

## The Romanian journalists between constraints and liberties

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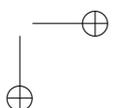
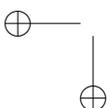
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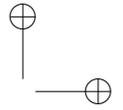
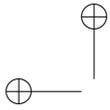
**T**HE analysis that we are going to make is based not only on several theoretical points of view but also on a research made in the period 2004–2005 together with the sociologist Valentina Marinescu. The research was made through some semi-structured interviews applied on a number of 50 Romanian journalists. In that context, we were interested in identifying and delimiting the status, the values and the relationship with the external environment as well as the modality in which the Romanian journalists' manage to "insert" themselves in their profession, as compared to their fellow co-workers from other countries (especially the ones from the European Union).

### **The journalist's social role in a bureaucratic press organization**

In the journalism sociology there are certain distinctions referring to the way in which the journalists' social role is explained. Generally, the European authors' try to emphasize the limit's of this role in the media practices, whereas the American theoreticians perceive things with an obvious tendency towards action and social involvement.

In his work, the journalist doesn't act by himself – he is part of an organization, his activity being the result of certain negotiations, often conflictual ones, between interlocutors. The journalists' objectives consist of making some media products wich should match to an as large as possible extent the public's expectations. In order to fulfill their objectives, people working in the press should take into account a certain bureaucracy, specific for every organization: the rationing of work on the basis of certain rules and hierarchies.

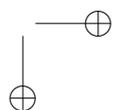
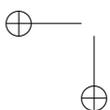


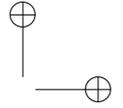
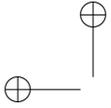


In a work devoted to a sociological analysis of organizations, Cl. Lafaye [1998] emphasizes the fact that the theoreticians of the organizations from the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century notice the fact that not obeying the bureaucratic rules may be in some cases productive. Hence, the appearance of some positive unexpected consequences after the introduction of new rules in an organization, while the expected consequences fail to appear.

The press organization, being a completely distinct entity, involves not only activities which presuppose a high degree of organizing and routine but also other activities and behaviours which carry a higher degree of freedom than in a regular organization. Although this view point is proven by several scientific approaches, preoccupied with this activity field in practice, the editorial gets more or less close to this situation. The oscillation between a perspective and another one was intensely analysed in the debates about this profession from the last years. The journalists' generally sustain the necessity of respecting the primordial role of the editorial point of view and the owners the primordial role of an efficient organization of the activity for the journalist in a position to answer the public's expectations and to bring profit. It has been also noticed the emphasis and the proliferation of the points of view expressed by the "syndical committee"; unfortunately this last actor is preoccupied only with the pursuit (necessary but not sufficient enough) of the interests connected to the journalists' collective labor contract.

The media system theoreticians have noticed that in the last decennies the importance given to technology increased progressively in the media industry. The journalists's work takes place, subsequently, in more and more technical, but also more constraining institutions because of their production, efficiency and capitalization objectives [Mathien, 1992, 32]. The objectives mentioned above apply on the one hand through a type of selecting the professionals in that domain based more and more on evaluating the technical skills to the expense of the editorial skills. In the Romanian media the risk-return principle acts especially in the written and radiophonic (private) press, in which except several editorialists, commentators, the personal perspectives are abandoned due to the necessity of providing to the readers or the listeners what they want as information, either in a pure form (more and more rarely) and infotainment (more and more often).

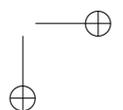
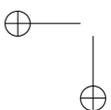


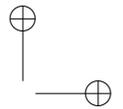


## Structural characteristics of the journalist profession

In the light of observing the distances between the practices and the values of the profession, or the real deriving in spreading the information, we can legitimately ask the question about the possible interventions of the people in charge with making the decisions in the social system with the purpose of establishing new game rules for the journalists [Mathien, 1992, p. 313]. Even though we admit the existence of some deriving moments in the professional field we should not forget that the information always regards the society. Subsequently, the social system maintains even though not exclusively but in a preferential way, because of the permanent representation, either idealized or mythological, which the media and the information professionals ensure (assign).

Referring to the structural characteristics of the journalist profession D. Ruellan [1992] states that in the functionalist conception, social ambition, money and power, as both personal and collective strategies, aren't taken into account, unless they are perceived as disfunctions of the "social machinery", as diseases which have to be corrected. Ambitions, power, positions of strength of the journalists' investigating "cases" in which are involved upper social hierarchy personalities, the essential revenues obtained by the journalists' in the developed countries and gratifications such as notoriety, the right to signature are all the more valid reasons for choosing a journalistic career. The French authors' consider that the wish for social recognition, the money and the wish for power (elements which could contravene to the functionalist vision) are mobilizing for journalists. This statement shouldn't be interpreted in the sense that in the press organizations the specific rules for that profession are not respected, but in the meaning that, in order not to be excluded from the profession (for example, by suspending the journalists' charter of duties in France) and at the same time in order not to lose the specific gratifications, the journalists' respect the organization and the internal hierarchy in a less explicit manner than the ones performing other professions.



