



GENEVA CENTRE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC
CONTROL OF ARMED FORCES (DCAF)

WORKING PAPER – NO. 131

**WHO BUILDS CIVIL SOCIETY? CIVIL SOCIETY, MASS
MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY IN POST-COMMUNIST
COUNTRIES**

Dušan Reljić

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Internationale Politik und Sicherheit (www.swp-berlin.org)
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CIVIL SOCIETY, MASS MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY IN POST-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES¹

Dr. Dušan Reljić

Introduction

Media are often acclaimed as the “fourth power” in a democracy. They are hailed as the “watch-dogs” of democracy. As an integral force of civil society, the mass media is expected to play a prominent role in controlling the parliament, the government and the judiciary, in investigating whether private industrial and financial interests respect the law, sounding the alarm if the environment is polluted, and engaging in conflict prevention and resolution.² Mass media are omnipresent in modern times. Perhaps, therefore, people expect omnipotence from the media.

Television (and other media, of course) is certainly not, as one of the former chairmen of the US Federal Communication Commission stated, “just another appliance...a toaster with pictures”.³ Yet, indeed, media are first of all enterprises to be affected by the mechanisms of the market. However, at the same time, what the media produces is important for the public.. Communication channels that are established and operated by mass media are vital to society. Without free and balanced political communication, democratic institutions will corrupt. Without accurate business information, markets will

¹ This is a revised and extended version of the paper ‘Proliferation or Pluralism? Mass Media in post-Communist Countries’ presented by the author at the conference on ‘The Role of the Media in Public Scrutiny and Democratic Oversight of the Security Sector’, held in Budapest, 6-9 February 2003, organised by the Working Group on Civil Society of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF). Paper delivered to the Civil Society Building Project in Russia (CSBP) 2003 meeting in Moscow, September 2003. The CSBP is a joint project between the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) and the Foundation for Political Centrism (FPC).

² cf. Ian Leigh, ‘Civil Society, Democracy and the Law’, Speech at the Foundation for Political Centrism, Moscow, 22 May 2003, p. 12.

³ Quoted by C. Edwin Baker, *Media, Markets, and Democracy*, (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.3.

collapse. Without uninhibited information about new artistic trends, culture will degenerate.

These are all truisms. It is simple to spell out what the media should and should not do in democracies, especially in post-authoritarian countries which are still building democratic institutions. However, in this paper there is little of a normative approach. It intends to offer a basic analysis of the politics of media control and the media markets in post-communist countries.

The result should be an elementary overview into the complex interplay between public authorities, media owners and journalists in post-communist countries. It should offer a better understanding of the performance of mass media, as a central part of the civil society, in post-communist countries.

Yet there are limitations to this analysis. First, there is a problem with the term post-communist countries, or countries in transition. Central and Eastern Europe, and to an even greater extent the former Soviet Union, are anything but uniform when it comes to political liberties, economic development, media structures, cultural progression and the expansion of civil society organisations. Therefore, little more than a basic matrix can be applied when aggregating empirical evidence to determine the state of the media in post-communist countries – a region spanning over twelve time zones.

The second problem is the very concept of civil society. What is it? Something, to use a German proverb, neither fish nor meat (*Weder Fisch noch Fleisch?*). Is civil society essentially constituted by noble and unselfish groups of people concerned with the “public interest”, rather than commercial gain, but with a sound distrust of the state?⁴ Let’s be frank: in many post-communist countries the concept of civil-society is still foremost associated with western democracy assistance because, evidently, most, if not all, non-governmental organisations would not survive without external financial assistance. In the case of the media in post-communist countries, it is obvious that the public does not perceive the most important non-governmental media to be working in

⁴ cf. Leigh, p.3

the public interest. Most mass media are regarded as political instruments of the government or particular interest groups.

Activists in non-governmental organisations, in the “third sector” are, for instance, often ridiculed in Albanian as “*Sorosani*”, meaning off-springs of George Soros, the New York philanthropist. If they are not considered outright to be foreign-paid elements, then there is certainly a wide-spread perception of civil society in post-communist countries as a kind of Western export meant to create problems for the democratically elected government. Many people in post-communist countries suspect that the reason the West would support NGOs, mass media and other segments of the nascent civil society, is associated with the Western conviction that there is only an imitation of democracy in the East. Democratic elections sometimes produce undemocratic politicians, or at least politicians who are not in accordance with the taste of some people in the West and, in fact, also in the East. In other words, western sponsored civil society organisations should help cover the democratic deficits of east European societies.

