

## POLITICS AND TELEVISION IN ROMANIA

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**ABSTRACT.** Despite the growing concentration of property, political interference and content trivialization, Romanians continue to show a high level of trust in television. Entering the political scene, television gradually put an end to the traditional model of political communication. Relying more and more on the visual impact, politicians became highly preoccupied by their televised image. Many decisions taken by politicians today are tributary to their foreseen reflection in media. Relationship between media and politics is therefore an important factor in comprehending the stakes of the evolution of contemporary democracies. The impact of television upon political players strongly depends on their own self-promoted image. As long as our perception of politicians relies heavily on television, it seems the latter is entitled to reshape the identity of major leaders but also of political parties which tend to develop a clear, easy to understand discourse. A significant number of politicians became TV stars, moving from one TV show to another. Some do not really seem to have any purpose other than being on TV as often as possible. In fact, taking a closer look at the Romanian press, one can often observe the political and economic interests behind the media agenda, far from the public interest. Most people questioned by EUMAP<sup>2</sup>, including the president of the National Council of the Audio-Visual (C.N.A.), responded that televisions in Romania are mainly a tool used to gain influence. The analysis focuses on describing the relationship between politics and television, focusing on how information is being produced, sent and received, the influence of television on society, with special interest on major players.

**Keywords:** *Credibility, influence, editorial independence, media ownership, politics, political communication, public interest, ratings, talk-show, television.*

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## Introduction

During the communist era, the word “television” meant a couple of hours of daily propaganda, broadcasted by the state television, especially during the 1980’s. Romanian public used to identify the TV set with the very source of power. Ironically, the power of Ceausescu dwindled and then disappeared on TV as well. Television remained, to an even greater extent, the actor in the leading role. The Romanian Revolution was the first event of its kind broadcasted live, mainly for the benefit of those who grabbed power: they were considered legit because of the mere presence on the television screen. It was then, in the old communist tradition, when an ample operation of misinformation and manipulation started, operation that was to continue, under different forms, for many years. There was not a single important event of the 90’s without the implication of television: the violent confrontation in the winter and spring of 1990, mobilizations of the "working class" in support of the FSN (National Salvation Front), the miners’ actions in Bucharest, a.s.o. “In many cases, news programs turned into court sessions or cameras dashed into citizens’ lives” wrote Alexandru Călinescu<sup>3</sup> in *Ziarul de Iași*, in 2007.

Ten years after the fall of communism, a third of the Romanian population still had access to only one TV channel, the public TV. Even though today most people have access to at least five different TV channels, the available options are not very diverse. In fact, there are only a handful of major players: Pro Tv, Antena 1, Kanal D and less and less significant, TVR1.

Two decades after the emergence of commercial TV in Romania, the first channels to appear on the market, Pro TV and Antena 1 are still in the lead. Amongst the first channels to be launched, only Tele7abc failed. The channel was launched in 1994 by a group of local entrepreneurs - Marcel Avram, Paul Opris, Mihai Cârciog - who invested about 20 million dollars in this venture, which proved highly successful during its early years. (Arachelian, Rad, 2004 p.177-185)

The emergence of private TV channels changed the Romanian TV landscape but made politics even more present in TV programmes, especially due to talk-shows. In fact, we have been witnessing for some time a hallucinating process: politics practically moved into the TV studios.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ziaruldeiasi.ro/opinii/televiziune-si-politica~ni492u/> 22.06.2015

## **Methodology**

The analysis focuses on describing the relationship between politics and television, concentrating on how information is being produced, delivered and received, the influence of television on society, with special interest on major players (journalists, politicians, business people and intellectuals) but also on the behaviour of the viewers, the general audience. This is not only about the influence of technology, about the influence of television on everyday life, about variations in ratings and public behaviour, but also about activating the criticism by constantly connecting these phenomena to their social relevance, systematically integrating the individual into the collective.

The paper will answer a set of questions that could offer a better understanding of the politics – television relationship: *How do politicians make use of television? How does television ownership influence independence? How did television change politics? Why economy creates political dependancy of television? How do politics affect editorial standards? Why the spectacle is more powerful than ideas on TV?*

## **Television As a Tool of Political Communication**

Relations between politicians and their fellow citizens used to be consumed during campaigns, in big rallies or meetings which usually took place in schools or in interviews for the press.