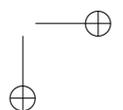
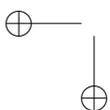


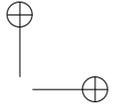
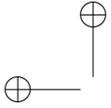
## Information selection/processing and the relation with the sources

In what concerns the journalists' activity, especially "the information selection", the same studies invoked above emphasize the fact that, although it carries the print of the financial and political constraints, this activity confers however a certain degree of freedom to the journalist and gives him, the illusion that due to his choices he may contribute through his vision to a new shaping/construction of the reality. It is obvious that the ambitions of the members of the journalistic professional field are tempered by the critical visions which notice the media contribution at conserving the social state of fact, the preservation of the "establishment". These critical visions are counterbalanced by remembering the situations in which the press destabilized the political order of the moment, such as the role of the American press during the Watergate "affair". It is generally admitted that people working in the media act not only for satisfying their economical and political interests but also for maintaining the independancy reputation in front of their equals or the public [Derville, 1997].

The relationships between the journalists' and their sources are based on certain "standard procedures": the journalists' collect the information directly, by contacting the persons who detain evidence or know details about a certain "case" or by consulting different materials received at the newspaper (news provided by agents, press releases). Thus, between the journalists' and the persons providing them the information directly (sources) a symbiotic relationship is established: on the one hand the journalists' are looking for "a line", on the other hand, there will be quite a number of people willing to talk about themselves (especially if the latter are politicians).

The inconvenience or the "weak spot" of such a relationship is that the reasons of this symbiosis are different for the two actors: the sources try to present the information as well as possible, whereas the journalists' want to find out from them the information they need [Lazare, 1991: 118-126]. But the reporters don't have always a direct access to the "heroes" of the events which draw the public's attention, especially if they are politicians or members of the Parliament who aren't at all thrilled to see their name invoked in certain scandals (corruption, car accidents and slander trials). In case the reporters





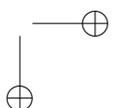
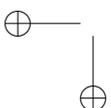
don't have access to the target- persons, they choose mediators (public clerks occupying an inferior position, policemen, actuaries, etc.)

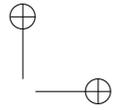
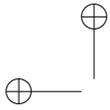
Allocating important spaces to the political domain is, in some authors' vision debatable from the perspective of the public's expectations: "The information concentrates largely on the political domain, meaning by that choosing the government and appointing people for certain state functions. But this is only a limited part of a country's activities, which doesn't affect too much regular people's lives; this aspect enters the sphere of the politicians' preoccupations" [Sorlin, 2002: 153].

### **Gatherers vs. *news-processors***

Analyzing the aspects of the journalist profession, J. Tunstall [1971] considers that the journalists' who collect the information (*gatherers*) are less inclined to pursue the organization general objectives (including the financial ones) as compared to the journalists' who process the information in their "wrapping", which is then delivered to the target public (*newsprocessors*). It is well known that this imbalance between the behaviours of the two journalist categories generate tensions which can only be reduced through negotiation. According to this classification of a newspaper staff in a media institution, results the fact that the gatherers respect a lot more the ethic values specific for their profession (objectiveness, impartiality), whereas the "office" journalists are more interested in the commercial values (attracting the audience and publicity). Filtering the information, although it always involves a certain amount of hazard, has at least as a premise, the intention of putting to the public's disposal the events and the opinions in which he is interested (due to the proximity factor, preeminence, human interest etc.) in a manner as objective as possible.

In time, the distinction between the "office" journalists and the "field" ones will no longer be so clearly stated in the sociology treaties of journalism but there will always be journalists' who will have an important role in appreciating the events. In press, the page responsables (from the journalistic domain) control not only the materials which are included in the respective edition, but they are also responsible for the content and their position inside the newspaper. Moreover, in television and radio stations, the chief-editors answer for the quality and the truthfulness of the subjects presented on the

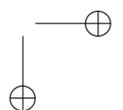
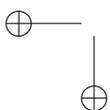


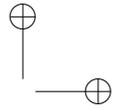
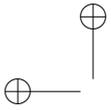


channels they work for [Mathien, 1992]. The respective responsible appreciates the event according to all of the subjects proposed by the reporters that day while the reporter, specialized for a certain domain claims a part of the final decision. Each of the two actors from the newspaper makes decisions regarding the final form that the subject should have according to different parameters.

