

## Theme 7

# What Happened to the Dream of Independent Media?

ERIC CHENOWETH

Twenty-five years ago, among the central ideas of the freedom movements was that it was necessary to have independent media to replace the state-controlled media of communist regimes that had simply printed and broadcast lies and propaganda serving the party-state's interests. But the dream of independent media has not been realized in most of the region. This session explores what happened in different countries. We begin with **Tatiana Vaksberg**, who was a founding activist of the Bulgarian Students Association in 1989 and is today an award-winning independent journalist and translator. The first respondent is **Sergey Duvanov**, an independent journalist from Kazakhstan who was imprisoned for 1½ years on fraudulent charges in the early 2000s because of his intrepid reporting on government corruption under President Nazarbayev's kleptocracy. **Maciej Strzembosz**, a leader of the student self-governing movement in the 1980s, is an independent television producer and filmmaker who has spent a great deal of time since 1989 working on enacting legislation to strengthen the independence of media and culture.

### Presentation

#### The Media in Bulgaria: The Full Story

by **Tatiana Vaksberg**

I was a little bit unsure when I prepared my paper whether to focus more on the contemporary gangsterization of the media in Bulgaria or about the lack of freedoms for media in the 1990s and what caused it. So, I will tell you the full story.

In November 1989, my grandparents' apartment in Sofia became the repository of strange items from the Occident. One was an electric typewriter brought by Irena Lasota, an unknown person to us at the time. We had just created the Bulgarian Independent Students Association. She told us this was a basic tool for us to be able to be heard. Just write the news the way you see them through your own eyes, she said. Don't rely on the state media to give an accurate image of the events; they won't do it for you. These were among the most important sentences ever spoken to me.

A few weeks later, we received two more gifts from Poland. Both related to a free press. In December 1989, a Bulgarian studying in Warsaw brought to us a small manual mimeograph machine donated by Solidarność. For it, a typewriter was used to impress heavy waxed-paper stencils—a highly uncertain process because you can't see really what you type. The stencils were placed on a drum for copying what you wanted to produce with ink. The problem was that you need a lot of practice operating such a machine and we didn't know all the intricacies. The Bulgarian Student Association managed to produce three issues of a prototype publication with 40-50 copies each. Some copies were posted with glue on the buildings of popular places in downtown Sofia.

The second present was given to us in the very beginning of 1990 by a Solidarność representative named Marian Orlikowski (he is now the Polish consul in Lviv). He brought us an offset press with metal plates—a much more sophisticated machine to produce a real newspaper. He told us this was the cheapest and easiest way to produce a publication and communicate with people what you want to be heard. We managed to produce two issues of a student newspaper with it. We should have done more, of course, but at the same time the first “real” independent newspaper was born, *Demokratiya*, the daily of the United Democratic Forces (UDF). As part of the UDF, the students association turned its attention to helping make this daily a success. It was one of our most important mistakes—not to insist on producing an independent student newspaper and relying on one single opposition newspaper instead.

When Orlikowski met with the students in Sofia, in January 1990, he also delivered a very important message to the newly created Bulgarian opposition: not to agree to the Communist Party proposal to hold a Round Table with the opposition as the mechanism for arranging the country's transition from a single-party state to a multi-party democracy. “Do not negotiate with them”, he said. “Just do yourself what you think is the right thing to do.” His advice was ignored. It became one of the greatest mistakes of the Bulgarian opposition. From that moment, virtually all of the gains of the opposition were based on permission given by the Communist Party, instead of independently winning the opposition's goals. In late January 1990, the UDF presented two preconditions to the Communist Party for agreeing to the Round Table with the Communist Party where the forthcoming elections and future multiparty system were decided. They were: permission to publish a newspaper with a large circulation using state printing presses and state-controlled print paper and permission to occupy office space. The first daily, *Demokratiya*, and the weekly *Svoboda Narod* (Free People), which started in February 1990, were grant-

ed circulation of 70,000 copies each, printed through the state printing offices. This determined the development of the media in Bulgaria.

There were other attempts in 1989 and early 1990 to create newspapers independently from the Communist Party and the democratic opposition. The first and most important was *Nezavisimost* (Independence), which was inspired by two samizdat magazines *Glas* (Voice) and *Most* (Bridge), both published in the late '80s during communist rule. *Nezavisimost*, edited by Gancho Ganchev, put out ten issues using an early computer and printer. But most of those independently sponsored newspapers could not survive for long. The newspapers that survived were launched on the same model as *Demokratiya*, by gaining the state's permission. Based on its precedent, editors of new publications also asked to use the state printing offices. Soon after the first free elections in 1990, it became clear that a very strange kind of press freedom was born: free media that never really fought for their freedom. Twenty-five years later, many analysts agree that one of the main reasons for Bulgaria's significant and constant decline in press freedom indexes over the past two decades lies in part in the perception that establishing the independence of free media was not a value that Bulgarians were willing to struggle for.