Even worse, many observers believe that, in spite of much Western money being poured into democracy programmes, civil society organisations are largely irrelevant for the so-called target societies. As if the people in the aid business and the majority of Russians, Ukrainians, Serbs or Albanians and other “new democrats”, are simply sitting in two different trains, on two different tracks, with no intersection?⁵

Thirdly, there is dissatisfaction with the performance of mass media in established democracies. People, generally, do not believe in the veracity of information transmitted through the media. Governments often clash with mass media about sensitive issues (the on-going debate in the UK between the BBC and Prime Minister Tony Blair concerning the Iraq war). In some Western countries, civil society organisations, such as FAIR (Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting) in the US, monitor the media and often raise alarm about alleged or genuine bias in reporting. Objections are raised as to whether the

⁵ For this metaphor and a highly critical and inspirational analysis of ‘democracy and business’ see Steven Sampson, ‘What Really Happens When We Export Democracy: Experiences from the Balkans’, Paper presented at the Conference on Western Aid to Eastern Europe, Helsinki, November 28, 2002.

Western prescriptions to new democracies concerning the role of mass media are not, to a certain extent, hypocritical.

So, what could be the purpose of a debate about the role of mass media in building democracy if reality, also in developed democracies, is never attaining the noble norms set by political philosophers?

In this context, there is a lot to be said in favour of the approach advanced by the late 19th century Austrian social democrat Eduard Bernstein: movement is everything, the final goal nothing. It is important to know where the social movement should lead to, but it is even more important to keep society constantly moving forward to avoid stalemates and even regression. Transition has an open end: we cannot know where the transformation from authoritarian social structures and mentality will lead to in various post-communist countries and how it will change, in this case, the mass media. But we know that there is a prevailing mood in the society not to have a re-creation of the old situation under a new label. No one wants Pravda without Izvestija and Izvestija without Pravda again.⁶ Yet, it is also true that most people do not want CNN or Bild Zeitung either. All that can be done is to determine where the transition has led to in comparison with the normative outset. The discrepancy between reality and the norm, if there is one, offers substance for a political debate and, perhaps, political action to change the direction of the development of the media industry and the public sphere.

The normative starting points of transition in the media field

The importance of being a business:

A young journalist, who was later to become famous in a different profession, nourished a firm notion already before 1848 – the year in which the bourgeois revolutions paved the way for more civil liberties in Europe – concerning the basic condition for his trade to be really free to perform adequately its important social task. The privilege of not being a business was, according to Karl Marx, the precondition for the freedom of the press. A

⁶ *Pravda* means truth in Russian, and *Ivestija* news.

century and a half later, when the single-party Marxist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union were collapsing, their opponents, the anti-communist revolutionaries, were demanding exactly the opposite: the freedom of the media to be a business. After decades of state and party dominance over every segment of public life, and especially remembering the iron grip of the security apparatus on the public sphere, it was self-explanatory that only the elimination of state control – and especially the eradication of police oppression - over the media would enable freedom of speech.

Another common demand in the post-communist countries, over the past fifteen years, has been that the media sector be reformed according to the “European” model, with matching legal regulations and administrative practices across the region. It was assumed that this model would counter the perils of the return of state control while simultaneously eliminating the pitfalls of US-type commercialisation of the media and television above all.

Sporadically, one could also hear the demands that civil society wielded more influence over the media. Such propositions came primarily by the intelligentsia, who had been at the forefront of the struggle against the previous regime and rejected the thought of simply exchanging state domination for subservience to business interests.

Western media scholars looked at the back-ends of their book-shelves for dusty studies on the role of the media in development and modernisation – a topical issue in the de-colonisation debate of the fifties and sixties. The mantra in that discourse was quite similar, if not identical, to the normative role currently ascribed to the media in the process of transition. Half a century ago, Western scholars expected the population in former colonies to develop an "empathy" for, Western life-style through exposure to relevant messages in the mass media and to modernise accordingly.⁷ Nowadays, the

⁷ Cf. Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958).

media are expected to "transmit western democratic norms and role models to the public and thus act as a major agent of political re-socialisation".⁸

However, even fifty years ago it was easy to observe that the prevalent Western media products, especially in Asia, Africa and Latin America, were cowboy serials such as *Bonanza* and other similar American-made entertainment. In modern times, every accidental tourist will confirm that the most frequently shown foreign shows, between Albania and Kazakhstan were, if not Latin American telenovellas, American smash hits, portrayals of wealth, power and matrimonial crises, such as *Dynasty*, or the German crime evergreen *Tatort*.

