

analyses. This position is addressed mainly to scientists with the basics in statistics, however it is a good base for lecturers who want to present another and/or new perspective for students.

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**Péter Bajomi-Lázár (ed.) (2017). *Media in Third-Wave Democracies. Southern and Central/Eastern Europe in a Comparative Perspective*. Paris, Budapest: L'Harmattan Publishing House, pp. 238, ISBN: 978-2-343-13011-8.**

Although this international collection of studies is a conference volume, it could make good use as a handbook on the current state of media freedom in the less fortunate half of the old continent. Editor Péter Bajomi-Lázár, distinguished scholar of comparative media studies, provides a broad overview — both theoretical and historical-factual — which convincingly supports his initial concept of “party colonization of media”. In recently-democratized societies, all attributes of democracy, including their media systems are still much more vulnerable than their ‘Western’ counterparts, no matter what sort of democratic institutions they have adopted on the requirement of the EU, claims Bajomi-Lázár. “Yet to date former communist countries still have a long way to go: they evince poorer democratic and economic performance, as well as low levels of media freedom compared with much of the rest of Europe” (forward, referring to the 2015 report of Freedom House). Among the main reasons for the differences between East/Central/South and Western Europe the author rightly mentions lesser density of population, belated industrialization and technological development, as well as unconsolidated political systems and more fragile economies in the East (South).

The book offers a multi-dimensional model, a coherent construction based on the theoretical framework in the first part and country case studies in the second. The first part elaborates on the three arguably most relevant aspects of contemporary media communication: national and international legal conditions (Judit Bayer), the changing relationship between producer and audience of journalistic content (Auksė Balčytienė) and the spread and influence of new media in the defined region (Dorka Horváth). Their statements and conclusions are regularly echoed and reflected upon in the case studies of the second part of the volume. One of the most significant achievements of this collection is breaking with the great illusion of the 1990s, which laid down the basis of practically all EU legislation, namely that democratization is a linear and irreversible process, and no political power will ever have the motivation to stop it. As a consequence of this belief, the EU lost its chan-

ces to efficiently interfere with the emergence of autocracies, as the protection of democracy as such now falls beyond the competences of the EU.

Still, the rather bitter conclusion of Judit Bayer related to media pluralism — “deficiencies cannot be changed by national measurements, but external intervention is needed” — sounds like an incentive for another discussion. It is not only the “big framework”, the legal foundations of the EU that are too old and rigid, incapable of furthering democratic processes in member states, but so are the traditional patterns of professional journalism, media on a grass-roots level. The outdated concept of informed citizenship is unable to shape public opinion in countries that recently went through societal transformation and “collective regrouping of societies” — as Balčytienė argues in her paper. According to Dorka Horváth’s excellently documented paper, the technological developments in media communication and the use of the Internet is more confusing than liberating in the context of unstable democracies or semi-autocracies. In other words, technology does not promote change in these societies but rather strengthens their traditionally present features.

The case studies of the second part cover seven countries — Greece, Portugal, Spain, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia — seven exciting stories of fighting for media pluralism and the freedom of the press, all with unclear and dubious results. These country reports written by insiders in a highly disciplined and credible manner all grant this volume a special value and make it a must-read for every scholar interested in the region, as the presented stories give a more precise insight into these countries’ recent history than any history-textbook. The concluding chapter by Josef Trappel provides a highly insightful and comprehensive synthesis of theory and cases, creating a new level of cohesion for the volume.

A comparative study in any academic field can follow two paths: a typological and a genealogical. *Media in the Third Wave Democracies* focuses more on the typological than on the genealogical side of the problem. The decline of liberal values and the emergence of home-grown authoritarian regimes in some of the post-state socialist countries follow a similar pattern: the legal-constitutional and institutional guarantees of media freedom and media pluralism prove to be insufficient. International organizations have no impact on local factors and public opinion, the independence of public service media is toyed with by political powers. Commercial media is sold by multinational media groups to national business oligarchs, who are closely related to politicians, while independent, ‘real content-providing’ journalism gets completely marginalized. The vicious circle is closed: the Habermasian ideal of publicity is left far behind, and the only thing media scholars can do is create new metaphors for describing parallel situations, such as “Berlusconiisation”, “Iberisation”, “colonization”, “media capture”, etc. Still, the volume leaves several questions open. It might need a different, genealogical approach as well, analysing social processes and societal reactions rather than describing the general “markings” of the existing parallelism. The Huntingtonian term “third

wave democracies” was coined at the very beginning of the 1990s to theoretically frame and explain the common origin of obvious similarities. It soon received heavy criticism for its American ethnocentrism and insensitive selection of indicators for measuring the level of democracy, and these days is less powerful for explaining the spread of authoritarian infection in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The rising illiberal autocracies are at least as complex, if not more complex than traditional democracies, and are ideologically and even “genetically” interconnected in a very peculiar way. The new Central/Eastern European as well as Southern political forces are highly susceptible to adopting Eastern “worst practices” (Putin, Erdogan or even Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore) together with the attached ideologies. Nowadays, however, even the most well-established Western democracies serve with ‘evil models’ — see for example the excellent analysis by J. E. Stiglitz *Toward a taxonomy of media capture* about the USA. ([https://www8.gsb.columbia.edu/faculty/jstiglitz/sites/jstiglitz/files/Capture2\\_Taxonomy-of-Media-Capture.pdf](https://www8.gsb.columbia.edu/faculty/jstiglitz/sites/jstiglitz/files/Capture2_Taxonomy-of-Media-Capture.pdf)).

Another related question is how new autocracies create their “bad” or “obedient” public, and how it is possible that the level of dissatisfaction of democratically-minded people in these countries never reaches a critical threshold. Attempts are made in the discussed volume to shed some light on these issues, although a more critical perspective on the correlation between social trust in international (mostly EU) institutions and the role played by multinational capital and its impact on local economies (and also media) might provide a more inspiring frame for analysis.

This volume is certainly a valuable contribution and will be of particular interest to those working in the field of comparative social sciences related to Southern and Central/Eastern Europe. *Media in the Third-Wave Democracies* convincingly demonstrates the local effects of global trends in media pluralism, and at the same time provides a rich basis for further analytical work on the correlation between politics, economy, technology, and society.

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