One of the journalistic activity aspects investigated is the access to the “information sources”. The studies devoted to this issue indicate the appearance of a context in which, in order to counterbalance the difficulty of contacting public persons whose acts are being investigated, the reporters resort to mediators or “equals”. Thus, if the respective journalist belongs to a family that is part of the society elite he will get in his turn more easily to the elite’s information, including the political elite. The negative consequence would be according to R. Rieffel [1984], the journalists’ temptation to filter the information which could disturb “social order”. To what extent this favouring of the elite’s interests by the Romanian journalists’ works is relatively difficult to evaluate for the moment. Nevertheless, we can assume the fact that the low income level for the majority, as well as the modest degree of non-material gratifications (the high social esteem the Romanian press enjoys doesn’t confer to the “common” journalists the same respect as the one the media stars benefit of) don’t attract for the moment the members of “Romanian high society”. Another effect of the financial dissatisfaction existing among the members of this professional field is the vulnerability in front of the influences exerted by the “economical-political complex” which detains the power in society at a given moment.

The media tendency in the last years of emphasizing the profitability of a media product leads implicitly to a process of differentiation from the media organization in which not respecting the bureaucratic rules didn’t automatically lead to making media products that are not appreciated inside and outside the guild. Even though at present there is a big variety of “atmospheres” in the media organizations, disciplined, “bohemian”, “mixed”, there is a more and more solid tendency of standardizing the journalists’ work. M. Mathien [1992: 26] noticed more than ten years ago the transformations that started to manifest in the mass-media system. The journalist is becoming a communication professional in the service of a certain project. The changes that take place in his profession are doubled by the changes that occur in the press





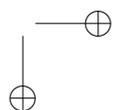
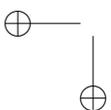
industry the latter giving up partly or completely the long-term vision for a short-term one. In the extreme case, we can notice the appearance of certain media which have deliberately a “short life”: it’s the case of publications and programs sponsored or financed for a certain period of time, very well delimited. More and more often we are witnessing changes of the visions inside the same “institution” in order to match the expectations of a more and more flexible public but also the challenges coming from the internal environment (the competition among the media institutions) or external (especially the new media based on communication via the P.C.).

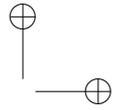
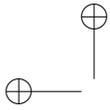
In parallel with the changes in organizational vision adaptations to the internal climate start taking shape. With the exception of those who have their own headings (and maybe it’s not even their case either) the journalists’ are tied to a notion which seems completely remote from their language and journalistic behaviour: the work productivity.

The information to the service of the public was and still is an absolute requirement but it is rethought. If recently this priority was still pursued in a relatively subjective manner (because of a specific domain, not very transparent in what concerns the selection and information processing criteria by the novices) lately this balance is becoming more and more fragile. It is not the members of the guild alone who dictate the priorities but an increasing number in the beneficiary public.

The bohemian image the journalists’ built/preserved will become in time a form devoid of substance and meaning since the journalists’ will be less tempted to stand out through different unusual behaviours because of the attention given to the competition on the one hand and the public’s fancies on the other hand. Moreover, the differentiation tendency among the members of other related professions (writers, artists, philosophers) will continue to manifest itself by appropriating certain professional procedures (building and “seasoning” the message), more and more specific and refined.

The new requirements of the domain overlap with older ones, also very soliciting: giving up free hours in the periods of maximum coverage of “the events”, the continuous struggle for finding attractive topics even during the holidays. These demands as well as the feeling that they alone detain such calling lead to anxiety and frustration when one of their subjects doesn’t make the “summary”.





However, the frustrations and dissatisfactions are compensated for (especially in the case of written press journalists) by the assumption that they are part of the elite and they write for the elite. The press allows for the ones who get involved into its mechanisms to acquire the feeling they belong to a privileged category. The audience reaches the conclusion that, being aware of all the news “put to stage” by the mass-media professionals becomes an important social category with an identity more valued from a social point of view [Derville, 1997].

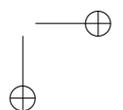
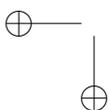
### **The organizational culture of a press entity**

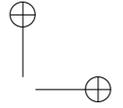
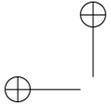
The organization mode of the press institutions confirms the perspective according to which, the unwritten, informal rules which appear in time or in the moment of a reorganization are more powerful than the formal ones, established with the purpose of making efficient and increasing the work productivity [Lafaye, 1998].

In the case of the Romanian mass-media the aspects previously mentioned have a special relevance for the changes that appeared in the managerial conception from the domain in 2004. To this effect, we should emphasize the fact that the resistance to imposing new professional behaviours and implicitly, new editorial approaches manifested either through massive quitting of a newspaper by the journalists’ (the case of journal “Evenimentul zilei”), or negotiating certain compromises (the case of journal “România liberă”).

