

## Mass Media in National Public Sphere and in European Public Sphere\*

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*The paper analyses the role of mass media in the construction of the national public sphere in relation to the Europe identification. The success of European integration is linked to a common public space. This means the Europeanization of identities, lifestyles and frames of reference. A European public space is constructed with more difficulty. Mass media will have a crucial role in setting up and supporting the European public space.*

*In communist societies public space was limited because the propagandistic discourse of official newspapers influenced it decisively. In post-communists societies mass media encourage the point of view of parties' elites, but not equally the opinion of different social groups. It analyses how these contextual conditions affect the role of Romanian press as a contributor to the formation of consciousness about Europe, to the feelings of common identification with Europe at the same time.*

We start from the premise that the role of mass media in the Europeanization of national public sphere is important not so much in the communication of political messages, but in the ability to transmit information on European lifestyles.

### The National Public sphere and European Public sphere

The public sphere is defined as a space where citizens interact through their acts of public debates. Habermas connects the public sphere to analytically dualistic model of deliberation: "Imagine the public sphere as an intermediary system of communication between formally organised and informal face-to-face deliberations in arenas both at the top and at the bottom of the political system" (Habermas 2006, 10). quoted in (Heikki & Kunelius, 2006, 75)

'Europeanization' of the public sphere is not the prolongation of the national public sphere at the supranational level, to form a supranational European public sphere. In the virtual absence of transnational Europe-wide mass media and the predominance of national ones, the most likely location for 'Europeanization' trends will be within national public spheres (Schlesinger, 1995; Statham & Gray, 2005, 64). The idea about segmented Europeanization quoted in Brüggemann et al. (2006, 16) is useful. The Europeanization of the national public spheres is seen as a gradual process on four different dimensions: 1. monitoring governance, 2. mutual observation, 3. discursive exchange, and 4. collective identification with Europe (Brüggemann et al. 2006, 4-7). From all four dimensions only monitoring governance is a real transnationalization of national public spheres. We think that most important for the study of public sphere is not the debate of the relation between national framework and European framework, but an analysis of the relation between local public sphere and national and European public spheres, because only in this way can we know if "European citizens must be able to see themselves not only as rights bearers but also as community-members." (Eriksen, 2005, 346). The studies show that public debates in Great Britain are centered rather on the national state than on the creation of transnational politics (Statham & Gray, 2005, 61). We ask what is the Europeanization beyond the political public sphere? European integration is more than a political problem. The Europeanization creates a

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new social actor – the European people, whose behaviour, thinking and mentalities are different from national actors.

There is excessive interest for political communication, to the detriment of social dimension of public sphere, especially aspects of people's daily life. For instance, the European identity is not only political, but it is the effect of many indicators: cultural, national, spiritual, political. Analysts have spoken about the paradox of Europe visibility in daily life, very much as familiarity with the euro currency, but at the same time, there is a deficiency in the access that publics have to the EU (Statham & Gray, 2005, 61).

The European public sphere is not the mechanical integration of national public spheres from all countries of EU, but it is a new reality based on one's own norms. It is a communication between the European public sphere and the national public spheres, and the consistency and legitimacy of European public sphere depend on attitudes and behaviors of actors from national public sphere. The news in mass media about the European public sphere proceeds from national public sphere. I mention that most of mass media from Europe select the reporters from national states, and rarely transmit news by their reporters. Mass media have a role in the preservation of national culture. Media's inherent nationalism has the responsibility for dissemination of national debates rather than European discussions. One of the effects of mediatisation of the EU might be the defense of visions of popular sovereignty in the nation state framework and collision with cosmopolitan visions of rights and justice defended by European elites. "Especially the tabloids adopt a populist style of news coverage serving mainly national audiences" (Trenz, 2006, 29-30). Newspapers were one of the most important vehicles for building national culture and identity. (Calhoun, 2004). In the second period of the XXth century governments from most European countries had investments in television and radio.

Outside the news production process, readership's preferences for national politics and low understandings of Europe act as a restricting condition for journalists' efforts to present 'multi-leveled' or supranational interpretative frameworks (Statham, 2006, 34).