Once television stepped in, the above mentioned traditional communication style gradually faded away. Relying more and more on the apparent impact of the image, politicians started paying special attention to their televised image.

Many of the decisions made by political leaders today are tributary to the manner in which they are to be presented by media. The relationship between mass-media and politics is therefore an important factor that explains the stakes of the evolution of contemporary democratic societies.

Political life worldwide has evolved significantly in the recent years, including in Romania. Some of these changes regard the evolution of political and economic institutions, frequently under the “threat” of the European Union bodies, or the recruitment of political staff. Other very important changes regard the so-called “mediatization of politics”, that is the intense and regular usage of the press by the political class.

The door to this had been opened by the first televised confrontation in history, the U.S. presidential debate of November 1960, between John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon, a debate that changed the way public perceives candidates forever, frequently placing the image before the message.

### **The Influence of Television Upon Political Leaders**

Mass media has changed the rules of traditional democratic play. Most recent research try to deliniate the effects of mediatization, in fact focusing on the dominant communication medium: Television. Its power to influence leaders can be expressed on three levels: image, work and recruitment.

As Remy Rieffel puts it in his book *Mass-Media Sociology* (Rieffel, 2008), the impact of television upon political decision makers greatly depends on the image they propose about themselves. In order to seduce the voters, this image must meet some criteria, coherence being the most important. Matching the posted image with the perception is imperative, for if the public sees a rupture in image, the politician would be abandoned and his credibility will suffer. Image management is therefore essential in mediatization of politics. A relevant case was the October 1985 debate between Laurent Fabius, French prime minister at the time, and Jacques Chirac, opposition leader.<sup>4</sup> Presented by media as a duel at the top, the debate unveiled a Laurent Fabius more aggressive than usual and less relaxed than expected. On the contrary, Jacques Chirac looked in full control of the situation. The comments in the next day's media, were widely merciless and critical on the prime minister, a good indicator of the verdict effect triggered by journalists and opinion polls. The discrepancy between the usual image of Laurent Fabius, that of a calm and balanced person and the image shown on TV, became a serious setback for Fabius, which stayed with the French public for a long time.

Success and efficiency of a televised intervention depends on its relevance, that is its capability to issue a new message in new terms and on how pregnant it is, that is how well it handles announcements of the same nature: therefore it is imperative to avoid any abuse. Whilst the public perception of the politician is tributary to television, it seems that television is capable of reshaping the identity of great leaders, as well as of political parties which are interested in developing a clear, easy to understand speech.

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<sup>4</sup> Champagne, Patrick, *Le cercle politique. Usages sociaux des sondages et nouvel espace politique*, Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales, nr. 71-72, p. 71-97

The personal image of the candidate and the global image of the party, rather than adding reasonable arguments, have a decisive contribution to the public perception of politics, especially by the undecided voters. Attention should also be paid to the image constructed by satire, cartoon and irony shows, which have a special appeal to youngsters.

Mass-media and especially television also affect the everyday work of politicians. The question of time also suffered profound changes. "Political time" actually takes time, requiring analysis and deliberation in order to ease memorization of what specialists call "heavy policy" (acts that create continuity). "Mediatic time" is, on the contrary, a time of direct communication, actuality and swiftness. The presidential elections in the USA in November 2000 constitute a perfect illustration of the importance of the logic of concurrency and urgency. TV stations announced at first the victory of the Democratic candidate Al Gore, later on announcing the contrary, that the new president of the United States was George W. Bush, the Republican candidate. In the end, they admitted that the outcome of the elections was extremely unclear. Romanian TV channels did the same thing in 2009, when they announced the victory of Mircea Geoană or in 2014 when, according to the interests of the TV station owners, news channels only announced the results of the exit polls that suited their interests, and they kept doing this to the last moment. These contradictory announcements proved that TV channels had not taken the time to check the exit polls results, as they all tried to be the first to deliver the outcome of the elections. Under the pressure of urgency, politicians are often forced to deliver on the spot reactions to journalists' requests, to deliver information on several media channels on the same topic, to seek the mediatic effect or cliché, assuming the inherent risk of this type of practice: excessive oversimplifying due to personal involvement, ill-calculated dramatization, even superficiality and conformism. Adapting their speech to the norms of the respective media, they often fall for what Paul Virilio (1995) calls a "monstrative" logic (based on a momentary reflex), at the expense of the "demonstrative" logic.