Indeed, over the years, Bulgaria media went through a spectacular decline in freedom and public confidence. At the outset, there was an impressive and rapid propagation of print media. In 1990 alone, there were 1,000 newspapers in the country, mostly organized around a community, a leader, or a cause. Most were closed, but new ones did emerge. While the total numbers did not change significantly, with an estimated 900 print publications in 2007, the content of them did change quite a lot. In the beginning of the 1990s, the majority of print publications published general interest and news and corresponded to the sharp political polarization of society. Today, the print media are largely entertainment, lifestyle, fashion, music, cinema or sport publications. General news and information publications declined in number, public confidence, and level of freedom.

In 2014, the Open Data sociology group of the Open Society Institute determined that 3 percent of the public had confidence in newspapers, 3 percent in radio, and 4 percent in internet news sites. Television has a higher level of confidence at 43 percent, but much of this group is found in the age category of 60 years and older. Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders show that there is something dramatically wrong with media governance and freedom. In 2003, Reporters Without Borders listed Bulgaria 34<sup>th</sup> in media freedom, ahead of Italy, the Czech Republic, and Romania. In 2014, it occupies 100<sup>th</sup> place. To illustrate the drop, post-war Serbia, which is not in the European Union, holds the 54<sup>th</sup> place.

European authorities often criticize Bulgaria for the lack of media freedom. They are especially critical of the law that allows anonymous companies to own media. This means that shady business circles, including those involved in illegal activities, can possess a media outlet without any transparency. These outlets claim to be authoritative sources for news and analysis on political and economic issues, however any Bulgarian journalist can tell you which publications are funded by trafficking in women, or by arms sales, or by Russian organized crime.

The second corrupting factor in media governance is the state, especially through its program of media and PR funding. In the last six months alone of 2013, the Bulgarian government gave 3 million Euros to media to explain its policies—from the need to reform the health system to the need for constructing new roads. The government is also operating European Union funds through which many media find support to publish or broadcast. Such state-controlled funding does not contribute to media's critical stance towards the government.

Last but not least, the communist past plays an important role in the deplorable conditions of media. It took twenty years for the government to admit that the security services played a key role in the transition from communism, especially in the field of media. Only in December 2009, the Files Commission published a list of current journalists with ties to the former security police. It announced that in 2009, 11 percent of the journalists working in print media as well as the hosts of the most popular television shows had worked for the communist state security. Some of the journalists were working for foreign-owned Bulgarian-language newspapers, such as *Business Week* or for the US-funded *Radio Free Europe*. The most important revelation was the state security connections of the editors-in-chief of the two leading general interest newspapers, *Trud* and *24 Hours*, as well as of the entire office of the weekly newspaper *Pogled*, published by the Bulgarian Journalists Union. Meanwhile, attempts to establish an alternative journalists' association repeatedly failed.

The Files Commission was established according to the State Security Archives Law, which was passed by parliament only in 2006. This independent commission was charged with checking state security affiliations of twenty-nine categories or groups, including national politicians, members of the judiciary, bank owners, army representatives, ambassadors, their deputies and other members of consulates, mayors and members of municipal councils, sociological agencies and lawyers associations, and people known as credit millionaires. This last group is made up of people who in the 1990s were given credit by banks without any collateral and when those banks went bankrupt, they were untouchable and did not have to give any of the money back.

Media represented a distinct category. While the Files Commission had to check all the members of the other groups who entered public life after 1989, journalists were checked only as of the date the law entered into force. It is thus believed that journalists played a much more significant role during the transition period, with many more than 11 percent of journalists being agents of state security and using their positions to manipulate public opinion.

With all these factors—the media relation to state security, the modern-day state-funded corruption, the non-transparent ownership of media—it is no wonder that the biggest scandal now in Bulgaria is the following. A company created by a family relation of a parliament member took a very large credit from a private bank at a time when the government had ordered the majority of state-owned enterprises to put their funds in that particular bank. The bank was allowed to use these funds from state-owned enterprises for any financial operations and it was the fastest growing bank in Bulgaria in the period of 2007–12, growing 9 percent annually. The family relation of the MP used the very large bank credit he received to become owner of a dozen national newspapers, one television station, a publishing house, and also the companies controlling general distribution of newspapers and other publications at kiosks.