The image of the West and Western values, as transmitted by the majority of its exported programmes, seldom relates to reality and, certainly, does not intend to propagate democracy, market economy and civil society. Evidently, the prevailing picture of the world in the media of post-communist countries is not an essentially European one. In post-communist societies, there is an overwhelming presence of American fiction on the screens. An analysis of the world-wide news-flow confirms that reporting on US politics, economy and culture remains a predominant feature in the international exchange of information.⁹

It becomes apparent that exposure to Western produced media content is definitely not the channel through which societies in transitional countries will receive a decisive impetus to modernise.

Additionally, the intelligentsia's ambition to exert an influence on the shaping and running of the new media system has obviously been thwarted. Non-commercial media outlets such as Open TV channels, representation of the listeners and viewers in supervisory agencies of major public service broadcasters, and related forms of civil society

⁸ Cf. Peter Bajomi-Lazar & Istvan Hegedus, *Media and Politics*, (Budapest: Uj Mandatum Könyvkiado, 2001), S. 8ff

⁹ Cf. Denis H. Wu, 'Systemic Determinants of International News Coverage: A Comparison of 38 Countries', *Journal of Communication*, Vol.50, Spring 2000, No.2, p 110-130.

representation in the organisation and creation of the public sphere have remained marginal in most post-communist countries.

The "European" model

The only operational criterion to measure the progress in the transition of mass media seems, therefore, to be the achieved degree of introduction of the "European" model. In essence, this would denote, on the one hand, the existence of a private media sector that is acting responsibly and respecting law, the code of journalistic ethics and the rules set out by independent broadcasting authorities and similar institutions of social control.

On the other hand, the "European" way of organising the media system also postulates the existence of the public service media, mostly in the field of broadcasting. Such media is meant to provide public interest programmes that commercial media could not afford, or, for other reasons would not offer, without the negative aspects of political meddling.

At this point, it is necessary to call attention to the fact that some analysts tend to perceive public service media as "autonomous state media organisations".¹⁰ Also, one has to remember that the "European" model evidently exists only as a normative prescription: "Public service broadcasting is more of an ideal, more of a consummation of citizen desires and an element of a perfected democracy."¹¹ Political interfering by the public authorities and political parties as well as the influence of economic interests, irresponsible behaviour by the tabloids and other deviations from the noble postulates are daily occurrences.

In reality, the match between the norm and actual media performance differs from one polity to another and depends on many interconnected variables.

¹⁰ c.f. *World Development Report 2002*, (Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 2003) p.186.

¹¹ Monroe E. Price & Marc Raboy (eds.), *Public Service Broadcasting in Transition: A Documentary Reader* (Düsseldorf: The European Institute for the Media, 2001), p.1.

Once the former regimes, to use another Marxian phrase, have landed on history's pile of rubbish, the audiences expect from the media perhaps not as much as to enlighten them, but at least not to tell untruths again. Specially when dealing with the security apparatus, which had sinned so much in the past. Nevertheless, critical, or even investigative reporting on the murky world of the "services" or the armed forces is still a risky business.

The politics of media control

More freedom for the press was one of the first visible changes after the breakdown of the old regimes. Actually, in the first years after the collapse of the single-party rule, the media was in a chaotic, unstructured state as much as the rest of the society. Only in the mid-nineties and later, were attempts made to regulate the media. Media developments inherently lend themselves to more public scrutiny. Therefore, the public was generally quick to react to violations of media freedoms. The Czech Republic, which was lucky enough to experience a tranquil regime change in 1989, astonished the world when on 3 January 2001, some 100 000 people took to the streets of Prague to protest against, what appeared to be, the political muzzling of the nation's public television.

Similar strife, though on a lesser scale, has erupted in Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovenia and other, more or less, "settled" new democracies. In Hungary in March 2001, an expert group from the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) accused the then government of Prime Minister Viktor Orban of having "weakened to the point of destruction" the national system of public broadcasting through "political manipulation and wilful neglect."

"Regrettably, even those countries closest to accession to the European Union have not been able to fully transform public media into a genuinely professional and democratic institution," said the IFJ.

Authorities in Central and Eastern European countries have typically moved to transform the state broadcaster into a public broadcasting service (PBS). The British Broadcasting

Corporation (BBC) and its German offspring, the Öffentlich-rechtliche Sender, served as models for reformed radio and TV systems in most countries of that region. The BBC's celebrated autonomy was the ideal but rarely achieved goal.