Politicians' actions are actually more and more subjected to a constant surveillance by mass-media and the public. Universal suffrage definitely remains the main instrument of the legitimacy of politicians. They are nevertheless forced to make considerable efforts to explain their actions all year long, as they are called upon to respond to media whenever requested and obliged to answer all questions based on opinion polls results.

Finally, the change also regards the recruitment of political personnel, or staff. Traditionally, access to the highest positions within a political party requested the approval of key militants and the fulfillment of specific tasks of responsibility in order to get invested. Today, the capital mobilized to be designated include, besides the speaking skills proven in rallies and the power to persuade, also the visibility and mediatic performance. Legitimacy is gained due to a good mediatic prestation and a popularity often gained outside politics, such as in sports or business. Public opinion often works as selection criterion. Looking good on TV does not guarantee success in elections but it appears as an essential element of the mechanism which designates politicians. Some specialists in political sciences sometimes relativize the influence of mass media, emphasizing that the most visible politicians best match the actual structure of institutional and partisan power. Thus, television helps preserving the legitimacy of the capital previously acquired.

Even if it doesn't impose a thinking pattern, television proposes topics to think about, including characters – politicians in the given context – which must be taken into consideration, upon which we must conceive and express a point of view. The importance rendered by media to a certain political character consists in his visibility, which can be analyzed using two measurable indicators: live appearances and replayed statements on the one hand, and the time assigned to this character in news, regarding his statements or deeds.

## **Spectacle and Infotainment**

Technological revolution led to perfecting the dissemination tools. These, along with the increasing influence of advertising, turned television into the media institution which sells entertainment for the lowest prices, as compared to theater, tourism, arts and sports. The spectacularization of information was determined by market pressure (the need for higher and higher ratings). In this respect, the very informative speech of the mass-media tends to transform into entertainment, generating a new species, *the infotainment*.

*Spectacularization of information* must preserve the apparent objectivity while capturing or even seducing the viewers. Thus, the focus would always be laid on the content of the speech, rather than on the situation which produced it, in order to build an impersonal speech. Objectivity presumes a credible factual report in which mediatic information must comply to a representation

that is common to both the media and the public, favouring the narrative and descriptive information at the expense of the rationally exposed explanatory information.

A pragmatic approach which treats the speech as a show staging, successfully adjusts to the specifics of mediatic speech. Following the same view, Coman (2003) defines *media events* as “those public events which get ample media coverage and which, because of mediatization, trigger processes of social mobilization and sometimes political action”.

Mediatic speech does not stand alone, it is fueled by the political and social speech. Therefore, *journalism* can be defined as an inter-relation between the three entities engaged in the mediatic speech: journalists, sources and audience. The mediatic product reflects the relation established between the journalist and his source and describes the deeds of the characters it refers to. This construction requires a mediatic scene. The mediatic speech is not independent, being in constant negotiation with the political and economic speeches on the one hand, and other media organisations, on the other hand.

### **Politics Is Being Done on TV**

News programs show recorded parts of talk-shows, press conferences or statements delivered in front of TV cameras. In talk-shows there are fragments taken from other talk-shows or from TV news programs. Most TV shows produce a kind of opinion polls, asking for citizens' opinion on “what's hot today”, the results of these so-called polls having no relevance whatsoever. Borrowing a formula from the speech of the socialist candidate in the presidential elections in France, Ségolene Royal, we are dealing with a local version of “participatory democracy”, a way to give the people the illusion that they actually participate in the decision making process.

Emerging and staying on the political scene is no longer predominantly based on the ideas, but on the ability to create spectacle, controversy and ratings. The best example is the political rise of the owner of the Steaua Soccer Club, Gigi Becali (who later changed his name to George, in order to change his public image, a change which, nevertheless, failed). Media product by nature, Becali managed to impose the image of a politician, even though the party he had founded and chaired did not succeed to enter the European Parliament.

A rather awkward moment occurred on TVR, during the confrontation between president Traian Băsescu and the ex-prime-minister Călin Popescu Tăriceanu. The tone of the exchanged replicas (as the president intervened by telephone), the attitude of the prime-minister, the mimics of other participants to the debate, all contributed to a lame show which produced a disastrous public impression. "It's come to such a low level of political life, so that dirty laundry is being washed on live television" – concluded Alexandru Călinescu<sup>5</sup>.

