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The Role Perception of Eastern European Journalists. A Qualitative Analysis

Abstract: This paper focuses on present-day journalism in Eastern European countries, based on 66 guideline interviews with editors and editors-in-chief in Bulgaria, Lithuania, Romania and Russia who were asked about their careers, their working conditions and their role perception. Using the concept of journalism cultures, the paper focuses on professional identities of journalists in these four countries. The main findings of the research can be synthesized in the following three main ideas: (1) there is a tendency at the cognitive level to provide informative journalism, (2) there exists a strong orientation toward the needs of the audience, and (3) the economic situation influences journalistic work. Role perceptions are related to three different generations of journalists: those integrated into professional life before 1989, those who entered the profession in the early 1990s and those who entered the profession since the mid-1990s.

Keywords: journalism; role perception; transformation; Eastern Europe; professional identities.

1. Introduction

This article deals with journalists in Eastern European countries, based on 66 guideline interviews conducted with journalists from Russia, Romania, Bulgaria and Lithuania, who were questioned about their careers, their working conditions, and their role perceptions. The study is based on the grounds that the media play a vital role in the process of democratization and that journalists codetermine the ways in which the media live up to this role. Research on the *transition* or *transformation* of Eastern European countries is especially strongly developed in the field of political science. In the majority of cases, *transformation* is seen as being equivalent to the modernization of society, following the pattern evident in Western countries. On the one hand, the role perception of journalists can therefore be taken as an indicator of how far this catch-up race has advanced; on the other hand, journalists are the drivers of change because they can promote transformation and consequently democratization (Mills, 1999).

The change experienced by the media in Eastern European countries is indeed much more complex than that indicated by the term *transformation*. During the past 20 years, media systems have changed in both Western and Eastern Europe. The tendencies toward commercialization and digitalization, and the rise of the Internet, are the strongest directions in this development. We face a differentiation of the media and a dramatic change in media consumption habits. It is obvious that the role perception of journalists would be influenced by these developments. Against this background, a glance at Eastern Europe is fascinating for

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four reasons. First, Western norms were imported into countries in which a completely different understanding of journalism had existed, based on media systems serving the interests of the ruling communist parties. Second, some of the journalists working in Eastern European countries were trained in their job before 1989; consequently, they are likely to have a different role perception to that of their colleagues from succeeding generations (Pasti and Pietiläinen, 2008). Third, Western norms stem from a time that pre-dates commercialization and digitalization, yet they are used today to evaluate the degree of development in Eastern European countries (good Lithuania, bad Bulgaria, and worst Russia). Fourth, the countries of this region are geographically and culturally diverse, even if researchers place them under the generic umbrella of Eastern Europe.

In the context of these four reasons, the present article deals with the role perception and professional identities held by journalists in Eastern European countries two decades after the political turnaround, their working conditions, and the main factors that determine their role perception and working conditions. To this end, the transformation process experienced by the media in these countries since 1989 is outlined in Section 2. Employing the concept of journalism cultures, the research design is developed in Section 3, and the key methodological decisions are explained in Section 4. Subsequently, the results are presented as five theses.

2. Transformation of journalism in Eastern European countries

Although the intent of journalists toward democratization is not to be doubted, previous research that focused on transformation in Eastern Europe only marginally integrated issues associated with this topic. The common questions were about media ownership, the stage of foreign investments in the media landscape, media laws and how political elites influence the media (Mills, 1999; Coman, 2000). The exceptions in this regard are case studies that examined, for example, the dangers faced by the journalistic profession in Russia (the case of Anna Politkovskaja) or links between journalism and corruption (the case of Romania). Most of these studies used documents, interviews with (Western) experts or (seldom) with journalists from the region of interest. In recent years, some studies (mainly quantitative) have considered the role perception of journalists in countries from the region (Wu et al., 1996; Pasti, 2005; Volek and Jirak, 2007; Vasilendiuc, 2008; Pasti and Pietiläinen, 2008). Some international comparative studies have gathered data from Eastern European countries; however, the central issue in these cases was not the development of journalistic cultures or the role perception of journalists in Eastern Europe (Hanitzsch, 2007).