The story finally attracted attention but by this time the newspapers were sold to an off-shore company and the ownership could not be traced. When the European Union paid more attention to the gangsterization of the Bulgarian economy, the government announced that this powerful bank was in fact unfit and its owner was a criminal under an Interpol warrant. The owner fled to Belgrade and the bank was closed with all the money seized or blocked by the government. Many people are not able to pay their mortgages as a result, which has created an artificial amount of bad credit. The media sold to the off-shore company now orchestrates campaigns against the political enemies of the leading party.

## Responses

### **Sergey Duvanov**

We are talking about why the dream of independent media was not reached. In Kazakhstan, the dream did start to be realized during *perestroika*. During that time and right after independence there was a renaissance of free media and free speech. It was an epoch when everything was possible. In the late Soviet period, together with my friends, I set up an independent newspaper and we were able to earn enough money and raise money from the US to establish a television channel. We had to bribe here and there but it was more or less acceptable. It was a Romantic peri-

od. There was no censorship. We had a program communicating live with people over the phone. It was very popular and we led in the ratings. There was a flourishing independent newspaper business.

This idyllic epoch lasted just four years. As Nursultan Nazarbayev consolidated power, the authorities realized the danger of free media in losing control over the public. So they decided to come up with mechanisms to take the media back under their control. Starting in 1994, the crackdown started on broadcast media. The authorities limited television and radio frequencies in favor of private companies that were allied to the government; this put us out of the broadcast media. In print media, it was the same. People were forced to sell their shares in an independent company that published the largest newspaper. The holding company came to be owned by the family members of President Nazarbayev and that company came to own the largest newspaper, television, and radio.

The period between 1996 and 2000 was an interesting time. There was still a struggle between the authorities who wanted to control everything and us who wanted to remain independent. It was not possible to register new publications—they were all rejected. So we figured out how to use existing registrations. I was able to publish a newspaper called *Fahrenheit 451* and there were others. It was a game of cat and mouse. After three or four issues, a publication would be closed and we came out with a new title. Of course, we ultimately exhausted the limits of existing print licenses, so then we used a non-media certificate, and so on. Then we began to print sort-of underground in Kyrgyzstan. At that point, the authorities used the courts to bring criminal cases against independent journalists and editors, whom they prosecuted on ordinary crimes. I was arrested and imprisoned.

We then encountered a new situation with a new opposition arising from a young generation of businessmen who wanted to use their money to influence politics. Due to their money, an independent television channel was started and also a newspaper. It was a breakthrough. There was now a polarity of opinions in which someone could follow events and different views. The next stage, however, was the government prosecuting the new opposition and businessmen or forcing them to emigrate.

So in the end, the information space was totally “cleaned up.” There is a refusal to register any new media; there is total control over print-runs; there is censorship and any independent media are closed using a variety of laws and bureaucratic mechanisms. There are still a couple of independent newspapers but the audience share is very limited, so much so that the authorities no longer pay attention to them, since they cannot influence the situation or the minds of people. It is the only reason these few examples of independent press can still operate.

I am not expecting you to pity us in Kazakhstan. But I would like to discuss why it happened. How could we have four years of free media and then have that free space devolve into nothing? The simple reason this happened, I believe, was that we were in no way equal to our opponents, which comprised the entire state apparatus.

On our side, there was just a group of people who wanted to change the situation. In 1971, long ago, the KGB apprehended a dissident. He was 28 years old at the time. I was then 17. His interrogators told him he could go to Europe. He told them he would not leave and that instead he and his friends were going to bring Europe to Kazakhstan and live like Europeans. This idea stuck in my mind and it became the guiding idea of my life. In 1988, when the Alma Ata Popular Front was created, I was already a journalist and I also became involved in political life. Human rights activists from the Netherlands at the time offered me the opportunity to leave the country and I repeated the words of my friend: that I was going to be a part of building Europe here in Kazakhstan. There were hundreds of us in those days. It was a euphoric time. We were very popular. While the state television had new technology and we had only primitive equipment, we were more popular. I thought we would succeed and there was no way back.