Fully aware of the new context of policy as a television show, political actors play their parts knowing that any deviation from the patterns stated by television regarding any event, explicitly stated by producers or only hinted, would let that event be ignored by media and consequently lead to its futility as a tool to enhance awareness, trust and voting intention. As a consequence, the accent transcends from the political act to the media and shapes the political actor to fit the format imposed by television. The new public space of the media, in which visibility prevails, turns politicians into actors who comply to the rules of directing, which can no longer be ignored without the risk of marginalization. (Drăgan, Cismaru, 2008)

Besides their need for audience, mass-media and especially television, put up and impose the image of a ruptured type of reality, in the style of TV commercials, which forces politicians to adapt their speech so that their opinions and deeds could be communicated to larger audiences. In order to survive and prevail in this medium, politicians must plan their actions as they were events that could be reported by media, to give up long term projects that have an uncertain deadline or are difficult to get media coverage. They must also put aside or pay lesser importance to actions that cannot be discursively reported and pay heed to the fact that information is yielding to show, which simplifies the political reality to the extreme. (Drăgan, 2007). The political actor thus becomes an organizer of events.

The visible outcome of the transformation of the politician into an event organizer is the increase of the importance of delivering the information, turning the political act into a simple motivation.

A. Touraine (Drăgan, 2002) states that the reason for the increase of the importance of political communication is that politics no longer impose any criteria of integration in the whole of social experiences and that public life surpasses political action at all levels. In Touraine's opinion, opening the

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ziaruldeiasi.ro/opinii/televiziune-si-politica~ni492u/> / 11.04.2015



public space weakens the bond between public opinion and state management, thus reducing the traditional role of political parties at the expense of the movie-style "star system" (Schwartzberg, 1995).

The dominant position of television is not exclusively due to the political actor's need to reach larger audiences, but also to the increasing addiction of regular people to media and the information it delivers. The regular citizens depend more and more on media to get immediate and cheap information. They appeal to media because the alternative would be more expensive and time consuming, but poorer in both quality and complexity of information. The need to get access to decisions or actions which affect their everyday life, which they could not act upon – the public renders television with their trust, awarding it the role of the fourth power in the state, unaware of the danger as there is no counter power just as efficient. (Dobrescu, Bârgăoanu, 2002).

The absolute credibility of television comes from the overwhelming usage of pictures to construct the meaning. The traditional saying "I'll believe it when I see it", gets easily replaced by the commercial line "as seen on TV", ignoring the fact that news production produces reality rather than reporting it, by selecting elements and defining them as such. The fact that credibility partly transfers to the actors who enact the television show, determines an increase of the interest of politicians for television which result in directing their statements toward media, at the expense of the direct communication with the public.

Delivering the political information from the its producers – *political actors* – to its users – *the public* – makes the political act "an incomplete, symbolic one, because the public does not experience the actions, but the language expressing them." (Edelman, 1999) The individual gains access to only a manufactured image of the actual political reality, but very real through its outcome. Public access to the event is usually granted through TV news. Their role in decoding the political action is explained by John Hartley in *Understanding News* (Hartley, 1999) where he states that "news does not simply reflect the language, social or historic determinants, but it also processes them".

In the given context, in order to understand the mechanisms of Romanian political life, one must focus mainly on the meaning proposed to the public by mass-media and less on the objectives of politicians, because, as Ioan Dragan stressed, (Drăgan, 2007) "Television pretends to be a tool that

records and replays reality but in fact it is a tool that creates reality... it has a high capacity to generate appearances and simulations, to express an event according to conveniences and opportunities, and not only the access to a better visibility of the world, which might help capitalize knowledge and increase the efficiency of its application."

## **The Power of Television in Romania**

Television still is the primary source of information for a large amount of the population, despite the allegations of superficiality in reporting major political events.

At first sight, the Romanian media landscape is a very rich one, with a large number of media channels, a healthy level of foreign investments, a strong legislation in compliance with the European Union's regulations, as well as the editorial independence, guaranteed by law. Judging by the number of media channels, pluralism should be ensured.

Access to information and free speech are guaranteed by Constitution and some specific laws. The Law of the Audio and Visual, the main law which regulates radio and television, states that "censorship of any kind on audio-visual communication is forbidden" and that "the editorial independence of broadcasters is recognized and guaranteed by the present law."