The managerial theory presupposes that in the big corporations the ones who detain the necessary technical knowledge assume the leadership in the organization. In the case of the media, “the managerial theory” states that the editors and the journalists, the only ones able to gather, to structure and distribute news, detain the function of managers [Sorlin, 2002: 171]. The 2004 discussions didn’t contest the editorial and managerial skills of the new managers, but their “right” to replace the “militant” journalists which had allegedly an overwhelming role in transforming the Romanian press from an authoritative one in a liberal one, with social responsibilities.

The media professionals diversions from the “objectiveness” norm in the case of Romania as well, are usually sanctioned through specific self-regulation procedures. In 2004 a public debate made for the *Mass-Media Forum* orga-





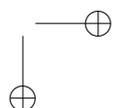
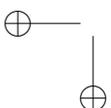
nized in January 2005, at the Parliament Palace signaled the necessity and the advantages of this profession: Self-regulation may represent a solution to force both parts employer's and employees- to respect the regulations established in their company; the long-term objective of such an approach is that in the case of as many as possible press institutions, these rules should be signed in order to establish a national standard. The authority which can judge the journalists' should be established through a convention- it may be a discipline committee or council.

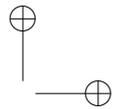
Invoked a lot more in the private media, the managerial spirit doesn't generally bring a disservice to the public interest. The tight relation among the managers of a media institution and the investors, the sponsors of the media products leads however to the appearance of some suspicions in connexion with keeping the objectiveness and the impartiality: "The purely commercial media boast with an increased independence but they depend strictly on sponsors." [Sorlin, 2002:146].

Coming back to the research project which is the topic of the present article we can say that in the case of the interviewed journalists' was recorded the opinion according to which daily negotiations among the actors of a newspaper regarding the materials "which deserve" to get to the target-public lead in time to avoiding the difficult moments by assuming the self-censorship: "*it's about the centers of political and economical interest which influence, make pressure on the audio-visual and on the written press, (...) you can't really say what you want. In the majority of the publications and televisions this is the atmosphere, even off the record, meaning that nobody tells you don't do a certain thing but it's obvious that you can't because you are somehow restrained by the economical interests of the respective environment*" (respondent 29)

The journalist quoted above approaches the problem of the "adaptation" to an atmosphere burdened by certain economical interests of the publication owner. However, in some other cases, not respecting in a higher or smaller proportion the professional or ethical media principles may occur due to certain conjunctures. These conjunctural reasons may take the form of subtle intervention or pressure [Mathien, 1992].

The subtle intervention is not a part of the regular pressure and influence circuit's and manifests itself at an inferior level. In the same measure in which the affective factor among the newspaper staff is not perceivable in the case



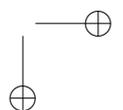
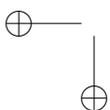


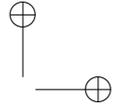
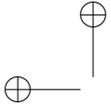
of each selection and information processing decision, the subtle intervention makes proof of the arbitrariness and aleatory of the situation. Its one of the displays of the constitutive swap of exchanges from any system of mass communication with it's external environment. M. Mathien considers that the pressure represents an ineluctable reality: "The newspaper is not a "no man's land" or an "ivory tower" and doesn't allow at all "a Sirius's point" of view based on which the entire world could be observed. No mass communication means could escape the interactions in the surrounding social-cultural context. This situation is all the clearer that even the mass communication means depend on the economical circuit in which the media system is integrated."

Any claim regarding a universal practice of this profession, will find here a moderation argument. However, the influence and pressure mechanisms strongly emphasize that the objectiveness only represents a dynamic myth and that it's cultural impact allows the information professionals to preserve a resistance strength very fluctuant in itself according to the media and the circumstances. The point of view previously quoted represents a realistic approach to the professional principles and their applicability limit's. What is more to add is the fact that the resistance strength also depends, besides the respective media, the circumstances and the personal data of a certain journalist or another, of his wish to accommodate to the norms he finds at the newspaper or on the contrary, to do his best, to become more "attentive" to the external pressures with the purpose of pleasing the corrupt chief-editor or the external instance which exerts the pressure. In Romania, where there is a tradition of fulfilling the most hidden wishes of the hierarchy boss or on political party criteria, it's not awkward for journalists' without special tasks at the newspaper to know even before the chief-editor what compromise to make in order for the respective media institution to maintain itself on the "market" or even to progress from a financial point of view.

