

TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE BULGARIAN MEDIA SYSTEM: TENDENCIES AND CHALLENGES

ТРАНСФОРМАЦИИ БОЛГАРСКОЙ МЕДИАСИСТЕМЫ: ТЕНДЕНЦИИ И ВЫЗОВЫ

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The transition to a civil society and market place economic relationships in Bulgaria have involved a number of challenges to the development of mass media. These include a general insufficiency of financial and technological resources, as well as a lack of professional standards. Media competition stimulated the first dynamic open markets in the country, which established well-developed media consumption patterns. However, although the public was offered a highly varied media menu, expectations that the media would aid the processes of democratization in a purposeful and effective manner proved unrealistically high. Media were in need of transformation themselves.

Tracing current political and economic developments in the country, this paper presents the challenges facing the contemporary

media system. Emphasis is placed on traditional media (press, radio and television). Tendencies aroused by technologically driven online media are outlined in several aspects: technological, economic, professional, regulatory, educational, scientific, and social.

Key words: *media, politics, challenges, tendencies.*

Переход к гражданскому обществу и рыночным экономическим взаимоотношениям поставили перед масс-медиа и ряд проблем. Среди них: общий дефицит финансовых и технологических ресурсов, а также и дефицит профессиональных стандартов. Несмотря на то, что болгарской общественности было предложено очень разнообразное медиа-меню и были установлены новые медиа-модели потребления, ожидания, что СМИ будут помогать целенаправленно и эффективно процессам демократизации, оказались нереально высокими. СМИ сами нуждались в трансформации.

Анализируя текущие политические и экономические развития в стране, в статье представлены вызовы перед системой современных медиа. Акцент ставится на традиционные средства массовой информации (пресса, радио и телевидение). Тенденции, пробужденные технологически ведомой интернет-СМИ изложены в нескольких аспектах: технологических, экономических, профессиональных, регулирующих, образовательные, научные, социальные.

Ключевые слова: *медиа, политика, вызовы, тенденции.*

Introduction

The period of transformation to democracy and a market place economy has posed significant social challenges to the population

in Bulgaria. The transition was slowed down by delayed legislation, aggressive political behavior and underdeveloped markets. All this caused rapid impoverishment, a high rate of unemployment and a loss of established social benefits such as free healthcare and free education. Thus the country entered the 21st century under the Currency Board (Raycheva, 2009). Among the major political achievements during this period of more than twenty-five years of transformation was the stabilization of the pluralistic political environment, the accession to NATO in 2004 and to the European Union in 2007.

Despite these achievements, the pace of development has not been satisfactory. In many parameters, Bulgaria ranks at the bottom of the list of the 28 Member Countries of the European Union. In 2014 GDP per capita was Euro 5,800 – less than half the EU-28 average (Eurostat, 2015).

Since the beginning of 2008, the Bulgarian income tax has been a flat rate of 10%, being one of the lowest income rates in the world and the lowest income rate in the European Union. As of January 2007, the corporate income tax has also been kept at a flat rate of 10% which makes it one of the lowest in Europe.

According to the World Bank, Bulgaria is an industrialized upper-middle-income country. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) amounted to Euro 42 billion in 2014. The average monthly salary was settled at 882 leva (Euro 451). The national currency – Lev (BGN) – is pegged to the Euro at a fixed rate of 1,95583 Leva for 1 Euro. The Lev is considered to be among the strongest and most stable currencies in East Europe (World Bank, 2015).

Data from the National Statistical Institute shows that the number of employed persons in 2014 was 2,166,199. The number of unemployed amounted to 300,900 and the unemployment rate in 2015 was 10.1% (National Statistical Institute, 2015a).

The Country Report on Bulgaria for 2015 by the European Commission states that the country is experiencing excessive macroeconomic imbalances, which require decisive policy action and specific monitoring. The Commission has made five country-specific recommendations to Bulgaria to help it improve its economic performance. These recommendations are in the areas of: fiscal consolidation, taxation and health; the financial sector; the labor market and wage-setting; education; and insolvency (European Commission, 2015).