A closer look at the audio-visual environment shows broadcasters' weak independence and scarce credibility. In fact, if we look upon the Romanian press as a whole, often behind media agenda one can find political and economic interests rather than the public interest. Have televisions become an instrument to fulfill their owners' interests? Most respondents to the EUMAP<sup>6</sup> questionnaire, including the president of CNA (The National Council for Audio and Visual) answered that television channels in Romania are being used mainly to gain influence. Editors enjoy their independence as long as they protect the interests of the owners and their associates, according to many of the questioned. Another particularity of contemporary Romanian television seems to be the trivialization and tabloidization of news, which are less and less oriented towards politics. Unfortunately, the race for the sensational produced victims, intensely mediatized themselves: On May 24 2004, two

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<sup>6</sup> EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program (EUMAP) in cooperation with Network Media Program TELEVIZIUNEA ÎN EUROPA-Reglementari, Politici si Independenta, [http://www2.cji.ro/userfiles/file/documente/media\\_rom3.pdf](http://www2.cji.ro/userfiles/file/documente/media_rom3.pdf) / 16.05.2015

Romanian journalists lost their lives while reporting a traffic accident which occurred in Mihăilești, Buzău county. When the two journalists, Elena Popescu and Ionuț Barbu, had learnt about this accident, this was a simple traffic event with no casualties. Nevertheless, they moved to the scene of the accident, hoping to shoot an interesting story for their editors in Bucharest. Eventually, they turned the event into news with their own lives: The truck loaded with chemicals exploded, killing a number of people, including the two journalists.<sup>7</sup> The two thus became “victims of the pressure which is put upon journalists for the purpose of producing the sensational at any costs”.

*The Romanian Academic Society*(SAR) commented: Lately, television news have become less political and more tabloid, with a taste for sensation, rape, murder and traffic accidents. Although editors claim that this procedure ensures high ratings, news are less and less popular, losing about 20 percent of the audience they had by the year 2000.<sup>8</sup>

### **Private-Owned Television Channels and Their Ownership**

Fully aware of the importance of television in building a political career, many politicians became TV stations owners, especially on a local scale. Despite strict limitations on media concentration, the commercial television market in Romania became more and more polarized, with owners in dominant positions, or animated by political interests to be found behind TV stations' ownership. In Constanta for instance, former mayor Radu Mazare, former journalist, later member of Parliament remained for a long time one of the most influential local media owners although, formally, in 2004 he transferred the ownership of his media empire to his friend Sorin Strutinsky. In Bacau, former PSD mayor Dumitru Sechelariu bought the Alpha TV station and Radio Alpha in 2002. In Piatra-Neamt, a city of cca 100,000 inhabitants, two politicians tried to share the local TV stations. In March 2004, half of the companies that operated local radio or TV stations had direct connections with politicians.<sup>9</sup> Facing a desperate shortage of resources, local TV stations accepted all sorts of compromises which, in the

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<sup>7</sup> C. Crisbasan, “Kitsch-ul mortal”, in *Ziarul Financiar – Ziarul de duminica*, /16.07.2004, p.8.

<sup>8</sup> SAR, *Raport de analiza si prognoza – România în 2004*, Romanian Academic Society, Bucharest, Jan. 30 2004, p.10, available on-line at [http://www.sar.org.ro/files\\_h/docs/publications\\_pr/final%20romana%20annual.pdf](http://www.sar.org.ro/files_h/docs/publications_pr/final%20romana%20annual.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> P. Barbu si P. Obae, “Televiziunile locale se misca dupa telecomanda PSD, in *Capital*, March 18, 2004.

long run, affect their editorial independence. There are cases in which certain programs were eliminated at the direct request of local chiefs. In February 2004, Ioan Romeo Rosianu, editor-in-chief at the local Canal 7 TL+ in Baia Mare, found his program suspended along with his labour contract, following a series of investigations on mayor's Cristian Anghel public funds policy. Following Rosianu's removal, the TV station was awarded a substantial publicity contract by the Mayor's Office, says the EUMAP report<sup>10</sup>.

Alongside the two leading media companies, new media groups started concentrating around TV channels. Several regulations referring to fair reporting in television programs were issued, but balanced journalism is hard to be enacted in a hostile political and economic environment. The concentration of cross ownership is very hard to check.