What characterizes the organizational culture? What are the values to which a newcomer has to "accommodate"? Social success, money, power are the attributes which generally motivate entering the journalistic guild. In order to attain such goals a journalist has to face a winding trajectory since the wages in this domain are far from being attractive, as results from a recent report:

The average wages in Romania are lower than in the candidate-countries for entering the European Union, and the average wages for the journalists'





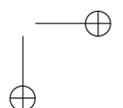
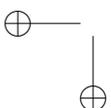
are below the national average. Especially in the last two years, there were frequent cases in which the journalists' received "alternative wages" from some political parties or institutions. Such cases are known inside the guild but there is no rejecting reaction either from other journalists' or professional organizations. There are hilarious cases, like the one from Timișoara where five journalists' became employees of the County Council [Policy Warning Report – Report on governing, the Romanian Academic Society [R.A.S.], Bucharest, 2003: 42-43].

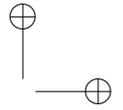
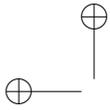
In a focus-group organized by the Center for Independent Journalism [C.I.J.] a journalist declared to this effect that the worst is the fact that such practices start to be considered normal, and even "desirable".

The Center for Independent Journalism [C.I.J.] appreciates that in Romania there are approximately 14 000 journalists' although the official statistics offer as maximum number of the people practicing this profession only 8000. This difference is due to the practice of replacing the employment contracts with the so-called collaboration contracts, a form of employment which doesn't protect the employee from the employer's abuses [Policy Warning Report – Report on governing, the Romanian Academic Society [R.A.S.], Bucharest, 2003: 43].

The audio-visual property is regulated by the National Audio-Visual Council. Thus, the person detaining or obtaining a share bigger than 10% out of the capital or the rights to vote from an audio-visual society has the obligation to notify the National Audio-Visual Council. It is forbidden to use the name of another person in any way, for giving an audio-visual licence [Damian, 2004: 259].

The present stipulations regarding the property and the audience rates from the audio-visual domain, though perfectible are welcome: "The normative decisions have as objective, at least in theory, limiting the concentration of the property and expanding the audience rate in the audio-visual domain so that it won't generate the appearance of dominant positions in forming the public opinion, for protecting the pluralism and the cultural diversity. The dominant position in forming the public opinion appears, on a national level, in the case in which the market rate of the radio broadcaster is over 30% on the market of the services of programs broadcasted at a national scale" [Damian, 2004: 259].





The economical concentration brings forth the issue of the real freedom of the press; it is more and more difficult to set up and to maintain on the media market a new periodical title; the silent agreement of the main market groups eliminates potential competitors. Moreover, the majority of the minority or opposition political tendencies can't consolidate easily nor support the existence of favourable media, just as neither the ethnic minorities have access to the media supports. After the period of scandals such as Watergate, the freedom of the press tends to cover only the freedom of the entities of the press industry [Barbier, Bertho Lavenir, 2000: 277].

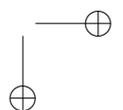
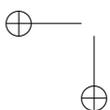
The answers to the difficulties of the periodical press are related to disappearances, rewards, title mergers, decreasing the dimensions, the efforts for reducing the sale price, eventually soliciting some help from the state and improving the distribution.

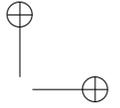
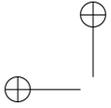
In certain cases, the reorganization of the structures and the financial concentration are accompanied by a reorientation of the contents of the periodical publications and even their titles. Among the consequences of relaunching some media institutions we can mention the following ones: a decrease of the article level, the reorganization of the content and sometimes deep changes of the editing team [Barbier, Bertho Lavenir, 2000: 277].

*The negative aspects are the high degree of poverty – with effects on the consumption of media products and on the publicity market – and the pressures exerted by the governing political party through which this one tries to control the largest possible part of the mass-media in order to disseminate it's discourse, namely to use the press institutions for propagandistic purposes (respondent 1).*

The means through which the government ensures a favourable press, could be according to the journalists' interviewed in 2004, the following: the publicity in favour of some (state) governmental agencies broadcasted excessively and discretionarily (9 subjects); Some televisions are given time to pay the huge debts they accumulate and subsequently they become vulnerable and obedient towards the authorities' from that period (5 respondents).