But the way did go backward. I disagree with Ales Bialiatski that we did not fail. We did fail. We were not equal to our opponents. Today, there are now very few people who think like me. Yevgeny Zhoftis, the head of the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, is one. I can count maybe twenty of us today still living inside the country. Others went into business and left, voting with their feet. And now when we look ahead I do not see the forces that can put forward the ideas we once hoped would take hold in Kazakhstan. I am disappointed and my pessimism is based in reality. Perhaps in Belarus there is more reason to be optimistic. In Kazakhstan, the fact is that we failed.

What should be done, then? I will not flee the country. I do still think we can change the situation. But I believe we must have a new strategy. We are the last border of Europe. We believed that our electorate wanted democracy and the only thing we had to do was to show them the way. We had many conferences and seminars and trainings to show them this way. The latest sociological data is that 85 percent of Kazakh citizens have a favorable view of the government. We thought our people were going towards democracy but now they are the subjects of Nazarbayev's and Putin's brainwashing. People who once would shake my hands in respect because I was a democrat today refuse even to greet me, believing I am a traitor who betrayed our country to the US.

## Maciej Strzembosz

I start with the premise that anyone who wants to shape the common civic space is a politician, by definition. I am a politician, but I am allergic to political parties. So, I became a screenwriter, producer, and the head of several NGOs. I was also a member of the group that drafted the first media law for Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki in 1991 and I worked as the government's lobbyist to pass the law through parliament. Since then, as a private citizen representing Polish NGOs, I helped pass five other pieces of legislation related to media and culture in parliament.

Probably what I will say for most of you is heresy and fantasy at the same time and I know that the Polish experience is different from Belarus or Azerbaijan but it is the experience that I can share.

After the 1989 revolution, there were two fundamental misunderstandings in Poland. The first was that the politicians who took over thought that the situation in media would be fine if we replaced the bad guys with good ones. This turned out obviously not to be true. But second, all politicians simply misunderstood the media. Some knew how to manipulate it, but none understood media and especially none understood television.

Politicians, by definition, are not credible when they say they want independent media. Even if a political leader is sincerely for the independence of media, someone in the party will behind his back attempt to make the media sympathetic to that party and that government. There is too much to gain in controlling media, not so much in fostering one's own party as in having the possibility to destroy your opposition.

The only way to do something with the television medium is to change its nature slowly. It is a lengthy process. If you are in opposition, you cannot simply reject the television because for the society television is the most important medium with which to communicate. And if you give up this tool to communicate with society, then it means you want to be in a ghetto without influence on society. You influence society, however, less through news programs. Influencing society begins more with children's programming and continues from there.

There are four groups of people who create the content on television no matter who the politician is or what the politician thinks. The four groups are: artists, producers, journalists, and celebrities. They draw viewers and create the sustenance for television to survive. The real task is how to get those four groups to help foster the idea of citizen, how to make them part of a citizens' movement, how to persuade them that the country and they themselves will be better off if there is a better media, if there is a better society, and if democracy is observed.



I will give you one example. I produce mostly comedies. The accumulated audience of my comedies counts approximately 6 billion viewers. On one series alone, the number is 2.8 billion. Each episode reaches millions of Polish viewers. And mine are not the most popular. Even so, if I want to reach people, I have much more power than the prime minister to communicate with society. If I want to promote the fight against breast cancer, instead of going to a news show that is watched by 200,000 people, I put it as a topic on my show through a character diagnosed with breast cancer. I am having much more impact over a much longer period.

So a positive program for media is to try to work with these four groups. How do you start? You give them financial independence. This means having the possibility for them to collect royalties and then it is possible to convince them to use those royalties for different purposes. In Poland, we convinced them to use part of the royalties to help new filmmakers and then to pass a new cinematography law that taxed all commercial media ventures at 1.5 percent for a fund governed by all important media players, including broadcasters, distributors, producers, and filmmakers. The government has no say in determining how to spend the funds and what films will be financed through this fund. We prepared legislation with the aim to build a space for culture that is independent from government. We have this year proposed a new media law (unsuccessfully so far) creating a similar fund for radio and television production based on licensing fees, a so-called Mission Fund. It will allocate funds up to 50 percent of a production budget for radio and television shows meeting the criteria established by the independent members of the fund. Then, a producer has the possibility of going to any station with a 50 percent budget and having it matched, no matter if it is a private or public channel.

Then you have to remember about NGOs. In Poland, everyone who was in opposition was in an NGO. But when my generation came to power, they immediately forgot about NGOs. You will have to rebuild NGOs and to do so independent of government money. We put through another piece of legislation that was a very small thing but potentially quite significant. According to this law, every public television and radio station has the obligation to allocate at least 2 and up to 6 minutes every day for civic programming that is free for NGOs as a public service. The only thing the NGOs need to do is to produce an ad or a video for a civic campaign. It is not well used yet but I think it is a good idea.