The literature describes three stages in the transformation of political institutions: the end of the autocratic regime, institutionalization, and finally democratization and the consolidation of democracy. Liberalization of the media market started with the rise of independent newspapers in the first days after political change, the introduction of private radio and a dual television system, which proved to be somewhat problematic in countries such as Romania and Russia (Pasti et al., 2008). For the majority of Eastern European countries, these processes took place in the 1990s. After 2000, they faced a strong infusion of Western capital into the media sector (especially in Lithuania, Romania and Bulgaria), a tendency toward commercialization and the rise of the new media (online publications, cross-media work, etc.).

The newly established media organizations required professionals for their operation. Some of the few journalists that once worked under the socialist regime in a state- or party-

controlled media system continued to work as journalists after the political change, whereas others moved to different fields. In the new situation, journalist positions became occupied by retrained professionals with no journalistic education who largely learned their trade while on the job. Some attended courses and trainings sessions that were conducted mainly by Western media. In the early 1990s, a new generation of journalists, with less professional experience and education, entered the media organizations (Mills, 1999). The status of journalistic education changed in the late 1990s, when a large number of academic programs became established and their alumni entered the market. This development gave rise to a heterogeneous population of journalists with contrasting habits, attitudes and professional definitions (Gross, 1999; Coman, 2000).

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical background to this article is based on two main concepts: the role perception of journalists and journalism culture. The concept of the role perception of journalists entered communication science via sociology, and can be defined as the entire set of expectations that other people have from the holders of a certain social positions journalists in the present case. The self-perception is related to the self-expectations of journalists in their professional life, which determine their attitudes and behavior. It is widely accepted among the scientific community that the way in which journalists understand their role influences the way in which they interact with news sources, and the way in which they select and present the news (Donsbach, 2008).

The first study on the professional orientation of journalists was conducted by McLeod and Hawley in 1964. Over the following decades, this research stream continued, with several typologies being identified (Patterson and Donsbach, 1996; Weaver, 1998): neutral vs. participative (Cohen, 1963); gatekeeper vs. advocate (Janowitz, 1975); neutral vs. participants (Johnson et al., 1976); bloodhounds vs. missionaries (Köcher, 1985); information disseminator, interpretative-investigative and adversary (Weaver et al., 1991); and signaler, common carrier, watchdog and public representative (Patterson, 1993).

In addition to the journalists' role perception, a second concept should be discussed here: that of journalism cultures. The theory of distinct journalism cultures stresses the pluralism of journalistic practice and value systems, and rejects from the start the idea of a universal journalism. Even if the globalization process is carried by the media, a complex connectivity between local identities and cultures is reflected in different journalism cultures. Journalists with the same socio-demographic profile (age, gender, education) can have different role perceptions because of the different socio-political context of the countries in which they work. Central to the idea of journalism culture is the identity of the journalists and the relationship between journalism and the cultural context. Journalism culture is defined as the specific cognitive and evaluative cultural patterns that shape the journalists' reality perception as meaningful and means a collective knowledge system that prescribes the way in which journalists act. This symbolic order has three dimensions:

- the cognitive dimension (journalists being influenced in the way they see reality, which can be translated into news selection),
- the evaluative dimension (the role perception of journalists), and
- the dimension of performance (journalistic practices).

Journalism cultures can be related to territory if culture is defined as a geographical space; can be essentialist if related to the race, ethnicity, age or education level of individual journalists; and can be lifestyle-related, value-centered and organizational (related to the corporate cultures of media organizations). The majority of research on journalism culture has focused on territorial cultures, comparing different countries (Hanitzsch, 2007).