The political system

During a period of a little more than twenty years, Bulgarian citizens voted twenty-seven times (on average, once yearly). Starting with the vote for the Grand National Assembly (1990), there were six presidential elections (1992, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, and 2016), eight parliamentary elections (1991, 1994, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2014), seven local elections (1991, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015), three European parliamentary elections (2007, 2009, and 2014), three referenda and the appointment of fifteen governments. Commenting on the political changes in the evolving European democracies, Lynda Kaid noted that the changes in the media systems and the uncertainties of government-media interaction raised even more questions for these new governments (Kaid, 1999: 2).

The new Constitution was adopted by the Grand National Assembly on 12 July 1991. Under its terms, Bulgaria is a Republic with a Parliamentary system of government. A multi-party political system has been established. In normative terms, political life is based mainly on the Constitution, the Election Code and the

Political Parties Act. After the country's accession to the European Union, election rules have been harmonized with the European Community legal framework – *acquis communautaire*.

In spite of the fact that Bulgaria has taken considerable steps towards democratization, the political system faces an immense challenge owing to its unclear identity, both at a conceptual and a representative level. The long years of one-party domination were replaced by an ever-growing host of new political parties, unions and organizations, which constantly split, regrouped and entered into coalitions, especially on the eve of upcoming elections. The breakdown of the bipolar model (socialists vs. democrats) with the aid of some newly formed structures of leadership, has failed to bring sustainability to the political system which is weighed down by difficult economic and social tasks. Gradually, the situation of social disintegration and shortage of social synergy has become a good environment for the revival of populism, primarily by non-systemic political parties. The model of democracy established in the country delegated the difficult tasks of transition mainly to the political elite, thus eliminating the broad participation of the people in the process of transformation. Although superficially heterogeneous, the political as well as the media environment (especially during campaigns) are still not fully aware of the parameters of pluralism, nor of independence. Thus, the media failed to meet expectations and to carry through their chance of contributing effectively to the process of social transformation because they did not seek its active participation (Gross, 2002).

On the other hand, politicians, too, failed to carry out reforms crucial to meeting the country's commitment to Europeanization and to satisfying the expectations of the people. Even the unique Bulgarian ethnic model, formed after long years of effort on the part of all ethnic groups and not by the contemporary parties and

politicians, has been put to abusive purposes. The ever deeper gap between leaders and society has proved a grave obstacle to gaining the trust of, and unleashing entrepreneurship, in Bulgarian citizens. The absence of distinct program platforms encourages inter-party migration and erodes the foundations of political pluralism, thus decreasing election participation: from 90,79% in the first round of elections for the Grand National Assembly in 1990, to 28,6% in the first elections for European Parliament in Bulgaria in 2007, and further down to 20,22% for the First National Referendum in 2013 (Central Election Commission, 2015). Slowly but steadily, Bulgarian electors have refused to yield to the instruments of political, survey and media propaganda, have refused to join the process of social imitation, and have acquired a position of active passiveness.

Professional inadequacy and bias of some political scientists, sociologists and media professionals is on regular display during campaigns. As a result, although considerable progress has been achieved in the audiovisual quality of political advertising products, the media system still fails to fulfill its major purpose during pre-election periods, namely, to inform society impartially and to treat participants in a political contest and their platforms on an equal footing.

Colin Sparks noted in 1998 that democracy in the modern sense of the world is literally impossible without the media (Sparks, 1998: 16). For more than of a quarter of a century political, economic and social upheavals significantly impacted the development of the mass media system in Bulgaria towards quick and flexible reactions to social processes. At the beginning of the transition period, the spirit of change was felt at the open meetings and rallies in Sofia for a full year. In the areas outside the capital changes were felt mainly because of television coverage. That is why the organizers of protest rallies in support of change in the capital made sure to march past

TV headquarters. The significance of television has been manifested in several critical situations over the years, including:

- the TV attack against President Petar Mladenov in 1990 that compelled him to resign; the resignation of the BSP Government headed by Andrey Loukanov in 1990;
- the mass media war launched by the UDF Government of Filip Dimitrov, which led to its toppling in 1992;
- the exit of the Government of Lyuben Berov (under the Movement for Rights and Freedom mandate) in 1994;
- the withdrawal of the BSP government of Zhan Videnov in 1996;
- the siege of the House of the National Assembly during a governmental crisis in 1997, which led to a radical power shift; the forced restructuring of the UDF government of Ivan Kostov in 1999, based on corruption allegations;
- the attacks that brought about ministerial replacements in the Simeon Saxe Coburg-Gotha government in 2005;
- the pressure that brought about ministerial replacements and in the three-party coalition (Coalition for Bulgaria, Movement for Rights and Freedoms and National Movement Simeon II) government of Sergei Stanishev;
- the constant correctives to the government of Boyko Borisov (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) and the wide coverage of the social protests which led to the early resignation of this government in 2013;
- coverage of the pressure inflicted by continuous social protests against the government of Plamen Oresharski (Coalition for Bulgaria) which also led to its early resignation in 2014 (Raycheva, 2013a).