In most countries facing transition, fierce disputes have broken out over issues of the influence of television, as well as over the type of media perceived to have strongest political clout. Particularly, in times of approaching elections, there were frequent clashes over the influence of TV – because it was widely assumed that voters were prone to follow the lead offered by TV stations. It was usually difficult to reach an agreement on how national broadcasting councils, editors, and executive officers of PBSs were to be appointed and supervised. More often than not, allocation of frequencies proved a divisive issue. Politicians, journalists, and civil society activists often clashed over the limits imposed on foreign investors and producers.

The fact that these questions in many cases remain unresolved indicates that the struggle for influence in the post-communist electronic media is far from over. It will be most interesting to watch the outcome of the debate re-allocation of broadcasting licenses and frequencies in Serbia after the law on the national broadcasting council has finally been passed. Will Slobodan Milošević's pet TV stations, such as BK and TV Pink, that are now shamelessly supportive of the democratic government, survive or even prosper under new political circumstances? It is an alarming signal that the ruling parties have stood firmly behind the leading members of the new Broadcasting Council, although several well-known media experts resigned, pointing out that the president of this body had been elected contrary to the law.

The media in “unconsolidated presidential democracies” – and most countries in the former Soviet Union - have done far worse than its counterparts in Central and Eastern Europe. Countless incidents revealed that current governments can deal with outspoken media professionals as brutally as the previous regimes.

The still unresolved disappearance of Ukrainian journalist Georgiy Gongadze in September 2000 in Kiev is one spectacular example because it involves the highest

level of power at the state level. A headless corpse was later found, but there is still no confirmation that the body was Gongadze's. Since then, President Leonid Kuchma has been pressured to resign in light of audio recordings made by a fugitive presidential bodyguard, in which the president appears to order the abduction of Gongadze. In a bizarre twist in Ukraine in May 2001, the Kuchma administration claimed that there was no political aspect to Gongadze's disappearance: criminals killed Gongadze and, in turn, they were killed. This is the account the authorities offered to a sceptical public.

The most recent interpretation of the case blames initial investigators of gross errors. Nevertheless, a credible explanation of the events surrounding Gongadze's disappearance has not been provided for by the authorities. Several other journalists have lost their lives in similarly suspicious circumstances. When asked why there was not more foreign companies willing to invest in the Ukrainian media industry, one veteran editor in Kiev recently replied, "You know, journalists get killed in this place".

Media markets in the post-communist countries

A mind-boggling proliferation of broadcasters has occurred all over the post-communist realm. Even poor countries such as Serbia or the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia maintain hundreds of locally owned radio and TV stations with revealing names such as TV Pink or Pop TV. As a rule, they offer programmes of the poorest quality – they do not rebroadcast without permission or without paying royalties for foreign satellite channels. In Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and some other new democracies, there is also a well-established presence of foreign commercial television.

While authorities have paid a lot of attention to retaining some leverage over public service broadcasters, commercial broadcasters have, for the most part, been spared their efforts. One likely reason for this is that commercial broadcasting in Central and Eastern Europe has yet to prove that it will be as lucrative and influential as had been assumed initially. Whatever the case may be in future, up to now foreign-owned

commercial TV stations have been flooded with soaps, quiz games, B-movies and soft-porn with offensively long commercial breaks.

The largest television company in the region, the U.S.-owned Central European Media Enterprise Ltd. (CME), with stations in Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, and Ukraine and an audience of 110 million, announced losses in last several years that were partly connected to an ongoing legal dispute over ownership of the Czech TV station Nova, once the CME flagship. CME finally won the dispute and was awarded compensation of more than US\$300 million, more than the Czech state spends per year for its public health system.

It remains to be seen how the Balkan News Corporation, a company owned by Rupert Murdoch, will fare after having acquired, in 2000, the broadcasting rights to the former second channel of Bulgarian state TV.

Most print media in Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary swiftly fell into the hands of foreign investors. There are estimates that between 60 and 80 percent of the print media market in those countries is now controlled by primarily German companies. In south-east Europe, it is the German newspaper company WAZ from Essen that is the dominant regional investor – with full or part ownership of many daily and weekly papers – perhaps as many as two dozen - in Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria (with a leading position in Austria, as well). German Springer, Bertelsmann and Neue Passauer Presse, as well as the British Maxwell and Murdoch together with some Nordic companies now constitute the core of the print media industry in all of post-communist Europe, with the exception of Russia and Ukraine.