Hallin and Mancini (2004) developed three models of journalism cultures: the Mediterranean Model of Polarized Pluralism, the North European Model of Democratic Corporatism and the North Atlantic Model of Liberalism. Even if these types were not originally developed for Eastern European countries, Hallin and Mancini commented on the way they might be applied to the region. The present study analysed role perception in countries with different journalistic cultures according to Hallin and Mancini's theory. For example, Romania and Bulgaria are close to the Mediterranean Model, with political influences evident in newspapers, and the late development of mass media and professionalism in the field. In contrast, Lithuania, like all Baltic countries, is closer to the North European Model of Democratic Corporatism, with a tendency toward neutral commercial journalism and the early development of the media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pp. 67–68). In addition to the above differences, a general tendency toward commercialized mass media and a journalism that provides professional, neutral information (as characterised by the North Atlantic Model of Liberalism) can be observed in most countries worldwide, as proposed by Hallin and Mancini.

4. Method: Guideline interviews with Eastern European journalists

The decision to undertake guideline interviews was based on the theoretical background. The concept of journalism culture focuses on the relationship between journalism and the cultural context. Qualitative methods are superior when it comes to the meaning of certain forms of social practice because the interviewees have the opportunity to speak unhindered about their life story, personal environment and working routines, and about their attitudes to the job and future perspectives. In such an open conversation, it is easier to obtain the meaning that journalists attribute to their actions.

4.1. Theoretical sampling: Selection of the interviewees

In every qualitative research design, it is difficult to define the selection procedure and the scope of the results. Guideline interviews assume that the interviewee is able to and wants to talk about his/her life. Hard-working people and those not interested in the subject are generally not willing to cope with the stress of an interview. Accordingly, qualitative methods can describe typical patterns but not reveal the distribution of certain patterns in the population. Nevertheless, the interviewees were selected according to the procedure of theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Lindlof, 1995, pp. 126–131). This procedure is based on the grounds that there exist a finite number of forms of practice in journalism. To analyse a journalistic culture, the interviewees should represent as many different variants as possible.

The selection procedure started with the concept of journalism culture, as outlined in Section 3. First, countries were selected which had entered the transformation process in 1989 with different political, economical and cultural conditions and which therefore show up in the literature in different “slots” (see Motyl, 2001; Gati, 1996). It is widely accepted that the Baltic

and Eastern Middle European countries are more advanced, in economical and political terms, than are Romania and Bulgaria in Southern East Europe and that there exists a gap between all these countries and the former Soviet Union countries (in Europe: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia). The actual selection of the countries for study depended on whether native interviewers were available, as they enjoy better access to journalists and create a conversational atmosphere which removes any pressure that journalists might feel when having to justify their work practice. in the presence of a Western interviewer. The interviewers used in Lithuania, Bulgaria and Russia originated from these countries but studied in Germany and were prepared there (by attending a seminar) for the interviews. The interviewers used in Romania attended a similar seminar held locally at the Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca.

Since the leading media and in this case most of the political and economical coverage are especially vital for transformation and democratization, the selection concentrates on a sample of the most important daily newspapers and TV stations, editors-in-chief and the departments named above. Furthermore, the interviewers were asked to assess the following two factors: gender and professional age (i.e. journalists who entered the job before 1989, between 1990 and 1995, and after 1995; see table 1). The dominance of young journalists in the sample reflects the fact that Eastern European editorial rooms are currently dominated by young journalists.

Table 1. Structure of the sample.

	Total (female)	Start before 1989	Start 1990-1995	Start after 1995
Bulgaria	14 (6)	3	5	6
Lithuania	13 (5)	3	4	6
Romania	24 (13)	4	7	13
Russia	15 (3)	6	3	6

4.2. Recruitment, interview organization, and analysis

The interviews were conducted during 2007-2010 by students who took part in an advanced seminar in which the role perception of journalists was introduced and where the interview guidelines were developed. The guidelines were only intended to present the topics to be discussed, thereby providing the interviewees with the opportunity to state their own opinion and to set a primary focus. The three ranges of topics are based on the concept of journalism cultures:

- *Curriculum vitae* and career: sociodemographics, socialization, current life situation;
- Working conditions: position within journalism (resources, working hours, relation to colleagues), autonomy (editorial pre-settings, influences of advertisers, other interest groups);
- A typical workday and role perception: tasks, aims, image of the audience, conception of media effects, ethical principles.