In contemporary Bulgarian society, the media have gained a position as the main source of information about politics and as

a transmitter of its communication techniques. Along with this, developing under the conditions of new technological parameters and business models, they are facing the great challenge of retaining their social purpose in society. This task becomes ever more difficult to accomplish not only due to the multichannel character of communication, but also due to the growing selectivity of a fragmented audience, which turns into an active user, both a consumer and producer of information. Thus the media, and especially television, involuntarily or on purpose, impose on society its personal matrix and, in the process of coverage of world events, increasingly repeat the mantra of their own reality, removed from its genuine parameters. Interpenetration of the media, capitals and politics dangerous for democracy comes to the fore, and this leads to auto-censure and to a warped version of free journalism. Although the media system has drastically changed in a very short period, the lag-time in deregulation, commercialization and the neglect of professional standards have predetermined distortions in the normal functioning of the market and in the development of two interlinked processes: politicization of media and mediatization of politics.

The media system

Analyzing the 2008 public service media in 26 post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Karol Jakubowicz classifies them into four groups: competitive democracies, concentrated political regimes, war-torn regimes, and noncompetitive political regimes. Bulgaria is mapped in the second group – that of the concentrated political regimes (Jakubowicz, 2008). In 2015 Boguslawa Dobek Ostrowska counted Bulgaria as one of 22 countries

in Central and Eastern Europe characterized by a politicized model of media (the other three models are liberal-hybrid, media in transition, and authoritarian (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015).

The transition to a civil society and market economy in Bulgaria has also involved a number of challenges to developments in mass media. These include a general insufficiency of financial and technological resources and the lack of articulated professional standards. Media competition stimulated the first dynamic open markets in the country, which established well-developed media consumption patterns. Although the Bulgarian public was offered a highly varied media menu, expectations that the media would aid the processes of democratization in a purposeful and effective manner proved unrealistically high. Media were in need of transformation themselves. As Slavko Splichal contends, in contrast to demonopolization, which has made decisive progress, other fundamental prerequisites of media democratization – e.g., media differentiation, professionalization of journalists, access to the media – were far from being actualized (Splichal, 2000).

The turn away from single-party control and changes in the property laws were by no means sufficient circumstances to establish a cadre of professional journalists. Although the guild adopted an Ethical Code in 2004, it failed to build the mechanisms for sustaining ethical standards, and in many cases reacted inadequately to important and publicly significant issues, as well as to a number of professional problems (Union, 2004). Trends toward deprofessionalization and tabloidization accompanied the transformation period. A number of professional journalistic unions were established, but they failed to defend and enforce basic professional rights and responsibilities. Similar to politicians, former and newly hatched, journalists were not ready to fully shoulder their

new role and the concomitant responsibilities of a Fourth Estate in a society under transformation.

Following the profound democratic developments throughout all of the Eastern European countries after 1989, the tendency toward fundamental changes in the mass media system became irreversible. The new Bulgarian Constitution guaranteed freedom of expression for any citizens. Article 40 (1) specifically defends the freedom of mass media: “The press and the other mass information media shall be free and shall not be subjected to censorship” (National, 1991). Alongside the overall economic and political crisis of the time, the transformation of the mass media system developed through practical, trial-and-error efforts, rather than on a legal basis.

Of all institutions in the country, precisely the mass media helped the transformation to democracy and a market place economy in the fastest and most profound way. The processes of decentralization, liberalization and privatization began spontaneously, however with no sharing of common perspectives. In a short time a completely new journalism landscape was formed in which different patterns of media consumption and new advertising strategies were introduced. The emerging professional principles and styles of journalism were created and mastered ad hoc, in an atmosphere of turbulent events. It turned out that the media were fulfilling the dual function of transmitters of protest and accelerators of political change. The transition period has provided journalists with a strong hold on public opinion. Thus, the mass media system often operated as a Fourth Estate, influencing social attitudes, political opinions and decision-making on national priorities.