*The audio-visual is influenced by political factors in a very insidious way, namely through financial means. This is valid in the case of the written press as well. Those who don't follow the governing party's line and who are more quibbler, don't get any publicity from the state institutions in the respective newspapers (respondent 37).*





*It is also about the commercial cake, the publicity cake which is not very big and on which there are big pressures made, because naturally, each television chain, each radio station, each newspaper tries to attract as much publicity as possible because this is what makes them exist (respondent 14).*

### **The role of the public in the creation of media products**

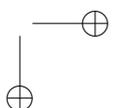
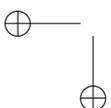
Regarding the influence of the public (usually a positive one) a lot of interviewed journalists' expressed their opinions:

*Positive influences – a single factor – the public, the public that buys your newspaper when you tell the truth. However, this may also have a negative influence because it has been noticed, in practice, the fact that there is a public that doesn't buy your newspaper when you start telling the truth, but rather when you tell exactly what they want to hear (respondent 23).*

*... the public has a positive influence even when it's difficult for us. Thus, it pains us when we are sanctioned but we know that this is how it should happen and this means that we have to take some measures, we have to understand the public better, to offer them something else, we have to see what they want (respondent 45).*

The public isn't described only in "positive colours" but also as an obstacle for diversifying the media offer and improving the quality of the media products, through the huge appetite for media products of a more or less doubtful quality: *I don't think that we are witnessing a growing up process of the public. As long as there are still expensive light entertainment shows, such as "Ciao Darwin" which bring a substantial profit, I don't think we're witnessing a determinant influence of the public's maturing on the quality of the programs (respondent 16).*

The improvement of the living standards and implicitly the purchasing power once Romania entered the E.U. will bring according to the opinions of several interviewed journalists' a better selection of the media quality products by the citizens who will have a more diversified offer of media products, highly qualitative as compared to what is put at their disposal at present. This hope of improving the quality of the results of the mass-media activity is not accompanied by the optimistic vision according to which the number of printed copies of daily and weekly newspapers would considerably increase



and all this due not only to the competition with the on-line media and the internet in general, but also because of the inertia manifested by the mass-media public in Romania. This “lack of appetite” for the written press can’t be explained only by “population’s poor living standards”, but it seems there is a certain tradition to this effect.

The interviews often display ways of action, the political intervention dispositives in the discourse of the specific Romanian press. The next fragment from interview no. 21 highlights another “Romanian contribution” in the domain: *The present authorities’ have acted in a dexterous, intelligent way and managed to shatter the media. It is due to the suggestion and the influence of the Power factor that a lot of newspapers appeared. The more, the better for the governing power, because though criticized in a newspaper, they may be defended in another one. Confusion arises from the messages and the governing power wins. Here is another typically Romanian factor of influence* (respondent 21).

*The increase of the number of written publications, radio stations and television chains doesn’t trigger at least not to the same extent, the increase in the number of the media employees, the solution of the limited duration work conventions being preferred in a lot of cases many media employer’s (the authors’ note) don’t invest in people and prefer to have floaters* (respondent 26).

The influences taken into account by our research universe (interviewed journalists) could originate from the following aspects as well: guaranteeing the freedom of expression, the transparency of the state institutions, the application mode of the access to information law, the attitudes of the representatives from the state institutions towards the media.

*The governments attitude or position towards the press influences the mass-media as well. We should perhaps mention the willingness of the state institutions to provide to the press the correct information, but also the wrong information which is either inaccurate or oriented in another direction* (respondent 27).

*The authorities’ lack of cooperation puts the journalists’ in a difficult situation as they want to inform the citizens about the less favourable aspects regarding their leaders as well. . . The press still complains of the closed doors when they try to contact certain authorities’ and when I say certain, it’s not that I would like to keep secret certain identities, it’s just that this is a general*

tendency, happening almost everywhere. As a rule, the authorities' are willing to talk to the press when they want to promote themselves and they refuse to talk to the press when they are trying to hide something (respondent 45).

*The role of the pure investigation press during the election campaigns was quite reduced in my opinion. I am saying this because very few journalistic investigations appear in those periods and what does appear doesn't represent the result of an independent investigation made by journalists' or newspapers editorial teams. Most of the information is published after certain top agreements between the politician and the editor/newspaper owner (respondent 51).*

Some interviewees make a connection between the economical performances of a media institution and increasing the performances at an editorial level: *A powerful press entity resists and can struggle against certain negative stimuli. The newspaper that is sold and has publicity can select only the professionals for making the press act. The procedure is similar for television (respondent 14).*

*Once the press trusts appeared and developed in the Romanian mass-media the atmosphere in the domain got complicated because the survival of the small press organizations has become more and more difficult and the state instances, that should limit the negative phenomena resulted from the "organization of the press in different trusts", do not intervene on a legislative level. The lack of reaction characterizes not only the journalists' guild but also the entire society when big shady affairs happen (respondent 39).*

A negative factor which influences the mass-media development could be the unprofessionalism of certain actors from that field, namely newspaper owners, directors or journalists:

*The lack of qualified personnel and of any viable horizon and at the same time maybe the unprofessionalism of the press owners and directors who managed the press as they could practically set up the Romanian press. They invented the press since they had nothing else to do with the heritage they were left with. The majority are a mid-level generation, from the communist press. The dinosaurs disappeared and who remained? Cristoiu, Nistorescu, Roșca, Băcanu and so on, the young hopes of the 80's. An entire generation stood with good and bad things, in this case especially bad things because well we can see that in their newspapers and in what they write. (...) Trying to understand what the Romanian press means, I sometimes think that the professors*