One condition of the study was that the interlocutors were not familiar with each other prior to the interview. In most cases, the recruitment began with a request to the editorial department. The interviews, which usually took between 60 and 90 minutes, were recorded. For every interview, a transcript was prepared to note any peculiarities and information about the

interviewee. Furthermore, the following sets of closed and open categories were developed to exhaust the possibilities provided by the interview material, as well as to ensure the material could be evaluated (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Lindlof, 1995):

Closed categories:

- Sociodemographics, socialization, career, life circumstances;
- Position within the media field: terms of employment (position, salary), working hours;

Open categories:

- Functions of journalism within society: What types of tasks does the interviewee attribute to journalism and what image does the job have, in his/her opinion?
- Influences: advertisers, politicians and political parties, other interest groups;
- Self-perception: tasks, aims, image of the audience, conception of media effects, ethical principles.

The open categories aim at a portrait of the interviewee, an interpretation according to the concept of journalism culture. The closed categories were established to explain the differences between individuals. To minimise subjectivity, the interviewers were also asked to interpret the material (in the form of a term paper or Master's thesis).

5. Findings

5.1. Eastern European journalists have similar motivations and a similar habitus, to that their colleagues in Western countries.

The majority of respondents had wanted to become a journalist since primary school or at least high school. Their "talent to write" was discovered by one of their teachers at school, as reported by two women from Russia (44 years) and Romania (28). The act of writing is a main motive, especially in the interviews conducted with journalists working for the press: "Ever since I can remember I wanted to write and write", said a Russian chief editor of a women's magazine (male, 67). A Romanian chief editor of a local newspaper (male, 60) said that to become a journalist, "You have to have a certain gift", and recommended the job only for "those who feel a certain attraction for it". Some of the journalists described that becoming a journalist was "a dream that came true" (male Romanian TV reporter, 30).

The reasons for becoming a journalist were similar among different generations. We discovered similar paths into the profession for the generation of journalists that entered the profession before 1989 and for the generation that entered the profession in recent years. Only those respondents who entered the profession between 1990 and 1995 stressed that the political change influenced their professional decisions. A Lithuanian reporter said she was impressed by the events after 1989: "Journalists are the only ones who speak the truth" (female, 34).

All respondents frequently use the media, especially the Internet, even the older journalists. They have good relations with their colleagues, but nevertheless spoke of strong competition among them: "Competition is the working engine for the journalist", said a Lithuanian reporter (female, 60). They love their profession because "journalists are in the middle of the events" and "never become old or tired" (female Lithuanian, 60). A Romanian radio journalist considered that the strongest motivation for her is "to obtain new information and bring it to my public. Journalism is like a disease, it is like a drug" (female, 40). Using the same reg-

ister of language, a young Bulgarian said, “Journalism is like a drug that you easily become addicted to” (female, 32). This “virus” (male Romanian, 32) helps journalists to forget the low salary commonly received by those in the profession: “The job is more than money. I could contribute to the development of democracy and freedom” (female Romanian chief editor, 40). Many of the interviewees used statements such as “people recognise me on the street” or “my mother is proud of me when she sees me on television” (male, 30).

In Eastern European as well as in Western countries, the profession of a journalist is associated with high levels of workplace stress, with irregular working hours, as it is “not a 9-to-5 job” (male Bulgarian, 25): “I go to bed with journalism and I wake up with it. Journalism is my life” (female Bulgarian, 40). This explains why some of the respondents stated that it is difficult to enjoy a harmonious family life. Only few of the young female journalists we spoke to have children, and some of them are happy for their mothers to help in caring for their children.