If you want a free and independent media, don't use government money because there are always conditions attached. The condition may sound good, like don't support anti-Semitic groups. But after that good condition, there will soon be ten or twenty other conditions, many of them bad. Where is the money to come from? In Poland, we introduced a law to tax

businesses in the filmmaking industry at a very basic rate, 1.5 percent, for a public fund that is independently governed. The Polish Film Institute now has annual financing of 40 million Euros. You persuade businesses it will benefit them and that it will be more beneficial if it is independent of government.

What I am trying to say and what governs my activity as a citizen is that culture is a currency of independence. Without independent culture, you won't be independent long.

## **Discussion**

### **IRENA LASOTA**

As in Kazakhstan, there was independent media in Azerbaijan, including television for a short time. I wanted to ask Mr. Gambar: how have the independent media voices been eliminated in Azerbaijan? What was the process there?

### **ISA GAMBAR**

One journalist in Azerbaijan wrote that there is mutual freedom of media in Azerbaijan today. Journalists have the absolute freedom to write what they want and the authorities have the absolute freedom to beat, to kill, and imprison any journalist.

We do use the internet and social media and there is some print media, but the print runs are decreasing due mainly to the authoritarian government's unwillingness to tolerate different views or independent information. Thus there are pressures on independent media from all directions. Some of the owners are forced to sell their papers. Some journalists are bought. There is repression and imprisonment. Judges carry out orders from the presidential apparatus and issue huge fines against newspapers for publishing something unauthorized—fines they are incapable of paying. There are other methods such as limiting newspaper circulation and the selling of newspapers at kiosks.

The story of television is much simpler. Since 2000, the access of the opposition to television channels is nil. Opposition representatives appear on TV only during the election campaign, but perhaps for 4 or 6 minutes. Even the public television created under the influence of the Council of Europe is simply a government channel. Despite our request and demands for this channel to carry out its functions properly, it doesn't allow any free access. The Council of Europe, which trumpeted the creation of this station as its triumph, is silent today about its actual content.

The authorities in Azerbaijan closed almost all financial sources for the opposition and the opposition press. The freedom of journalists to create independent media is also non-existent. In this situation, we do not feel the support of international organizations. There is cooperation with NGOs in the media sphere and sometimes even large grants of 1 million Euros are awarded for media watchdog projects, but not for independent media itself. A watchdog is useful but not as crucial as independent media in authoritarian regimes.

Beginning in 2003, independent parties and newspapers tried to establish an independent satellite television but in order to begin it needed several million Euros—a huge amount for us although not a huge amount for European or American institutions. Instead, the USAID offered huge grants to both independent and government-affiliated NGOs, without distinction. There was a huge scandal when \$1.5 million was offered to the NGO of the head of a parliamentary commission who is very close to the presidential administration. We don't know how this money was spent.

This is the situation in a few words. We have a few newspapers that try to stay independent and some that represent opposition views, but our main hope lies in social media. What we write there is read by a larger number than readers of independent newspapers and so far the authorities haven't limited social media. Now, however, it is trying to introduce a requirement that anyone commenting on Facebook must enter their data from their internal passports. This would be tragic. People wouldn't express their views freely.

The situation of print media is similar to other types of freedom in Azerbaijan and in other post-Soviet states. We have quite a peculiar situation. Everyone remembers that in the Soviet times people were prevented from leaving the country. Now, all rights are violated except the freedom to travel abroad. People can leave easily and that would be considered a good thing by the authorities.

### **GÁBOR DEMSZKY**

I wanted to comment on Maciej Strzembosz's presentation. I agreed with his prescription for creating interesting television programs and I think his ideas are well formulated. But this approach is valid only in normal circumstances, where the media is free and not the opposite, where it is fully controlled by the government or by different ruling circles of family and friends. Ask Sergey Duvanov about the Nazarbayev family control over national television and other media; ask Arkady and Maria Dubnov about the Putin mafia's control of Russian media; ask Hungarian experts about the situation of media in our post-communist mafia state. I

disagree with you that the politicians don't know how to use media. These so-called politicians know exactly how to use the media.

In Hungary, the law passed by Fidesz created a new media authority controlling all the broadcast frequencies and overseeing publications. It give the frequencies to Fidesz allies. There is one radio station and one television not controlled by Fidesz; it makes for a media ghetto. Fidesz creates messages through its machinery. You can hear the same messages at all the stations because there is a centrally delivered message. The law was condemned by the State Department, the EU, and the European Parliament,<sup>1</sup> but no one is actually doing anything. In fact, the opposite: the EU is providing huge subsidies.