*teaching these children in universities have nothing to do with the press. They probably know too much theory, which is good to know by the way, but for as long as there is no practical experience in the press, I think that it would be more useful for an university to convince I don't know, maybe C.T.P. or Nistorescu or whoever of the present personalities to come there and talk to the students. Not to teach any courses, but just to meet them and to tell them about their own journalistic experiences. It would be a better experience for the students than to learn who knows what written communication theory conceived by who knows what bored Frenchman (respondent 40).*

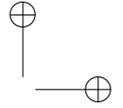
The opinions which state that the Romanian journalists' professionalism isn't very high are not shared by all the interviewed journalists. There is even an opposite opinion wave after analyzing the transcribed interviews, according to which we can be optimistic from this point of view:

*The positive thing is that there is a big competition regarding the work force, so there are a lot of people who would like to work in the press and I think there is a multitude out of which a selection could be eventually made. I also think that there are a lot of professional journalists' who have been already working in the press for many years, who have become professionals, and if they are allowed, if there are no economical or political pressures exerted on them, things could go very well. This is a good thing (respondent 37).*

The appearance and the development of the on-line press in Romania is welcome, showing at the same time the major impact of the information present in the publications diffused on the internet, because of their "select target-public": persons with university degrees, on superior positions of the professional hierarchy, businessmen.

The absence of a press law is a satisfaction reason for the majority of the journalists, an attitude to be understood in the context in which in the majority of the E.U. countries there are no press laws, at least not any laws which may have a coercive effect. The explanation for the weak legislative regulation regarding the media starts from the more informal specificity of the domain and the tendency to prefer auto-regulation. Unfortunately for the Romanian media auto-regulation manifest itself at an incipient level.

*One of the positive factors which have effects in the media activity is also the race for integration and the fact that somewhere, at the end of the tunnel there is that light which now is becoming more and more visible the Euro-*



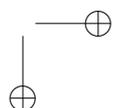
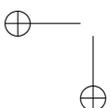
*pean Union; another positive effect is the vertiginous increase of the number of pages devoted to culture, in the last year, in the daily and weekly newspapers or the expanding impact of the press devoted to women (respondent 30; respondent 31; respondent 42)*

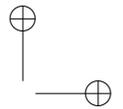
## Conclusions

The analysis of the interviews with the Romanian journalists' showed a series of interesting aspects referring to the significance, the directions and the practical modalities of integrating the Romanian mass-media system in the European Community. The specific objectives of the present study are the following:

1. The general image of the European Union the data marked out the existence of an apparent differentiation between the extremely generous "global" image of the European Union and the journalists' approach to the mass-media domain. In the entire sample, both on a global and specific, straight to the point level, there is no reference to the media system from the European Union, to the significance of Romania's adherence to the European Union from the perspective of the mass-media. The journalists' invoked prioritarily and even exclusively the economical aspects (plus the socio-political) involved in this process and they didn't include in their evaluations clear references to the specific domain (mass-media as a social sub-system). Under such circumstances, a working hypothesis *a posteriori* (useful for making a subsequent study at a representative level for the group of professionals in the domain) would be that the mass-media are not perceived as a particular sub-system in the Romanian society. It would be the second *a posteriori* hypothesis according to which the Romanian journalists' define their social role not only as watch-dog and simple specialists in informing the citizens but also as 'social diagnosticians' (a specific type of "social analysts").

2. In what concerns the characterization of the Romanian mass-media system, the interviewed journalists' manifested unanimously several opinions relatively positive referring to the necessity of a legal setting for the Romanian mass-media system and for the phenomena appeared inside the system in the last years: the capital "concentrations" (even the massive trusts) in the domain, the imported "formats", regionalizing the options and the consumption modal-



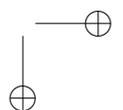
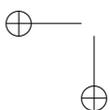


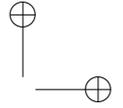
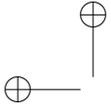
ities (which led to the development of the regional and local media). The “weak” points of the Romanian mass-media system at present are considered by the journalists’ the following ones: the political’s intrusion in the journalistic activity (on the level of regulations and functioning norms) the lack of a capital composed “exclusively” by the media; the state monopoly over the distribution network for the written press; the market deformation-implicitly the deformations in the public’s options (the tendency of south-americanization of the consumption, oriented especially towards the TV).