5.2. Eastern European journalists are committed to the ideal of the dissemination of neutral information

The ideal journalism, as a neutral disseminator of information to the public, has been intensively discussed in the literature, having strong roots in the Western tradition. In speaking about different types of geographically related journalistic cultures, Hallin and Mancini (2004) noted the origin of this type of journalism within North America and the United Kingdom. This tendency toward neutral information journalism was identified in many of our interviews, as demonstrated by the following statements:

- “I try to report objectively on every issue” (male, 30);
- “I am objective. I write only about things that really happened. I always go to meetings and I am present when something is happening. I try to be as correct and fair as I can” (female, 30); and
- “I try to report in an objective manner about every issue, to provide an objective and serious analysis of the events of the day” (male, 30).

The majority of the respondents declared that they are familiar with Western European journalism and journalists. Almost all of them had visited media organizations abroad or had taken part in courses held by Western journalists, not to forget the presence of Western media organizations in countries such as Bulgaria, Lithuania and Romania during the past decade. Western media groups (mostly from Germany, Switzerland, United States and Norway) brought with them certain editorial policies that supported the implementation of objective journalism.

For the particular case of Russia, based on qualitative research that consisted mainly of interviews with experts and guideline interviews conducted during 1998 and 1999, Svetlana Pasti stressed that “in contrast to the Western inclination towards neutral, detached, disinterested reporting, the Russian media and their workers have developed a participatory journalism” (Pasti, 2005, p. 104). The present interviews did not reveal this difference to any significant degree. There are tendencies toward an educator, advocate or missionary type of journalism in some generation-related cases, as discussed in the 5th thesis presented below. The journalists expressed their curiosity to obtain new information and their willingness to report such information to the public in an objective manner: “A journalist should inform and be like a bell, attentive to the problems” said a female (44), “Journalists help people to understand situations; it is not the attempt to convince the audience about the opinion of the jour-

nalists, nor the opinion of a person that is behind the journalist". In addition, "A good journalist means objectivity, mobility, professionalism, creativity" (male, 54). An explanation of this could lie in the development that took place over the past ten years, as Pasti's paper relies on interviews performed during 1998 and 1999.

5.3. Eastern European journalists are committed to their audience.

"We have a God. That is our reader" said a chief editor from Bulgaria (female, 40). "We have to stay connected. We live from the money that our readers pay us. I go home satisfied when I know that my audience is satisfied" said a Romanian chief editor (male, 60), and an editor writing on politics in Lithuania (male, 29) stated that, "I certainly write for my audience, which is my judge." These are only three of many vivid expressions that describe the relationship of the journalist with the audience. The attitude toward meeting the demands of the readers, viewers, and listeners was not only identified at the executive level, among the editorial board: a young Romanian editor shared the opinion that "the audience loves drama" (female, 29). This attitude affects the quality of journalism. As a Russian colleague complained, the orientation toward the preferences of the audience is dangerous in terms of content (the issues discussed in the media) and language (which is very simple nowadays). Some respondents considered that the audience is responsible for the increasing number of tabloids on the market, as it is a "politically tired audience", stated a female editor from Bulgaria, aged 32.

5.4. At a declarative level, Eastern European journalists benefit from having freedom of speech, yet in this context, the quality of media is endangered mainly by economic factors.

The majority of the respondents considered themselves to be free to write whatever they want: "I never faced the situation in which something was forbidden to me. I never wrote an article under orders" said a young Russian political journalist (male, 31). The journalists are aware that freedom of speech is something very precious that people had to fight for in the time of political change around 1989: "In the last fifteen years I have never faced the situation in which something that I wrote was not published" said a Russian chief editor (male, 44), "In the Soviet Union we had official censorship. Each media institution had an employee who worked as a censor."

