in Afghanistan at the time and summarised the contents of the speech as follows: "The Chancellor also addressed various issues concerning Afghanistan." On the same day, I happened to be in another Eastern Block country where, true to the Leninist principle of never trusting foreign journalists, I was accompanied by members of the State Broadcasting Committee. I didn't listen to the news on the radio in my hotel that morning as I couldn't speak or understand the local language and when I arrived at the studio I was met by my hosts who said: "Have you heard? Pravda has censored Schmidt." "No, I haven't. But how do you know?" The answer came back quickly: "Because RFE have just reported it." And here follows another example, this time from Hungary. West Germans and West Berliners – a distinction that was made at the bidding of the East German regime – were allowed to enter the country without formalities and get a visa at the border crossing. There were only two professional groups who had to submit a written application for a visa with photos and questionnaires sent several weeks ahead of their visit: priests and journalists. This is another prime example of the ideological significance that the communist rulers attached to journalism.

States which asserted their monopoly over the media did not simply resign themselves to the possibility that information might filter through from outside to influence their subjects, the very citizens that they had claimed for themselves and for their own ideology. They had an array of resources at their disposal for combating information regarded as 'interference' in the affairs of the East. The GDR certainly had the most difficult task of all, given the shared language and the geographical proximity. Any encounter with undesirable information was often offset with an attempt to stir up a political scandal. We all remember the expulsion of the West German TV correspondents from the GDR, the closure of the SPIEGEL office, the refusal to allow a West German radio station to attend the Leipzig Trade Fair – all clear examples of Eastern pressure against the media in general and individual persons in particular to tip the political scales in their balance.

One further technique in which the Soviet Union, with its huge technological expertise and security budget, particularly excelled was the jamming of broadcasts. Expert opinion suggests that they invested around 250 million Euros in setting up the equipment used for this destructive activity. This particular 'industry' cost over 100 million Euros per annum to operate, employed a workforce of approximately 500 and, in energy terms, consumed 1 billion kilowatt hours per annum. Even then, the network of jamming stations had by no means full coverage. Effectively, they only managed to cover the major population centres. The stations worst affected by the jamming were RFE and RL, the Voice of America and – depending how serious the political situation was – the BBC and *Deutsche Welle*. This led to vigorous protests, particularly from the British who, especially in the light of events in Poland around 1980/81, objected most strongly to this action which was clearly contrary to the accord reached under the auspices of the CSCE. Other Eastern Block countries also indulged in similar jamming practices and actually spent more on what they saw as measures to defend the political *status quo* than they did on directly informing the public. Even today, it is more expensive to generate interference than to broadcast information.

The political climate could generally be measured in terms of how much or how little jamming was taking place at the time. Heavy interference accompanied the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Hungarian Uprising in 1956 and the Polish Crisis in 1980/81. And it was no coincidence that jamming diminished in the mid to late 60s during the period of détente. Just how embarrassing foreign broadcasts could be is illustrated by the Bulgarian affair. In the notorious 'Case of the Poisoned Umbrella', the regime even resorted to assassination to rid itself of disagreeable reporting in Bulgarian by the BBC. Another method could best be described as 'poaching instead of jamming'.

As a result of careful opinion polling in their own countries, there was a growing awareness in the East that the official state media were heartily detested, perhaps for the very reason that they were seen to have this special instructive role in upholding party ideology. The national media were seen as boring, old-fashioned, uninformative

and lacking in credibility. This was the same picture that emerged from regular surveys conducted by stations such as Radio Free Europe.

As a result of various state directives, for example, in the Soviet Union during the latter period of Khrushchev's office, the media were instructed to provide the populace with more information and, most importantly, to do so more rapidly. In this way, they hoped to knock rumours on the head and diminish opportunities for information emanating from abroad to exert a greater influence on public opinion. The essential tedium of state broadcasting was countered by boosting the entertainment content. They were desperate to keep their own people tuned to the state-controlled media and tried every trick in the book. *Heide Riedel* wrote: "The singer Wolf Biermann was deprived of his GDR citizenship in November 1976, a move which was met with worldwide protest..." In order to divert attention in the GDR away from the storm caused by the Biermann affair and to dissuade the ordinary people from trying to tune into West German stations as a source of information, the GDR government embarked on a major entertainment offensive in 1977. The stars of this campaign were not recruited from other socialist countries but rather – and here's the irony – from Western commercial pop culture.