On a local scale, the influence of media channels is rather weak (as people know each other quite well within small communities), the influence of big players is significant on a national scale, as audiences can be quite effectively deceived or manipulated.<sup>11</sup>

Media policies in Romania suffer from a lack of consistency, says Virgil Nițulescu, former state secretary in the Ministry of Culture: "There is a lack of a coherent vision, and of a strategy of development of the audio-visual. Political influence has replaced any strategy, there is no public debate on the matter, yet".<sup>12</sup>

## The Independence of the Audio-Visual

Political pressure on the audio-visual is significant. Many media specialists agree that media owners consider their television operations rather as instruments for promoting their own political or economic interests. TV stations' executives would rather remain silent about this but media experts and TV journalists have publicly denounced the growing pressure that's being put on mass-media.

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<sup>10</sup> Convention of media Organizations (COM), press release, Bucharest, Feb.18, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Statement by Mona Musca at the launching of "Local Radio and Television – Monitoring Report", The Agency for Press Monitoring (AMP), August 25, 2004. At the time, Mona Musca was a member of Parliament, member in the Commission for Culture, Arts and Mass Media, Chamber of Deputies.

<sup>12</sup> Statement by Virgil Nițulescu in August 2004. Nițulescu worked as a media expert for the Commission for Culture, Arts and Mass Media, Chamber of Deputies. In 2005 he became a state secretary in the Ministry of Culture.

TV stations are in a desperate need for financial resources to produce more professional and more profound news programs. In the absence of these resources, they prefer to produce light entertainment, which is less expensive and attracts larger audiences. For TV stations this is also a way to elude news stories and controversies which may annoy the government or their satellites, which in turn, could cause serious problems to the respective stations. As a consequence, TV stations concentrate on cheap “stars” or the newly rich, regardless of their effort invested in the accumulation process. Therefore, the dominant model is the one of instantaneous gratification.<sup>13</sup>

Lack of financial resources for investigative journalism strongly reduces the independence of television stations. Financial weakness makes the audio-visual media vulnerable and easy to control by certain interest groups. For instance, huge debts or dependancy on state publicity increase media vulnerability even more.

The 2003 annual report of the National Council for Audio-Visual (CNA) shows that “monitoring of news programs reveals a worrying increase in the number of programs which exagerately yield to the sensational, senseless violence and pathologic cases, presented in ways that exceed by far the boundaries of decency and common sense.”<sup>14</sup>

Ten years later, in 2013, the National Council for Audio-Visual (CNA) issued a total of 101 fines, in total amount of 2.067.500 lei. România TV, Antena 1 and Antena 3 were the TV stations that were fined the heaviest, according to the 2013 annual report of the CNA.<sup>15</sup>

OTV television ranked fourth, having its broadcasting license revoked according to the audio-visual legislation, for failing to pay some older fines. Although the station got its license revoked on January 22 2013, the CNA continued sanctioning OTV for the period of time when the above mentioned TV station broadcasted political propaganda for the People’s Party - Dan Diaconescu (PPDD), issuing three fines in total amount of 160.000 RON.

A situation of sanctiones issued by the CNA between January and June of 2014 is presented in the following table:

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<sup>13</sup> I. Avadani, “Modele culturale”, in *Dilema veche*, 20, May 28 - June 3 2004, p.8. Ioana Avadani is the executive director of the Center for Independent Journalism in Bucharest.

<sup>14</sup> CNA, Yearly Report 2003, cit., p.14.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.mediafax.ro/cultura-media/raport-cna-pe-2013-consiliul-a-aplicat-101-amenzi-romania-tv-si-antena-1-cele-mai-mari-sanctiuni-12476695> /11.10.2014

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TV Channel	No. of sanctions	Subpoenas	Total fines (RON)
Antena 3	9 sanctions	1 subpoena	200.000
Antena 1	6 sanctions	2 subpoenas	170.000
B1 TV	9 sanctions	2 subpoenas	145.000
Pro TV	2 sanctiuni		120.000
Mynele TV	1 sanctiune		100.000
Romania TV	6 sanctions		75.000
Nasul TV	3 sanctions		70.000
TVR	2 sanctions	1 subpoena	70.000
Realitatea TV	5 sanctions	3 subpoenas	26.000
Prima TV	3 sanctions	1 subpoena	20.000