According to the interviewed journalists, the main problem today is the economic situation: "There is no censorship, but there are still certain political and economic obligations" said a Russian journalist (female, 48). Neither on the advertising market nor on the audience market could media organisations earn the money required for a journalism consistent with Western norms. Even if the media are considered a force in Eastern European countries, the poor financial situation, which rarely allows investigative work, is a weak point. The interviewees spoke of cases of hidden advertising, of issues that are not allowed to be reported, of articles on demand and of invitations to various events with the intention of influencing journalists in a material way: "Compared with Western countries, we report on few issues" said a political journalist from Lithuania (male, 48), "We could overcome this problem if we had more money". This economic situation could endanger the independence and freedom of journalism, especially in the local media, as stated by a young journalist: "In Romania, everything is politically influenced, even health care. I can write what I want but this does

not necessarily mean that it will be published. Not only politics is a problem, but also advertising. We cannot attack company X because they pay for advertising in our publication and our salaries are paid from this revenue. You cannot hit the person that is practically paying you. The issue with politics and advertising is an unspoken secret.” (female, 29).

Another problem mentioned by the interviewees was access to public information, especially in the course of investigations. The research undertaken by journalists is blocked by a lack of communication with those in charges at public institutions. Even if some countries have special laws regarding access to public information and transparency in the decision-making process (as in the case of Romania), those required to observe such laws are somewhat uncooperative when it comes to journalistic investigations. A Bulgarian reporter (female, 27) stated that, “We can speak about the refusal to deliver information and about the difficulties of research. That is the worst that can happen: obstruction of our work.” An explanation of this obstruction could lie in the different speeds of development when comparing media with public institutions. Alternatively, the reluctance to cooperate could be a legacy of the mentality of state institutions toward providing information to the public under the communist regime. Although some progress has been made in reforming public administration in Eastern European countries, the attitude of bureaucrats toward journalistic work has shown little change.

The journalistic profession involves an element of danger. Some Bulgarian journalists even spoke about a bad working atmosphere due to threats being made by the criminal milieu. For this reason, some journalists practice self-censorship, as explained by a young Bulgarian respondent (female, 27): “Sometimes my colleagues and I discuss whether we should publish a story or not. If we publish it we might be hit by a car the next morning.” A young Romanian reporter told of how journalists from all the publications within a small city worked together in order to reveal a scandal in the public county hospital. Working together, especially in small cities where local media has few resources for research, can prove to be a good strategy in presenting new, objective information to the public and in providing protection from dangerous situations.

5.5. Role perception is related to the generation to which each journalist belongs.

This idea has been emphasised in previous studies on Eastern European countries (Pasti, 2005; Pasti et al., 2008; Vasilendiuc, 2007; Volek et al., 2007). Some of these studies considered the significance of two generations working together (in the case of Russia: Soviet and Post-Soviet generations), yet our research revealed three generations: those on the job before 1989, those who entered the profession in the early 1990s, and those who entered the profession since the late 1990s. Previous studies conducted in Eastern Europe revealed different typologies of journalists: neutral disseminator, interpretative and adversary (Wu et al., 1996); career approach, opinion-leader approach and investigator/advocate approach in the Czech Republic (Volek & Jirak, 2007); and informer, organizer and propagandist in Russia (Pasti, 2005; Pasti & Pietiläinen, 2008).

Without any claim of being representative of the entire journalistic population in the four countries considered here, we found that the typology of neutral information disseminator (that of the journalist willing to objectively inform his/her public, not to present his/her own opinion) is widespread among both generations: those who entered the profession before 1989 and those who entered the profession after this date. This finding is demonstrated by some of the definitions of journalism provided in the interviews: “As a journalist I consider it to be

important not to publish my own opinion, but to objectively inform my public; the public should form its own opinion” (male, 67). Some differences were observed between the two generations, with the older generation complaining about the quality of language used by today’s young journalists. However, the older generation still appreciates the younger workers, as revealed by a Russian chief editor: “The main difference between us and them is that we knew fear and they don’t know it” (male, 67).