VI. The unexpected consequences of the turn of events in Germany

Now to return to the print media, although for the duration of communist rule, the distinction between print and electronic media was far less significant than it would have been under free market conditions. There simply was no competition. The commercial success or failure of a particular media was, at best, of secondary interest. The chief purpose always remained the political control of the reader and listener with a view to preserving the power of the Party.

For this reason, media managers in the Eastern block were all the less prepared for the events of 1989. They were ill-equipped to rise to the challenge presented by free journalism. Editors-in-chief who had spent decades acting as loyal party hacks struggled to adjust to their new responsibility to serve the interests of their readers rather than slavishly adhere to the official line as laid down by communist spin doctors. During the weeks and months after the implosion of the communist regime, while the official state and party publications were both helpless and rudderless, numerous opposition publications sprang up in competition, though these were to vanish again after 'normalisation' and the switch to constitutional government, as they not only lacked capital but also the commercial expertise to survive in a free market.

Even though each of the former communist states experienced the changeover in a different way, a general pattern emerged whereby West European media companies were able to turn to their own advantage this lack of understanding of how the free market and, perhaps more importantly, the lack of know-how regarding free journalism.

They skilfully positioned themselves in the new market, particularly in the print media. In Poland, the Czech Republic and the Balkan states, a new and diverse media

landscape is now flourishing under foreign ownership, one more after-effect of the Cold War.

And after such an immense turnabout in fortunes, it does no harm to pay tribute to the victors in this theatre of the Cold War. Their victory was itself a form of tribute to the man who gave his name to this seminar. Kaj Munk died for those very principles that unite journalism and the spirit of academic enquiry: namely, human dignity and freedom.

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Chapter Eight:
Walking on a Knife's Edge: Freedom of Press in Turkey

Yusuf Kanli

Freedom of thought and freedom of expression are not just luxury concepts of Western democracies. Free press is not a right just for newspapers, TV and radio stations or newsmen, it is at the same time a requirement of the public's right to be informed. Freedom of opinion and the right to information as well as a free press are fundamental rights in the absence of which there cannot be democracy. I couldn't agree more with what Wilhelm Staudacher, the secretary-general of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, underlined in the preface of a "Media and democracy" book published in 2005:

> The relationship between media and democracy is one of interdependence, with the free media leading to informed decisions and to qualified political participation. Conversely, a democracy as a free expression of political convictions of a people rests on the firm foundation of a free media.

Are we first journalists reporting developments as we see and observe them? Or should we first be patriotic servants of our states' august interests? Where is the line between the two?

The contentious Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code (*TCK*), the anti-terror law, the taboos, written and unwritten restrictions on freedom of expression, political pressures, interests of the media bosses and the shackles on the Turkish public's right to be informed…

Shall we allow people "curse at Turkey and get away with it" rhetoric of the conservatives against demands to amend Penal Code Article 301 and remove the shackles on freedom of thought, or shall we stand by the international perception of "There cannot be a crime undefined in the laws" and thus defend that in modern societies there can be no crime such as insulting the Turkishness?

Are the beatings of women by police on International Women's Day at an Istanbul square and European Union Trio meeting in Ankara next day coincidental, or do they reflect some sort of an organized reaction of the establishment against EU imposed reforms? What about police tearing down posters of a Kurdish film from the walls in Diyarbakır just a day before a Turkey-EU Association Council meets in Brussels?

Catering to national taboos and sensitivities, respecting the norms of the profession, abiding with the "right of people to be informed" and not violating the vaguely described crimes in laws of the country… Growing monopolization of media ownership, increasing pressures and intermingled relations between the political administration and media bosses and journalists and writers trying not to give up free expression and free speech...

This is like walking on the knife's edge.