It exists the relations between new media and the representation of national symbols (Slaatta, 2006, 16). The media influence on European public space is associated with national framework. If there is a credibility shortage in the relations between politicians and media in public national sphere, it may create a problem in the functioning of European public sphere.

Can the national public sphere become European public sphere after adhering to the EU without a transition period? A public European sphere is moulded by homogenization of national public sphere. It is not mass media who europeanises the public sphere, but the media itself europeanises to the extent the national public sphere is europeanised. Mass media may reflect the tendencies of Europeanization of society.

Splichal expresses the critic's points of view: "Mass media have central significance in the creation of an institutional (infra) structure enabling the organization of the general interest both nationally and internationally (globally)" (Splichal, 2006, 703). He speaks about the weak and the strong public sphere (Splichal, 2006).

## **The Europeanization of national public sphere through mass media**

As we already mentioned, the issue of Europeanization through television enjoys wide interest in the international research.

Some major approaches can be traced:

The first one concerns the mission of the public television in the public sphere:

Starting with the 80's, policies of Europeanization of the whole sector of communication were initiated and implemented, aiming at harmonizing and protecting European cultural identity.

The main responsibility for the creation of a European public sphere should belong to all broadcasting public services from Europe. Because the concept of "citizenship" gained a European dimension as the process of European enlargement took place, one could argue that public televisions would reflect this tendency through the Europeanization of their content, especially which of their news programmes. Despite the wide variety of opinions, an agreement was reached regarding two criteria for a European public sphere: simultaneity of debates through media in various countries and similarity of understanding structures (Groothues, 2004). Some claim that the idea of European identity should be shaped and understood as a political concept and not as a cultural heritage which should be discovered and reformulated from the traditions of the continent. Discussions about cultural fundamentals are necessary, but there is no legitimacy yet for the idea that UE requires a cultural identity shared by all its citizens (Meyer, 2006). Another approach concerns Europeanization of media, seen as a process with two directions: one from top-to-bottom, orchestrated from Brussels, through normative acts, and one from bottom-to-top, generated by citizens and member states. The achievement of a Europeanization of media faces some difficulties, especially in small countries, the most important difficulties being: the power of national states to regulate the communication systems, the absence of an international union of televisions, the absence of global practices of publicity and the perpetual importance of linguistic and cultural barriers. Consequently, small countries have minor or no advantage from changes in the media field. (Papathanassopoulos, 2005)

Studies in political communication prove that mass-media are the main actors in promoting the European public space. (Koopmans & Pfetsch, 2003) These are invested with remarkable virtues in creating and popularising this space. Media can be seen as an important factor in shaping the European identity. If media from a specific European country broadcast news about an event or a problem from a different member state without referring to the common European framework, then a basic criterion is not respected. To be judged as "Europeanized", a piece of news must reflect the existence of EU, to which all its members belong. (Groothues, 2004)

Relevant studies in this field prove the existence of a significant difference between the main actors of social life with regard to the content of Europeanization. While actors representing civil society emphasise the instrumental and economic dimension of European integration, actors representing states and political parties stress on government and constitutional principles, and actors representing mass-media are interested in the collective identities, in the norms and values that Europe should support. For instance, German media manifests more interest towards European enlargement and other European issues in comparison with other actors. The mass media acts as an engine of enlargement, contributing thus to the opening of spaces of transnational communication. In opposition, national political elites of the state or of the political parties or even those representing the civil society are inclined to emphasise on public debates within national borders. (Koopmans & Pfetsch, 2003)

For the reinforcement of European public sphere, there was an initiative for editing an European newspaper, like *The European*, the project of magnate Robert Maxwell, with the subtitle Europe's First National Newspaper, but the biggest circulation was 180.000 copies, and more than half of it was distributed in Great Britain. In Sweden the circulation of this newspaper was 5000 copies.

Another significant example is bilingual German/French Channel *Arte*. It has won 1.260 prizes, but its audience is very weak: 'a meagre 1 per cent share of the

market' (Fredriksson, 2004; Golding 2006, 14). On the other end, publications as *Le Monde diplomatique*, *Lettre internationale*, *Eurozine*, edited by national editorial staff, have circulation in almost European countries. This example shows the sustainability of European public sphere by national media, but European media doesn't have a great audience.