As a rule, foreign investors moved quickly to position their papers within the mainstream and thus avoid spectacular confrontations with the authorities. Many critics believe that this compromised the quality of investigative reporting. On the other hand, foreign ownership provided a solid shield against government intrusion in its extreme form, facilitated technological innovations and offered job security to their employees: "They

don't pay much, but they pay regularly," were the words of a Bulgarian journalist whose weekly was taken over by WAZ.

A novel approach, understood as part of democracy building through the media, has emerged in some post-conflict countries of south-east Europe where capital coming from philanthropic or other Western political motivated sources was funnelled to media pursuing pro-democracy and anti-nationalistic editorial policies. The US billionaire George Soros is the founder of the Media Development Loan Fund (MDLF) in Prague which has sponsored through soft-loans non-government media in many post-communist countries. Such loans and non-returnable grants from the Soros Open Society Institute, the European Union's Human Rights and Democratisation Initiative and other EU budget lines, the US government backed Eurasia Foundation, USAID, the Norwegian People's Aid, various German political foundations and other Western sources are, in many cases, still the most important pillar for the economic survival of pro-democracy media. In the recent past, the MDLF has become co-owner of some media in south-east Europe such as the Riječki Novi List and Feral Tribune in Croatia, or the famous B92 radio and TV station, once a symbol of resistance against the previous regime.

In Russia, with some 40.000 registered media outlets, and most other former Soviet Union countries, much of the print media, especially in outlying regions, still depends heavily on state subsidies - that is, if it is not owned outright by the state. There are huge privately owned media holdings as well which usually belong to some industrial oligarch. Some of them like Gusinski and Beresovski, who were the biggest media owners in President Yeltzin's times have been in the meanwhile ousted from control over their assets – which were initially bought through loans from the state that were never reimbursed. These two mega-oligarchs have fled Russia in the meanwhile. Some observers abroad believe that the recent arrest of Gusinski in Athens is connected to the forthcoming elections in Russia.

The growth of Gazeta Wyborcza, the leading Polish broadsheet, from a dissident paper into a joint-stock company remains one of the few post-communist media business

success stories in which foreign capital did not play a decisive role – although foreign political support, especially from the US, should not be underestimated.

“Berlusconisation” as the next stage of media “Europeanisation”?

Media transition, understood as the emphasis on private ownership and the promise to transform the former state-owned electronic media into public service broadcasters, yielded dissimilar results in different parts of the former communist world. The introduction of market mechanisms created new opportunities - and risks – for journalists and the media in post-communist societies. While private competition is certainly a most important corrective to state dominance in the public sphere, it is still not the ultimate guarantee that the noble goals of the freedom of the press will soon materialise in the predominantly pauperised world of post-communism.

In any case, private ownership remains the driving force behind the proliferation of mass media in post-communist territory. It has already produced a non-reversible change in the former Soviet Union. Unlike in the times of one-party rule, there is choice for the reader and the viewer, although it is often reduced to an assortment of low-end commercial offers.

In the former Soviet Union, and there is empirical proof for this statement, the state owned media are still firmly under control during elections by the parties in power.¹² Sensitive topics, such as security issues, are difficult to discuss in the media and attempts to do so still entail considerable risks for the journalists. Even so, it is not any longer lethal to criticise the army, the police and the "services" as it used to be in not so ancient times. With the exception of some neo-Stalinist polities in Central Asia, in most part of the former Soviet Union, the interested reader and viewer can find information critical of the powers that be. Depending on the internal political situation and the

¹² Gillian McCormack, *A Model of Post-Soviet Media Control in Elections*, (Düsseldorf: The European Institute for the Media, 2002).

pressure from the West, the rulers gauge how much liberty they will permit in the media channels.

The initial ambition, the "Europeanisation" of the media, still continues to be a distant goal in most parts of the former Soviet Union. With great speed Russia (and Ukraine that, in many aspects, demonstrates copycat similarities to Russia) has moved from an initially anarchistic media situation after the collapse of the empire towards re-asserting formal and informal control mechanisms by the Kremlin and many lower levels of the power over the media.

The situation is far worse in the majority of Central Asian countries that are firmly in the grip of neo-authoritarian leaders who do not hesitate to infringe heavily the freedom of the press. The three Trans-Caucasian countries are trapped in economic misery, civil strife, lingering ethnic conflicts and unresolved wars which all reflects heavily on the plight of the media.

