

**MEDIA AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY.
A SURVEY OF POST-COMMUNIST EXPERIENCE**

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Introduction

The central motivation of the majority of the internal opposition to the communist regimes in Europe was a desire to establish democratic societies. Of course, there were important differences in what was understood by 'democracy', but there was general agreement that a substantial reform of the mass media was an essential objective (Splichal, Hochheimer and Jakubowicz, 1990). The communist media were seen, quite rightly, as totalitarian. All the media, whether formally owned by the party or formally independent, were completely under the control of the party leadership. The Central Committee of the ruling party dictated their editorial policies. Proven loyalty to the party was a condition for employment, and still more for advancement. Very often, the General Secretary of the party treated the media as his private mouthpiece. Clearly, such goings on would not be tolerated in any democratic society and the media would have to change radically.

There was less agreement as to what the direction of change should be, but most people looked to a version of the media in the western countries for inspiration. Some people looked to the USA, some to Germany, and some to Sweden. Perhaps a few even looked to the UK. What they saw, or believed they saw, in all of these different countries were mass media that were autonomous and independent in their editorial policies. They saw journalists who were trained as professionals and promoted exclusively on merit. They saw newspapers and broadcasting stations that were fiercely independent of government, and not at all afraid to make harsh criticism of wrongdoing even by the most powerful. They saw editors and journalists who had the resolution and courage to defy Presidents, Prime Ministers and Parliaments, and to print or broadcast the truth regardless of consequences.