There are authors who deny the role of television in edifying a European identity, despite all efforts made since the 50s of the 20th century to set up a European media structure, as the European Broadcasting Union was. The belief that media has a great power in shaping collective identities, as it happened at a national scale, was widely accepted. Politicians and representatives of televisions thought that television could create a sense of belonging to a common Europe. A false deterministic vision of television as a means to shape European identity was thus created. (Bourdon, 2007)

The studies demonstrate that the Europeanization of mass media is a difficult process in all countries of EU, but it is more so in ex-communist countries. The mass media debate the issues regarding the Europeanization to a lesser extent. This is a reason for mass media to insist less on European identity. Therefore mass media, especially television, focuses on news about bad cases from European countries: "negative news and, in general, a lack of news regarding the EU and EP are thought to contribute to a lack of legitimacy and to detract from the formation of a European identity". (de Vreese et al, 478).

The question is whether media has to develop a European public sphere or Europeanized national public sphere which sustains the democracy (de Vreese et al, 479). European public sphere is sustained by media news about EU. This news has three particularities: visibility of EU or quantity of coverage, European nature of information, and the dominant note of discourse (de Vreese et al, 479). All of them are legitimate by national public sphere. There is not yet a European public of mass media. Mass media is one of the most important ways to construct a European public sphere, but in a process of several years' standing. A European public sphere is related to European discourses in national public sphere. As it has been said, a European public sphere depends on the quantity and quality of discourses presented in different national mass media. (Valentini, 2006, 7)

The theoretical debate discusses about the decisive role of mass media in Europeanization because they have been considered ways of European identity formation. In our point of view, it must allow for effective potentialities of mass media in a society in transition from national public sphere to European public sphere, from national values to European values. It is necessary to notice the role of mass media in transmission of information, ideas and mentalities from the society in which they exist. Mass media have the vision and modalities of communication in connection with the actual problems of concrete public.

Romania is a model of society in transition, not at all completed, joining European structures with this specific feature. We have in view the fact that Romanian society will register new modernizations as a member of EU. Following the process of European integration, Romania will continue to be a society in transition; the most critical and relevant problem continues to be the dependence of Romanian society on Europeanization, as a model of a strong European society. In these circumstances, the question is: will Romania still be a periphery of Europe, or will it be a national community with a European development standard? Romania has to carry its national advantages forward if it wants to participate actively in Europeanization and globalization. As a process, Europeanization is different from country to country. Without doubt there is an European public sphere in founder countries of EU, which is dominated by dialog and is deliberative. What happens in the new members of EU? These countries benefit from the stock of Europeanization as members of EU. In the same time, the new members have to carry out the decisions from Brussels.

As a member of EU, Romania is compelled to have an accelerated rhythm of modernization. Romania has the integration and Europeanization problems, unknown before adhering. There is a difference between the new position of EU member and concrete realities in domestic framework. Some of the themes require a parallel approach, given communitarian decisions. Thus, Europeanization takes place in national public sphere. All 'Europeanization' social actors – intellectuals and political elites, multinationals, the Romanians who work in Europe – operate in this public sphere.

In this context, it is a short time for work of mass media on democratic principles in domestic public sphere.

One of the problems of Romanian media is the absence of skilled human resources. At least today there are not skilled journalists who have an in-depth knowledge of European institutions and Europeanization processes. As it is said, EU news items tend to be more a part of national news as Romania draws closer to its accession date (Lazar & Paun, 2006, 5).

### Mass media in Public Space

Because of absence of debates, European integration could be compromised. Neither mass media nor elites initiate discussions in the public sphere.

The events in post-adhesion Romania have shown a deficit democracy, but mass media is not an element of coagulation of Romanian public sphere integrated in European public sphere. The news of mass media makes marginal reference to European norms. Because public sphere is unsettled in Central and East Europe, it has become more difficult to examine the evolution of mass media (Gross, 1999, 100).

