

# TRACING THE UNSEEN IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIAN TELEVISION

During the 1989 Romanian Revolution, the state television fell in the spotlight of the fight for a new democratic order. After decades of serving as the main mechanism of disinformation and control, the public and immediate change of sides during the revolutionary events of the public television, transformed the institution into a measurement unit for the consequent democratic evolution of Romania. The few minutes in which a nation witnessed the news presenter, Teodor Brates changed his speech from ‘the terrorist riots are under control’ to ‘we have won, the dictatorship has fallen’, appeared to mark the beginning of a new era. They also marked the beginning of the televised revolution, an event that complemented the street revolution in complex ways.

Considering the sudden change the public television advocated: from the status of an instrument of disinformation and control to the status of a mediator and leading actor in a democratic change, it is relevant to question the extent to which post-communist Romanian television was a conservative institution that facilitated the transfer and the preservation of communist resources into the new system. The present study will therefore attempt to analyze a potential conservative status of public service television that may have coexisted with a rather modernizing function of the medium. To which extent did post-communist Romanian television contribute to the conservation of the old regime and how did its possible conservative status reconcile with the modernising role the institution took up in the wake of the 1989 Revolution?

During this pursue, there will mainly be taken a deconstructive, historical perspective centred on a prosopographical approach meant to reconstitute the (biographical) continuities that key actors ensured within the public service television. Since the analyses will try to identify and justify two apparently contrasting roles of Romanian television, the deconstructive perspective will be used so as to break down democratic structures into their corresponding practices, which will, in turn, help identify the complexities behind the functionality of television. The deconstructive approach will also be justified by the theoretical discussion on the Habermasian public sphere which appropriated to the specific Romanian case, will allow for a critical stand against a symptomatic reading

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## CUVÎNTAREA TOVARĂȘULUI NICOLAE CEAUȘESCU la posturile de radio și televiziune

Dragi tovarăși și prieteni,  
oameni ai Republicii Socialiste România,

Mă adresez, în această seară,  
poporului nostru al patriei noastre  
socialiste, în legătură cu  
evenimentele grave care au  
avut loc, în ultimele zile, la  
Timișoara.

În zilele de 18 și 17 decem-  
brie, sub pretextul împiedicării  
execuției unei sentințe judecătorești  
legale, câteva grupuri de  
elemente huliganice au organi-  
zată o serie de manifestații și  
acțiuni, trecând la atacarea  
autorităților de stat, distrun-  
d și jefuind o serie de cli-  
buri, de magazine, de clădiri pu-  
lice, iar în ziua de 17 decem-  
brie și-au intensificat activita-  
țile împotriva instituțiilor de  
stat și de partid, inclusiv a  
forțelor armate.

Din desfășurarea evenimentelor  
și din declarațiile unor  
participanți la aceste eveni-  
mente, aceste grupuri aveau  
scopul de a provoca dezordine  
și distrugerea instituțiilor și  
autorităților generale ale orașului  
și de a da semnalul unor aser-  
tate acțiuni și în alte centre.

Populația din Timișoara cu-  
noaște și a văzut toate aceste  
gesturi de tip fascist care au  
avut loc.  
Cu toate insistențele depuse,  
după de două zile, de organele  
militare, de partid, de consiliul  
popular, de conducerea înre-  
șirilor și de organele de  
ordine, aceste grupuri au con-  
tinuat și și-au intensificat acti-  
vitatea de distrugere, de ata-



21 December 1989: Ceausescu's televised speech appears also in main communist daily. Source: Scanteia Tineretului, 21 December 1989

of democratic structures and instead, will enforce a deconstructive reading of such structures into their specific political, social, economic and institutional practices.

Whereas discussions on the post-communist Romanian television have been part of various discourses dealing with the cultural development of Romania after Ceausescu, the social development of post-communist Romania, the democratic assessment of the country, the 1989 Revolution or freedom of the press, no steps have been taken so far in providing a historical analysis of the medium.<sup>1</sup> This study provides a first filling of this gap.