### **MILJENKO DERETA**

I agree: what Maciej proscribes is possible in normal situations but today we heard the story of the madhouse in Russia. In Serbia there is a similar madhouse. The current prime minister was the Minister of Information during the NATO bombing campaign when Milošević imposed martial law in Serbia. He is today as efficient as he was then in controlling all information that is distributed. Every morning he calls the journalists to a press conference to tell them the main news stories they should report on. He forbids any ministers from going on non-preferred media channels. At press conferences, he is distributing questions to journalists that may be asked and throws a tantrum if a question is asked that is not on the list. This is all seen by the public. But there is no reaction: the media is all controlled and journalists are blackmailed and trying to keep their salaries. They have nowhere to go. The top two newspapers are owned by former secret police officials and those tabloids announce who is going to be arrested and even publish transcripts of interrogations by police.

There is also a monopoly over advertising. It happens in Hungary, too, and the media accepts conditions on what it broadcasts or prints in order to get advertising, to survive. So, while there may be a private television station, to get advertisements it can't say certain things. All this is happening in front of our eyes and no matter how much we criticize it nothing is changing. During the recent floods in Serbia, the government arrested people for sowing panic for posting messages on Facebook with information on what was going on. The European Commission did finally step in to tell the government it couldn't arrest people for posting messages on Facebook.

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<sup>1</sup> In July 2013, the European Parliament accepted the report of special rapporteur Rui Tavares that was highly critical of the Hungarian government's human rights practices and compliance with European human rights standards, especially the adoption of the Media Law and constitutional changes. — Editor's Note.

The support for independent media does not exist now in Serbia so what we are doing is discussing the best way to disseminate information. People are lacking information. The independent media circulation is now very low. In the 1990s, one of the hopeful things we had were the small local televisions in each village. In Tito's times, these were for showing stories about local weddings but we used them as a way of spreading information. We are trying to find new points for spreading information.

As a former filmmaker, I am attracted to the idea of spreading ideas through television programs and films. But the problem is that the funding comes from the state. And the state uses it for its own propaganda. During Tito's time, we had very good quality films and the Black Wave film movement, which was very critical of the socialist system. Why did Tito allow funding for it? For one, it created the illusion that there was some level of freedom. But the second reason is that it kept those filmmakers politically quiet. They made movies and didn't make any problems. Only Dušan Makavejev was forced to move to the States for many years.

#### **IRENA LASOTA**

Somehow, I think we should keep some proportion. The situation in Hungary and Serbia is incomparable to what is happening in Central Asia—remember that Sergey Duvanov spent one-and-a-half years in prison and in Azerbaijan the list of journalists imprisoned for long periods of time is long. It is like comparing communism in the 1950s with that of the '70s and '80s. The differences are quite big.

#### **MILJENKO DERETA**

Yes, but I think it is not correct to minimize the problem in our countries. Nobody said that the situation is good anywhere. What we were describing though is the situation in an EU member, Hungary, and an EU-candidate member, Serbia. And pursuing independent journalism in Serbia is not without consequence. We can count in recent years three journalists killed for their reporting. No one knows about it outside Serbia.

#### **SMARANDA ENACHE**

Just to add to the picture. Control of the media can sometimes go beyond state borders. Harassment of the media in Hungary is exported to Transylvania to the Hungarian community of Romania. Business people associated with Fidesz own the newspaper *Marosvasarhely* in our city, Tirgu Mures, which has a large ethnic Hungarian population. Elek Szokoly, a participant here, used to be for years a columnist with that newspaper until he received a letter from the editor saying that his articles were no longer welcome because he was critical of Fidesz.

**MACIEJ STRZEMBOSZ**

I want to make my point stronger: government cannot control culture. Ask Osip Mandelstam. The government can kill the poet but not control the culture. If you think the government controls culture by owning media, you are lost. Get out of politics, then, because you won't do anything. During the communist period in Poland, everyone in the opposition knew that the good songwriter-singer was more effective than government propaganda. And that is the same today. If you find a good singer-songwriter, it will be more important than being elected to parliament. And Gábor is a prime example of what I am saying. For twenty years he was mayor of Budapest and it is half of the country. In fact, Hungary is the only country in Europe where the media is so highly concentrated in one city—90 percent is concentrated in Budapest. You were mayor of the city and you were responsible to create a culture for businesses to be independent and to be resistant to what Orbán is doing and you didn't do it when you were governing the city with a huge budget and had connections to the governing party in order to pass favorable legislation. In Poland there is the saying "the cloister lasts longer than the abbot," and you did not build the cloister.