Mass media system from ex-communist countries has known a contradictory evolution, like the evolution of society from these states:

1. Demonopolization and (partial) remonopolization
2. Commercialization and marketization of media systems
3. Change as regards media freedom and independence
4. Democratization
5. Pluralization and diversity in the media
6. Professionalization of journalists
7. Development of public service broadcasting
8. Internationalization and globalization

(Jakubowicz, 2005, 15)

Peter Gross (1999, 131) has formulated five traits of the Romanian journalist:

1. the absence of a sense of values which stay at the foundation of the journalistic discourse and of collection and spread of information;
2. the absence of deference toward public;
3. the absence of deference toward verifiable information;
4. the belief of journalists that they find out the truth rather than they transmit accurate, verifiable, level-headed and complete information with a view to helping the public to discover the truth;
5. the feeling that journalists are social, political and cultural leaders in society.

The journalists' image of themselves is elitist – a missionary one. They believe that have special rights (Coman, 2003, 70).

From this position journalists tackle the themes regarding EU and Europeanization. The attitudes toward Europe are a consequence of superficial knowledge on the functioning of EU, but they assume the communication of European messages based on expert-type (Beciu, 2007, 26). Romanian public is informed about political and diplomatic aspects of EU from



statements of Romanian and European officials. The researchers show that among the major sources concerning EU issues are the official ones: EU officials, and Romanian government officials. Other important sources mentioned are EU documents, Romanian and foreign news agencies, international news media and the EC and EP online services. All the interviewees evaluated the national news media as being the least accurate and reliable source. Approximately 75% of information at public television is retrieved from official communication or interaction with EU officials, politicians and other EU sources (Lazar & Paun, 2006, 7-8). This does not mean that journalists have competence in European problems.

As for information about EU in mass media, only 12% have indicated the preference for them (Comşa et al, 2006: 93). Because the public of media has had the possibility to choose between all themes transmitted by mass media, it has preferred other themes much more than the ones about EU. Probably, the persons interested in information transmitted by media are a specialized public, with competence in European problems.

After the adhesion, in 2007 mass media from Romania manifests interest in political domestic conflicts between the representatives of state institutions, but it neglects the effects of these conflicts on Europeanization of Romanian society. It is not an agenda of Romanian problems derived from the position of the Romanian state as a member of EU. Interesting conclusions regarding the relation between EU and media are in a research on Romanian youth (Mitulescu et al, (2006). The significant information sources about EU are: television (88%), discussions with friends and colleagues (40%), newspapers, magazines, radio (33%). As preferred sources of EU are: television (66%), books, booklets and folders (28%), radio (24%), newspapers, magazines (23 %), internet (23%). There is a youth group that considers mass media reflects EU fairly (42% from respondents), but another group thinks mass media depicts much more positive aspects of EU and a little less negative aspects (29% from respondents). The latter idea is especially true for young people who are more educated, have a large income and live in urban area. In accordance with an analysis of European Commission Delegate in Romania, the interest of media for EU has grown constantly. If in 1999 mass media published less than 5000 articles, in 2004 the average was 64.000. Approximately 90% of all articles were news, but analyzing articles were only 10%. These data confirm the idea about the accent on political and diplomatic information, and the lack of interest for public debate on the relations of Romania with EU.

An useful analysis of mass media from Romania is a comparison between actions of European Commission Delegate in Romania and the level of coverage in mass media. Since communication on aspects regarding the relations of Romania with EU is precarious, European Commission Delegate in Romania had to assume some of communicative competences of domestic actors: Government, political class and civil society. European Commission Delegate in Romania has become the most important communicator regarding the adhesion of Romania.

A communicative partner is the Romanian public television, which transmits the European information programmes.

The most useful expressions looked up on European Commission Delegate site in Romania in the period of 10 May-10 June 2007 were: structural funds (273 searches); European theme (175 searches); the guide of applicant (137); Phare program (128 searches); financial opportunities (112 searches); programs (103 searches); requirement of engagement (97 searches); European Union Council (71 searches) ([www.infoeuropa.ro/10\\_iunie\\_2007](http://www.infoeuropa.ro/10_iunie_2007)).