Although externally media pluralism has been established in the country, the existence of many media providers is not a sufficient guarantee of normal market functioning, nor of independent regulation; neither do they guarantee the provision of widely varied

and quality content. Research on the Bulgarian media environment by the European Commission, Transparency International, Balkan Media Barometer, IREX, Freedom House, and Reporters without Borders, abundantly criticizes the political dependency of the Bulgarian media. Unclear ownership and funding, attempts to exercise political and corporative influence, the inefficiency of the regulatory and self-regulatory mechanisms, the deficit of professional standards, compromise the concept of media pluralism (Raycheva, 2013a: 151-152).

Political pluralism and a varied media environment in Bulgaria still experience systematic difficulties. The still-in-the-making civil society is yet unsteady, and as such can not successfully provide a stable public basis for professional journalism. According to the World Press Freedom Index 2016 Bulgaria has dropped down to 113th place (among 180 countries), suggesting that freedom of speech and independent journalism are still unassimilated concepts for most media outlets and for many a non-governmental organization disbursing the funds of European and Transatlantic institutions (Reporters without Borders, 2016). Their activities prove erratic, limited and ineffective in the long run.

Many challenges were encountered in the process of establishing a new press. The early 1990s heralded the age of deregulation of the print media, leading to a tremendous change in the entire industry. Tight ideological control over the mass media was replaced by economic motives. Some factors such as the soaring price of newsprint, printing services and distribution expenses sped up the process of catering to audience expectations and needs rather than promoting narrow political interests. In this situation, it was quite natural for advertising to prosper and the profits from it became the main economic resource for print media. In the post-1989 years, many new publications came and went. Right after the political

changes, extreme media partisanship developed. Political pluralism fostered the emergence of a multi-party press. A wide range of highly varied editions quickly took shape: political, popular, quality, topical, and specialized publications. This decreased circulation of the party press. A new press emerged which declared itself politically independent. These periodicals quickly gained the largest audience share and took over the expanding volume of advertising. Under the auspices of privatization and commercialization, aggressive press corporations laid down the basis of media focus.

Data provided by the National Statistical Institute vividly show the trends in the development of the media within the first two decades of the transition period. In terms of print media, 301 newspapers (17 dailies) with an annual circulation of 895,265,000 were published in 1989, compared to 436 newspapers (70 dailies) with an annual circulation of 370,789,000 twenty years later, in 2008. The corresponding figures for magazines and bulletins were 827, with an annual circulation of 57,849,000 in 1989 vs. 775 with an annual circulation of 14,708,000 in 2008. There has been a significant trend favoring the preservation of, and even increase in, diversification of supply, while at the same time acceding to a considerable reduction in circulation. At the current time, due to the economic crisis and to technological development, the circulation of print media has been reduced: 307 newspapers (54 dailies) with an annual circulation of 324,310,000, and 668 magazines and bulletins with an annual circulation of 27,831,000 are on the market place (National Statistical Institute, 2014).

In contrast to the turbulent transformation in print media, changes in electronic media were slower to come, incomplete and lacked general consistency. They started and were carried out in an atmosphere of deregulation – the Radio and Television Act, as well as the Telecommunications Act were adopted only in 1998. Both

of them have been amended frequently. Bulgaria joined the Television without Frontiers Directive (1989) and later ratified the European Union's Convention on Transfrontier Television (1997). Current media legislation has been closely aligned with EU regulations. The two national institutions that regulate the electronic media – the Council for Electronic Media (CEM) and the Communications Regulation Commission (CRC) – jointly issue radio and TV licenses and register cable and satellite broadcasters. CEM (the successor of the National Council for Radio and Television) is the regulatory body that elects the general directors and the management boards of the public service broadcasters and monitors compliance with the Radio and Television Act, including issues such as advertising, sponsorship, product placement, copyright, and protection of minors. The Council also considers complaints by citizens and organizations. CRC (formerly The State Commission of Telecommunications) enforces the Telecommunications Act and manages the radio frequencies spectrum. CEM and CRC jointly issue licenses to radio- and TV broadcasters.