When I hear people in Poland complain about censorship and that no one is giving them a chance, I tell them it is because they can't build anything. Today, international advertisers don't choose where to advertise on the internet, the internet chooses the advertisers. They have computer programs directing the ads. I am not speaking about Kazakhstan, but in Hungary an important part of international advertising goes automatically by computer programs. If young, educated people go to a site, the advertisers wanting to reach that group will follow. So go create such a site. It is not true in Belarus and Kazakhstan, but it is true in Serbia and Hungary. Then, there are certain rules of media. Television has a female-dominated viewership. Shows that appeal to women and that are established will not be cancelled. Orbán couldn't do anything about it. It takes years to develop, but it is possible to do it. The same with children's programming. You can use government propaganda against itself. If you had a children's program saying that true Europe begins in Kazakhstan, the government wouldn't do anything against it if it were popular. If that program were popular, you would have children growing up thinking they were Europeans.

In free Poland, I was blacklisted twice by public television. During the post-communist government, the public television chairman did it. I didn't blame him because he was a socialist and I was always anti-communist. And then Bronisław Wildstein from the right Solidarity government did it because I made fun of one of his programs on a blog. He said that as long as he was chairman of public television, Maciej Strzembosz won't be able

to do anything. But by then I was a producer of a show called “The Ranch” with five-and-a-half million viewers. Many spontaneously protested just the rumor of the program’s cancellation and it was renewed.

I want to make a bet with Gábor that if he really wants to do it and has a talented filmmaker, I will make a Hungarian-Polish co-production that will be totally against Orbán and he will be satisfied with it. The European Union has laws that must be implemented.

In Poland you could go to prison for printing a publication in the 1980s, but it was relatively easy and common to do it and I was involved with printing and distributing independent newspapers. There were 200 serious publications that were long-lasting and a 1,000 if you count the local publications. It is simply not true that you can’t do something in Hungary today. You can do a lot. It is simply much harder for someone who was in power to go back to the basement and start over.

### **GÁBOR DEMSZKY**

First of all, in Budapest, we were building independent culture. We spent more than 10 percent of our budget for culture. We owned fourteen theaters and built an independent library. We created jobs for creative artists and intellectuals. We did it partly due to tradition and partly due to the political orientation of people in Budapest. It was a more liberal city and Orbán and Fidesz lost the election in 2002 and 2006 because of Budapest. I disagree that we were not protecting and building up independent culture. The point is that the whole climate in Hungary changed when the law changed the media’s structure in favor of one ruling group. Yes, we can convince the one person who now controls film production in Hungary to do a film that is critical of Orbán, but the problem is with the structure. Film production is controlled by one person tied to Orbán.

### **MILJENKO DERETA**

Before telling our authorities what are the European Union standards, we must convince the European Union representatives in Belgrade that what is happening in Serbia is against their standards and that they should pay attention to it. Most often, they are just whistling away such concerns. Really, what I think you are not realizing is that Serbian politicians today have the support of European Union officials *not* to respect the standards because the European Union does not care.

### **SERGEY DUVANOV**

If I understand Mr. Strzembosz correctly, he is saying “give me a lever and I will move the world.” Of course, Archimedes did not in fact have such a lever and he did not move the world. You did not consider one fac-

tor. You as a producer may do a lot. But the authorities targeted me personally as a producer of media. What happened in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan is not the same. And our authorities are feeling so threatened that they isolate themselves. I will not get inside this circle and you will not get inside without dealing with three KGB agents first. You think that you can produce something that is so brilliant and popular and there can be introduced a political message and everything is possible. It isn't.

### **MACIEJ STRZEMBOSZ**

I understand that it is not so easy. I am not attacking you. I understand your situation is much more difficult. But I think there are still ways to go around some of these difficulties.

### **VINCUK VIAČORKA**

In Belarus, there are no possibilities for bringing anything to the television. All the channels are state owned. As in Kazakhstan, television is considered a means to protect the state's security. There, anything endangering the standing of Nazarbayev is kept off the air. In Belarus, it is the same. There are five government channels. There is no independent radio or television. There may be non-governmental or non-state programming, such as music and comedy, but all of this is under censorship and there is no possibility of making political jokes that are anti-Lukashenka.