There is a public interested and specialized in European problems, which appeals to all modalities of information, especially from European institutions. The Internet site of European Commission Delegate in Romania is one channel preferred by Romanians in communication with the representatives of EU. The specialists, students, representatives of

small and medium enterprises, journalists and non-governmental organizations use daily this means of information about EU. It is the most comprehensive portal with a database in Romanian language. The total number of visitors in December 1999-april 2007 was 3.957.997. ([www.infoeuropa.ro/10 June 2007](http://www.infoeuropa.ro/10 June 2007)).

All these data about the ways of communication of European Commission Delegate in Romania demonstrate its role in informing the Romanians about EU. Mass media doesn't have the same impact as the European Commission Delegate in Romania.

Mass media benefit from the sources of European Commission, but, as a rule, the use of information is precarious.

There are some stereotypes or euro-myths about the integration of Romania in EU. The former Ministry of European Integration has published a list of euro-myths – false ideas about the EU and the adhesion of Romania to EU, which circulate frequently in Romanian public space. Here we are some of them: after the adhesion Romanians will not work in EU, the growth of economic competition will expel Romanian companies from the market, the foreigners will buy Romania, EU forbids state assistance and Romanian economy will be bankrupt, agriculture negotiations are unfavorable for Romania and the agricultural farmers will disappear, the Romanian viticulture will disappear, EU will decide the cutting of trees, the animals will have passports and ear-rings, Romanians cannot sell their traditional products on EU market, all slaughter-houses and milk factories will close, Romanians will not be able to drink their plum brandy prepared by them, Romania will be in danger of secession because of the implementation of regional policy development, Romania will pay more at EU budget than it will receive ([www.infoeuropa.ro/10 June 2007](http://www.infoeuropa.ro/10 June 2007)).

The circulation of these euro-myths reflects the absence of information about EU, and mass media has a great responsibility, because it did not give answers to the need of public information. It is true that mass media is a vehicle of mediatisation of publicity campaigns initiated by Romanian authorities on the integration of Romanian society in European structures. One explanation for this media action is the proceeds obtained by media owners from these publicity campaigns paid by the Government.

Another argument for the normative character of information about EU transmitted by mass media is the monitoring of Romanian press by nongovernmental organizations. This action has focused on the analysis of the manner in which mass media discusses about European funds, the transparency of the process of accessing funds, absorption of funds. The Group of Transparency, a network of investigation journalists specialized in European funds in Romania, has been created (Agenția de Monitorizare a Presei, Raport anual de activitate 2006 <http://www.mma.ro>; [www.freeex.ro](http://www.freeex.ro)). Thus, it is easy to observe a concentrated attention from monitoring agencies of press on financial and economical aspects of relations between EU and Romanian society. Press discusses about European funds with priority. To a much lesser extent is the monitoring of mass media coverage about the euro-myth and the difficulties known by Romanians as applicants of adhesion criteria. The domination of public sphere by the omnipresence by political parties and disputes between them is an explanation of estranging the public from mass media debate, especially the talk shows, all being perceived as a spectacle only for political actors. The Government itself is made at television. The evaluation activity of Government is the mediatisation and the perception of media on the members of the Government. There is a discrepancy between the image created by TV and the concrete image of the Government, but that competent governances are considered only those who have visibility in media. Romanian mass media depends on the modern particularities of the evolution of domestic society. Therefore, the development of media is a consequence of 'tendentious modernity'. This means the development in the opposite direction: from the affirmation of national spirit and political construction towards economical

development (Schifirnet, 2007a). Tendentious modernity penetrates slowly and hard through the complicated network of socio-institutional structures of the traditional and patriarchal Romanian society. It is a mosaic modernity. It is not organized in a clear dominant form. Modernity is the framework and the element which supports the Romanian nation, but not by means of economy, as a basis of a national state, like in Western Europe.

## Conclusions

Mass media is a very important presence in public sphere, but it does not promote values and norms of society. Mass media encourage the point of view of parties' elites, but not equally the opinion of different social groups.

The events in post-adhesion Romania have shown a deficit democracy, but mass media is not an element of coagulation of Romanian public sphere integrated in European public sphere. The news of mass media makes marginal reference to European norms.

European Commission Delegate in Romania has become the most important communicator regarding the integration of Romania in EU.

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