For a quarter of a century a highly saturated radio and TV landscape has been gradually established.

Several telling trends in radio program dynamics can be discerned during this period of transition. Radio broadcasting has increased enormously. In 1988, prior to the political changes, some 46,810 hours of programming were aired. In 1989 the number had increased to 48,498 hours; in 1993 the introduction of private radio bounced the total number of on-air hours to 161,278. By 2008, twenty years after the changes, the public enjoyed 797,683 hours of programming, more than sixteen times the number of hours broadcast in 1988. Program supply had been strongly diversified. Local radio stations had developed a clear-cut public profile and had also introduced technological innovations, such as computer-run, RDS and

on-line versions of regular radio programs. The introduction of new styles, formats and standards lead to steady segmentation of radio audiences. The dynamics of structure and format of the programs is notable: news programs drastically increase: from 19,090 hours in 1988 to 26,154 hours in 1989, 72,358 hours in 1994 and 92,070 hours in 2008 (National Statistical Institute, 2009).

Compared to other media, changes in television came much more slowly. Some major reasons for this include a state monopoly over national telecasting, political pressures resulting in frequent replacements of TV executives (in the course of 25 years, fifteen General Directors in succession headed the public National Television and only three of them have completed their office term without suspension), the lack of research and development of concepts and strategies, inefficient management, and economic constraints, such as obsolete equipment and so forth.

The introduction of commercial television from 1994 on encouraged program diversification in the national TV landscape. A diverse TV market was gradually established in the country. Meanwhile, the almost uncontrolled reception of satellite, trans-border and cable programs exerted significant pressure on domestic channels. Infiltration of foreign audio-visual products had an equally strong impact on national broadcasting policies.

The TV program dynamics was accompanied by several important trends. TV broadcasting displayed a significant increase. In 1988, prior to the political changes, 5,886 hours of TV programming were aired. A dramatic growth of 500 hours of telecasts was registered during the critical year of 1989. By 1994, when private television was officially introduced, audiences enjoyed 7,178 hours of TV programming, while in 2008 the number of hours reached 747,036 – an increase of more than 120%. (National Statistical Institute, 2009a) The diversified program supply encouraged higher audience

selectivity. Digitalization, mobile- and web casting are the current technological challenges for Bulgarian TV broadcasters.

Although the advertising market is still not very big, the radio and TV environment is oversaturated. Lack of clarity about media ownership obscures the fact of how dependent electronic media can be on political and business interests and impacts on the media policies. The weak market, which can't support numerous licensed radio and TV stations, has left a loophole for companies needing tax shelters for capital investments of doubtful origin. At the present moment, the legal, technological, regulatory and social framework is rather contradictory and often serves corporate interests.

In 2014, 337 radio stations and 187 television channels were listed as registered and operating on national, regional and local levels terrestrially, via cable or via satellite. Radio and television broadcasting on the Internet is rigorously developing (Council, 2014). Privately owned radio- and TV stations undoubtedly challenged the monopoly of state-owned public television. However, the public service broadcasters enjoy the highest audience credibility: BNT is approved by 72,5 % of the population and BNR – by 58,6%, compared to other institutions such as police – 42,3%, army – 41,9%, Parliament – 23,4%, and Court –17,0% (NCPOR, 2012).

The increasing popularity of the Internet during the last two decades has definitely impacted the media system status quo. However, an online media business model is still problematic. The combination of content sales, subscription fees and advertising revenues can not bring sufficient income to assure content variety for attracting bigger audiences. Searching for their identity in the transforming social and market environment, online and traditional media are more eager to woo advertisers rather than to serve audiences. Because of the ability react more quickly to breaking news, online-only media slowly but steadily are taking over the

niche of conveying the latest up-to-the-moment news, competing successfully with traditional print media.

In addition to traditional media and online-only news sites, some citizen-generated content has entered the World Wide Web. The Internet is beginning to be used for so-called “citizens’ journalism.” Weblogs on different social and political issues have multiplied. Using other social media platforms, as well as networking and microblogging services such as Facebook, Google Plus, Instagram, Twitter, and hashtags are becoming more and more popular.