"Europeanisation" has become far more factual in those countries of Central and Eastern Europe that are pursuing a successful economic transformation and retain a political consensus about national priorities such as EU accession and integration into Euro-Atlantic security mechanisms. However, they are often at the verge of a new danger – the "Berlusconisation", a recently erupted European malaise, comprising the persistence of government control over TV, private monopolies in the broadcasting industry, strong overt and stealth collusion of business interests and media ownership, blatant partisanship in the media and other flaws.

The Western Balkans area – actually former Yugoslavia and Albania – displays a confusing mixture. Not so recently leading media outlets in Serbia, Croatia and other parts of the region were part of a huge propaganda and hate machinery closely reflecting the whims of their autocrats. Although all countries in the region have democratically elected new governments and have proclaimed their willingness to cast away the nationalistic past in favour of the European future, political and economic stability is far from guaranteed. As always, media reflect this precarious state.

Liberal news magazines, (glossy imitations of Western tabloid magazines), try to gain ground against nationalist and populist pamphlets. Laws on public service broadcasting are adopted all over the region – but their implementation seems to over-stretch the political elite's enthusiasm for democracy. WAZ, Bertelsmann and some other mostly German and Austrian investors have bought off huge chunks of the print media market – but their local products such as Politika in Serbia or Jutarnji List in Croatia only faintly resemble the mainstream West European press. The proliferation of mass media continues. Whether prolific quantity will transform to pluralistic quality remains to be resolved.

A concluding canine typology of the media:

Mass media are often called the watch-dogs of democracy. This is when the media, through investigative reporting, uncover misdeeds by the mighty and the wealthy. In such situations, they act in the interest of the public good and affirm their importance in civil society. They help build society's institutions and mobilise public opinion. This is how we would like the mass media to be.

However, mass media often act in other roles. The following is an attempt to develop a typology of such roles using analogous metaphors from the canine world:

Some media are definitely the pet-dogs of the mighty and the wealthy. They offer nothing but praise for their masters. State-owned television, radio stations and newspapers usually fit this description, as do privately owned media that avoid any trouble. They are part of the imitation of democracy in some countries. This is how we do not want the media to be, but more often than not, this is how they are.

On seldom occasions, the media act as fighting dogs, similar to pit-bull terriers. A lot of what one can see before elections in many post-communist countries resembles this. Yet recently, in Serbia, there were examples of television and print media acting in the interests of organised crime groups that were trying to bring the state into submission. It is a danger for democracy for such mass media to be unleashed on society.

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Established in October 2000 on the initiative of the Swiss government, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) encourages and supports States and non-State governed institutions in their efforts to strengthen democratic and civilian control of armed and security forces, and promotes security sector reform conforming to democratic standards.

The Centre collects information and undertakes research in order to identify problems, to gather experience from lessons learned, and to propose best practices in the field of democratic governance of the security sector. The Centre provides its expertise and support, through practical work programmes on the ground, to all interested parties, in particular governments, parliaments, military authorities, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and academic circles.

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Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF):
rue de Chantepoulet 11, PO Box 1360, CH-1211 Geneva 1, Switzerland
Tel: ++41 22 741 77 00; fax: ++41 22 741 77 05; e-mail: info@dcaf.ch;
website: www.dcaf.ch

This volume makes a significant contribution to the debate about the development of post-communist civil society by focusing on its alleged 'dark side', i.e., on the groups that are excluded from 'civil society' on both conceptual and normative grounds. The chapters, written by specialists in the field, explore in rich empirical detail the complexities involved when such groups - like the skinheads in Hungary, the farmers' 'Self Defence' movement in Poland or the war-veterans in Croatia - challenge the state, engage in community activism, or get involved in p Post-soviet civil societies often refer to "œlegacy of 1989" and simultaneously criticized for being weak and fragmented, not being able of fulfilling its obligations, and most importantly - for not responding to populations' needs. Many surveys highlight the important role of international assistance in building civil societies, and it's widely accepted that common historical experience have caused similarities of the latter, in a negative context at most. The idea of institutional and ideological pluralism in post-soviet space was matched with formation-development of civil society that would contradict power monopoly, balance state institutions or complement public policy. One of the notable shifts in post-Soviet world politics is the almost unimpeded involvement of Western agents, consultants, and public and private institutions. As communist party apparatuses in those countries began to collapse by the late 1980s and in almost bloodless fashion gave way to emerging political forces, the West, especially the United States, was quick to intercede in their political and economic affairs. Labor Solidarity (Solidarity Center), which are chartered to support electoral and civil society initiatives in target countries. Last, the article considers how government and media management of public