3. The process of the integration of the Romanian mass-media system in the European Union was considered by the journalists’ to be double dependant: (1) of the governmental factors though the journalists’ appreciated during the interviews that the Romanian institutions in the mass-media domain are similar to the European ones; (2) of the specific dynamics (mixed public vs. private) of the media systems in all the countries from the European Union. The interviews showed that the journalists appreciate that the development of the internal domains of the media system doesn’t depend so much on harmonizing the legislation on a “formal” level but on applying it correctly in practice given the fact they said that there might be real distortions (a sort of adaptation to the “Romanian specificity”).

According to the professionals’ opinion, the most efficient control over the application of the community acquis in mass-media wouldn’t belong to the political factor but to the media itself. This is a position opposed to the general image referring to the important aspects from the European Union construction (where media weren’t mentioned). A research might reveal to this extent if in this case we have to deal with a self-perception of the journalists’ as acting in a specific domain where the legal regulations only apply with the ethical and “professional” ones (where the control exerted by the “guild” would matter not only inside but also outside).

4. The relationship *the Romanian mass-media system-the political sphere-the society* from the perspective of Romania’s adhering to the European Union is a particular one, highly polarized and even internally “fractured”. Thus among the institutions that the interviewed journalists would “choose” to represent their interests in a hypothetical debate on the integration in the European Union, the professional associations clearly detach themselves (the Romanian Press Club, Journalists’ Associations/Syndicates and NGOs). At the same time, the institutions designated as ‘rejected’ in the case of such a hy-





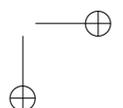
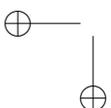
pothetical debate were from the perspective of the media professionals almost exclusively from the political power sphere: the Government, the Ministeries, the Parliament.

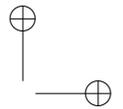
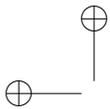
Thus I had to do with strictly bi-directional relationships: the Romanian mass-media system the political/governmental power sphere and the Romanian mass-media system the civil society and the professional organizations of the following type:

The concerns, the convulsions which the mass-media has experienced in the last years finally led to a bigger awareness of the mass-media role in society. Adopted progressively, from the journalism schools or in who knows what books, the principles of the responsible journalism are known and appreciated and the Romanian media slippages are strongly repudiated.

The journalists' discourse about the influence exerted by the political factor over the professional field seemed initially, at an evaluation from a more quantitative methodological perspective, relatively parallel as compared to the discourse of Romanian and foreign nongovernmental organizations about these aspects. At a deeper analysis several resemblances were noticed between the two discourses, the one from the inside of the professional field as well as the one from the exterior. In both cases it is talked about censorship and self-censorship, about the risks of disobedience towards the political command exerted most of the time indirectly or through the intermediate of the people who have the power of decision in a press organization. One of the differences is that compared to the NGOs that don't hesitate to name the press organizations where the journalistic deontology is "trampled" the interviewed journalists name very rarely "the entity" they talk about. This makes us think about two types of explanations: a) although they were announced that their identification data won't be made public, the interviewed journalists apply in this case as well the censorship so well learned at the newspaper. b) some of the situations they describe represented flaws they have noticed inside their own press institution (this fact is relevant to the extent to which the majority of the interviews were recorded in the press organization where the respective journalists' work; it is also relevant the fact that in the case of the interviews made on a neutral field the interviewees's courage of denouncing onerous practices and procedures was higher).

Although we couldn't render all the points of view expressed by the subjects we tried to offer them the opportunity of self-describing in order for their





professional life with hopes but with disappointments as well to shape/build a professional field which is in a period of defining and re-consolidation.

The economical takes precedence in the media activity and the private capital saves the journalists' honour.

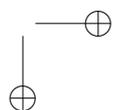
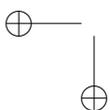
Moreover, there are some similarities between signalling the slippages in the media by the theoreticians on the one hand and by the journalists' on the other hand. Thus, signalling the dangers that may affect the information professionals by the French author J.M. Charon (1995) (transformations, the manipulation of the facts presented to the public, the onerous complicities with the sources, corruption) were also brought to discussion by the journalists' from our research team.

The interviews also revealed the existence of a set of "negative expectations" of the journalists connected to the process of the integration of the Romanian mass-media in the European Union expectations identified with the menace of bigger pressures of economical nature and the continuation of the influences exerted by the political factor on the Romanian mass-media system. At the same time, the public formed either of common people or a specialized audience was considered by the journalists' as a "homogeneous whole" the interviewed subjects appreciated thus that the society, their audience is the "beneficiary" of such changes.

The journalists know only little in what concerns the topics of the integration, the regulations and professional associations, specific for the journalists' from the present E.U. but they "stand better" in what concerns the awareness of the professional constraints which act in this domain and the capacity of analyzing the present state of fact from the Romanian mass-media.

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