Irrespective of the fast development of new media and of taking the public debate online, television is still the most trusted medium in Bulgarian society: 64% to 45% for radio, 42% for the Internet and 35% for the press (European, 2014).

Concluding words

The main trends in contemporary communication processes, such as technological convergence, media and communications trans-nationalization, blurring of the line between commercial and public media areas, commodity manipulative approaches to audience fragmentation and specialization of media consumption, and genre hybridization all are having a great impact on the development of modern Bulgarian media.

More than a quarter of a century after major political and economic changes, despite significant progress towards democratization, we can still pinpoint some serious challenges to the transformation processes of the media system in Bulgaria:

- the pluralistic media system, despite its diversification, does not have a clear identity, either conceptually or professionally;

- the optimization and consolidation of the regulatory framework, as well as its harmonization with Aquis communautaire of the European Union, still suffers from deficiencies in rules and instruments regulating the media system. Attempts at co-regulation between the professional guild, NGOs and official regulators are fragile and inconsistent;
- regardless of its diversification, the media environment is severely lacking self-regulatory reflexes. Though heterogeneous, the media world is still failing to effectively enforce the parameters of pluralism as a basic principle of journalistic independence. Market mechanisms have proved stronger than the norms of social responsibility and adherence to professional standards. Despite the rapid development of new media and the transfer of public debates online, television and radio still enjoy greater confidence in Bulgarian society compared to online publications and print media.

In this situation some trends in media functioning can be outlined:

Technologically: The turbulent advent of new information technologies encourages a basic change in the structure and functioning of the media system, which particularly affects the specificity of the mass communication process. Globality of communications, determining exchange of information between entire populations, could render the consumption of such information highly individual. The territory of media contents distribution will continue to expand via various communication platforms into diverse hybrid forms – media, media-like, personal, corporate, etc.

Economically: The globality of communications determines global trends in the economic organization of the media system

both by developing transnational companies and by retaining the tendency for local development at the expense of national. The convergence of production and distribution of audiovisual content will encourage the development of new business models.

Professionally: Communication convergence entails functional changes in the mass media which reflects on their specificity, content and form. This leads to a departure from former media standards and to the introduction of new formats, styles and liberal journalistic ethics, and results in the diversification of political, popular, quality and topical periodicals and radio and TV programs. The essential characteristics of journalism, public relations and advertising undergo a manifest change. The internationalization of most communication products and services conditions transnationality in the media field, which in principle is national. Polyfunctional requirements for journalists working in the convergent media environment would increase.

Regulatory: Responsibility to the public on the part of producers and distributors of AVMS should be guaranteed by measures toward higher effectiveness and joint efforts at regulation, self-regulation and co-regulation under the conditions of observance of editorial independence and preservation of the model of PSB.

Educationally: Traditional teaching programs, curricula and methods of training of media specialists need fundamental and wide-ranging correction. Introduction of a new structure in media education is imperative: the goal should be life-long learning unconfined by time and space.

Scientifically: Under the conditions of the new communication environment a proper orientation on the vast quantity of information shall be particularly important; media workers must learn to make sense of the information and transform it into accessible knowledge. A new media reality in all its parameters has come into

being and shall require new avenues, approaches and techniques of research.

Socially: Fragmentation of audiences calls for higher standards of selectivity and better social feedback. Application of the ICT would entail further development of the media ecosystem, namely diffusion of blogs and the content of social media with the genres of traditional journalism. Such new applications will facilitate the creation of media content by consumers, which in turn could influence editorial organization and would step up democratization of the information exchange.

The dynamic nature of media processes is so intense that it is becoming more and more difficult to define the characteristics of contemporary media in Bulgaria. Are they an essential part of the democratic development of the country, or an independent trans- and supranational system that operates according to free market principles? In other words, will media evolve towards strong deregulation prompted by market support of technological and economic convergence, or will they move in the direction of co-regulation in order to effectively serve the interests of society? The system is departing permanently from its mass character, the consuming of information is becoming more and more personalized, and the commercial nature of messages is, unfortunately, replacing the spirit of public interest. The hybridization of genres and the diffusion of various communication platforms suggest new formats of content where consumers will be able alone to create and disseminate information. Given these trends, a grave danger to democracy is posed by the interpenetration of media, capital and policy, a combustible concoction that can easily lead to self-censorship and can undermine the functionality of free journalism.

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