The generation that entered the profession in the early 1990s has a different role perception to those who entered the profession prior to this time. For them, it was only possible to enter the workforce because of political change: “After the political change there was a need for young, engaged and politically untainted people” (female, 40) stated a chief editor from Bulgaria. The younger journalists consider it important as a journalist to publish their own opinions, not to simply believe in the “pure presentation of facts”, as related by an editor from Lithuania (male, 39). They strongly believe in the media’s role as a watchdog and are willing to move the audience “toward a political ideology” (female Romanian, 40). They often believe in ideals, consider that the media has political power, and know how to use it, especially because this generation is now in the ruling position. Some of them share the enthusiasm of the days following political change in 1989 and consider that this enthusiasm is not shared by the younger generation. They understand how to perform journalism of the missionary and advocate type. The presence of this type in the present-day Eastern European media is something that differentiates Western and Eastern European countries, if we take into account the results of some of the studies conducted recently in Western Europe.

6. Conclusion

Today, Eastern European journalists have similar attitudes toward their profession, working patterns and career development as those of their colleagues from Western Europe. With a strong commitment to an informative objective journalism, they share similar values. Yet there remain certain problems in this professional field in Eastern Europe. For example, the role perception of journalists in Eastern European countries is much more strongly related to the weakness of the current economic situation. Journalists feel certain economic influences, especially from advertising customers. For this reason, it is difficult to make any assumptions regarding the likelihood of improvements in the future, especially in terms of the current economic crisis. There exists a link between underfunding and a lack of independent journalism: those who cannot employ journalists for investigations are unable to obtain in-depth information.

Journalists share the opinion that access to public information should be improved. They seek greater transparency by state institutions, institutions that haven’t faced the same dynamic of change as that experienced by media during the past twenty years. Eastern European journalists from all generations have traveled to Western countries, have become familiar with the working style of their colleagues from the West, use Western media, and in some media organizations have Western European owners. Although the journalistic field has become professionalized in the past two decades (even if because of journalistic education), the mentality in the political field and in state institutions has not change at the same speed. Most of the bureaucrats who survived from the communist era are still young, and this will hamper progress toward information journalism.

In the sample of interviewed journalists, there exists a strong orientation toward the demands of the audience and a high degree of commercialization. The journalists identified this orientation as a problem regarding media quality. One of the relevant differences between typologies of role perception in Eastern and Western countries is the strong presence of the advocate type in Eastern countries, especially in the generation that entered the profession in the early 1990s and now holds top positions in media organizations. Among the relevant findings of the present study is the identification of three generations of journalists with different role perceptions, whereas only two generations were identified previously (Pasti, 2005). There exist similarities between the generation of journalists active in the profession before 1989 and those who entered the profession after 1995: both generations tend to perform the role of a neutral disseminator. The role perception of the generation that entered the profession in the early 1990s tends towards an advocative journalism. With the members of this so-called *middle generation* of journalists occupying leading positions in the media and being of the same age as members of the leading generation in the political field and in public institutions, the differences between the journalistic cultures of Eastern and Western Europe are set to continue for some time. These differences will also be encouraged by the weak economic basis for quality journalism.

Rezumat: Lucrarea de față analizează jurnaliștii est europeni pe baza a 66 de interviuri semistructurate cu jurnaliști și redactori șefi din Bulgaria, Lituania, România și Rusia cărora li s-au adresat întrebări despre condițiile în care profesează și rolul lor în societate. Utilizând conceptul de cultură jurnalistică articolul își îndreaptă atenția către identitatea profesională a jurnaliștilor în cele patru țări. Cele mai importante rezultate ale cercetării pot fi sintetizate astfel: (1) există o tendință crescută către jurnalismul informativ, (2) o orientare crescută spre audiență și (3) situația economică influențează munca jurnalistică. Definirea rolului și a identității profesionale diferă de la o generație la alta, jurnaliștii putând să fie clasificați în trei mari grupe: cei care au intrat în viața profesională înainte de 1989, cei care și-au început activitatea la începutul anilor 90 și cei care profesează după mijlocul anilor 90.

Cuvinte-cheie: jurnalism; autopercepție; transformare; Europa de Est; identități profesionale.

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