There are very few independent print publications left and they have small circulation. And only 5 percent of the population has direct access to internet. Still, people look for an alternative source of information. We know that 15 to 20 percent of the population actually uses the internet to seek alternative information. Considering everything, this is a good figure and it concerns the government, which tries to apply filters and shut down internet sites.

There is an alternative youth culture that uses social networks. But remember, the internet requires effort to actually look and find what you want. With television, you switch it on and you have the program all day long. And recent poll figures indicate that 70 percent of the Belarusian public trusts Russian television news, which is even more dominant in Belarus. Belarus's government television programming is more primitive and is not as professional as Russian media. It hardly covers anything on Ukraine, good or bad. It is focusing on Lukashenka visiting the truck factory. But Russian media presents propaganda on Ukraine with high professionalism. It is state of the art and much more powerful than Soviet propaganda.

What is urgent now is to save alternative sources of information for Belarus. Apart from the internet, there is the US-funded Radio Liberty, two radio stations broadcasting from Poland (Radio Racjya and



Euroradio), and Belsat, the satellite TV channel also operated in Poland. Belsat is essentially a Polish channel that has some U.S. and European support. It is accessible to 20 percent of the population and the government tries to restrict its spread by restricting sales of satellite receivers. Still, it reaches about 300,000 to 350,000 people. There is a rumor that Belsat will lose its funding. This channel is now the only possibility for broadcasting alternative culture and news. So I address my colleagues to please save this Belsat channel as well as these other sources of alternative information. There is a great need for them.

### **MACIEJ STRZEMBOSZ**

We will make sure it won't happen under either party in government.

### **ARIF HAJILI**

I must agree with Irena Lasota that in many post-Soviet states we have different problems. The development of democracy in these countries is not similar. In Azerbaijan, we have more than 100 political prisoners, dozens of whom are recognized by Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience. People are being apprehended regularly, not only because they take to the streets, as in the past, but now just because of expressing critical views of the government. The situation is getting worse. Ten years ago, Vincuk Viačorka and others came to Azerbaijan to observe the elections and at that time he could see me on television and meet me openly in restaurants. Even without any real democracy in Azerbaijan, I could say then the situation was better than in Belarus. Now, we are not allowed on any television and we are refused service in many restaurants.

Unfortunately, it is a mistake to think it cannot get worse. We thought Haidar Aliyev was the worst ruler and then came his son Ilham. He spoke English and had a lot of friends in the West. But in recent years, he simply disregards everyone in the West and is acting worse than Lukashenka.

The situation of media is definitely worse today. In 1989, hundreds of newspapers were established and many of them were independent. The most popular were opposition party newspapers. But year upon year, pressure has been building on journalists. Many were arrested. More than ten famous journalists were sentenced. Eldar Huseinov was killed. The government prevents the circulation of independent newspapers. Many kiosks refuse to sell them and it is illegal to sell them in open or public places. We don't have an independent news agency any more. In cities with 100,000 or more inhabitants, there are only one or two places to buy newspapers.

We have developed a social media network. There are more than one million people receiving independent information through Facebook. But Vincuk Viačorka is right to stress the importance of television. People in post-

Soviet countries are inclined to believe what they see on TV, even more than from their personal observation or relations. Belsat, therefore, is of the utmost importance for Belarus. In Azerbaijan, we discussed the idea of establishing an internet television in a neighboring state, like Turkey or Georgia, but this is impossible because of current Azerbaijan government relations with those states. Eastern European countries, especially Poland, are not dependent on Azerbaijan for oil. So perhaps Poland could offer at least an internet TV. Even twice or three times a week for two hours each day would be a great improvement and would be very popular.

In October 2015, we will have parliamentary elections. These are important because according to a new election law different parties will receive state budget funding if they are represented in parliament. So, please try to monitor our elections in 2015 in good faith. IDEE helped us a lot in 2003, when it informed the world what happened in Azerbaijan during the elections. All honest people remember the 188 IDEE election monitors. They were the only honest monitors, while the OSCE and other official delegations were less critical. If it is possible to monitor elections in 2015 it would be very important for us.

### **MACIEJ STRZEMBOSZ**

Irena asked me to describe what we did together for Cuba. We used money from the Polish Film Institute to translate into Spanish the most important Polish films and smuggled them to Cuba. We can do the same for you. If you are interested, we can translate into Belarusan, Azeri, Kazakh; we could do twenty movies for five languages. Piracy, of course, is something we fight all the time. But there are websites where you can synchronize subtitles for any movies. Youth will access such things if it is put on the internet.