Data in the above table was collected by Paginademedias.ro, based on information posted on the site of the National Council for the Audio-Visual, cna.ro

There is still an important imbalance between the relatively low advertising budgets and the relatively large number of media companies in Romania. Many media channels resort to questionable practices in order to cover their expenses, such as threatening advertising suppliers with negative publicity, taking advertising from state-owned companies or accepting “sponsorships” from business tycoons who frequently have ties with political parties. Most owners do not necessarily follow financial profit, but use their media channels to influence authorities to get favours in return, and to attack their economic competitors or their political foes.

Many TV channels on the market today were launched with the aim of gaining political or economic influence. Only a handful can present a solid business plan. Journalists must frequently fight restrictions or censorship imposed by the management and their own small income. Low wages of journalists also contribute to the overall instability of the press and its lack of independence. As opposed to a handful of TV entertainment stars, who make up to 150,000 euros a year, a news reporter usually earns a yearly salary of 3,000 euros. More than that, a significant part of media employees do not have legal labour contracts as their bosses elude paying taxes or leave allowances. Although the Labour Code is protecting employees, it isn't of much help, as most people working in television stations do not have labour contracts, as they prefer signing contracts with their own firms, established especially for this purpose.

## **Editorial Standards**

Political analysis programs, quality news and talkshows gradually disappeared from commercial television programs. They have been replaced by cheap comedy shows and low quality political programs. In the beginning, commercial stations appealed to these programs as a subtle way to avoid criticizing influential politicians and businessmen. During the period 2002-2004, both commercial and public stations deliberately avoided delicate political issues, especially items criticizing the ruling party and its leaders. News and investigative programs were replaced by entertainment programs, such as variety shows and light talk-shows. Because of the biased news regarding the ruling party and the general trivialization of TV programs, the interest of the public in political questions dropped dramatically. Staking on cheap entertainment, television got what it wanted: higher ratings and a low demand for quality television. Television stations justify their strategy affirming that rating is the only universal measurement in the television industry. More than that, due to the lack of resources, quality news and analysis programs, as well as journalistic investigations are unlikely to recover in the foreseeable future. Investigative programs are very much inexistent in Romanian televisions, with very few exceptions.

## **Conclusions**

Media theoreticians agree on the fact that television is a combination of journalism and showbiz (Postman, 2006). In this case, a quality show, staged by visual journalists (producers, anchors, hosts, directors, photographers, even set designers, because they all creatively contribute to the journalistic act of delivering information) which are responsible professionals following a clear and attractive format, will generate an educated and mature opinion in the mind of informed, constient and responsible citizens.

Unfortunately the present paper proves that this is not happening in present day Romania. On the contrary, news television stations, which have almost entirely occupied the space of political debate, sin not only by following high profit through high ratings and by assuming the toxic role of an influence factor, but also by the lack of interest for a professional approach of the pictures, which should be of capital importance in television, because of the ignorant managers and producers with no visual education whatsoever.

In a society where both political system and business environment are deeply affected by endemic corruption, independent media can hardly survive and is forced to accept various forms of compromise in order to keep on functioning. None of the private TV stations (except for Antena 3) has not reported any profit, as they function on a market in which advertising income is low and the social and economic environment is rather unstable. Investors fear sudden changes in state policies. Legislative and regulatory systems, for instance, can be subjected to political influence at any time. All the above mentioned factors rise the general level of business venture.

Lack of ownership transparency can be dangerous. Firstly, because it can conceal political connexions or fishy business ties. Secondly because, without real ownership information, the level of ownership concentration cannot be traced, despite clear and strict regulations in this field.

Pressure from advertising income also has a negative effect on editorial independence. In addition to this, publicity from state companies and institutions bonds television channels to economic and political interests.

The stronger, more stable and healthier the economy, the more will companies in Romania be interested in objective news and investigative journalism. But a healthy economy is unthinkable without a strong, credible and sustained anti-corruption policy. Mass media should be the first stepping stone on the road to a solid democracy in Romania.

Television stations should intensify their efforts to prove themselves transparent and credible, if they are to answer the challenge of an objective and profound journalism on the television screen. Yet hard to achieve, this objective is the only way to make mass media the watch dog that a real democratic society needs.

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