Paragraph one will evaluate Romanian television within the context of the 1989 Revolution. It will underline the implications behind the televised representation of the event and will try to reconstruct the specific political and social functions that the medium fulfilled during the revolution. Paragraph two will make a reading of the televised revolution as a media text and as a media practice on the background of a Habermasian discussion on the rise of the public sphere as a democratic structure. Thus, the representation of the revolutionary events will be countered down to the functions the Free Romanian Television performed during the revolution.<sup>2</sup> The aim of this paragraph is to point out to a distinction and interdependence at the same time, between a representation of events and concrete functions and practices that are concealed behind such representations. This will point out to the necessity of an underlining deconstructive perspective within the further analyses of the study. The following paragraph – with its two sub-paragraphs – will focus on a prosopographical approach that will expose biographical, practical and institutional continuities that were transferred from the old regime into the new system under the disguise of democratic structures. The structure of the new state power will thus be deconstructed into specific practices and individuals. So will be the new structure of the public television. The fourth paragraph will analyse the political interference within the state television from the perspective of a practice reinforced by the new democratic structures. The last paragraph will attempt to identify media moguls as yet another instrument of maintaining continuities with the communist regime, this time on the platform of private television networks.

## 1 The televised revolution

### *From an isolated representation to a self-standing reality*

The televised form of the 1989 Romanian revolution is crucial for the way it determined the revolutionary events, but also for the way it constituted a key platform for the revolutionary process that Romanian television engaged in at the time. The televised revolution asserted itself as yet another constituent form

of participation in the events by constituting a key actor in the social uprising. However, it also represented a revolution by itself. The character of the revolution, analyzed from the perspective of continuities and discontinuities with the past, determines the degree of change subsequent to the event.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore important to scrutinize the complex practices of continuity and discontinuity with the past behind the 'tele-revolution'.<sup>4</sup> The event carried crucial consequences on the future evolution of the Romanian society as well as on the future evolution of the state television and its mass-media landscape.

On December 21st 1989, Romanian television brought about the end of a dictatorship as Ceausescu made his fatal mistake of miscalculating the 'unintended consequences' of television production.<sup>5</sup> In a televised speech, Ceausescu called for the mobilization of the masses in the center of Bucharest, an event that was to take place the next day and be broadcast live on television. Thousands of people had been brought from their work places and gathered in anticipation of the rally. On December 22, Ceausescu and his wife together with high officials of the Communist Party appeared on the balcony of the Central Committee building – the executive premises of the Party. Shortly, the crowds burst out in anxiety. The live broadcast was interrupted, yet it was shortly resumed: applause and pro-regime chants responded now and then to Ceausescu's speech, so as to hide the greater commotion rising up through the crowds. Yet, the alarming anxiety of the masses prompted Ceausescu to stop and leave the balcony. The broadcast ceased seconds after chants like 'Timisoara! Timisoara!' and 'Down with Ceausescu!' were heard through the crowds.<sup>6</sup> In the historical course of the revolutionary events, this broadcast was crucial as it confirmed the news on the emerging revolution that had already circulated on Radio Free Europe, in the Hungarian and Western media. Furthermore, this particular televised event gave away the great power potential of the medium. Such a power was to build up during the revolution as a social function able to mobilize, enforce and determine events.

The live broadcast of December 22nd mobilized an entire nation. At that historical moment, the revolution gained social legitimacy through the artifice of live television. The size and force of the uprising masses increased considerably after the broadcast. Ceausescu seemed to have beheaded himself and his regime with the same weapon he had used to indoctrinate, manipulate and control the country. The situation appeared paradoxical; nevertheless it emphasized Ceausescu's estrangement not only from the revolutionary events, but also from his own nation. At the same time, the situation pointed out to a general popular alienation from the functionality of television as a social actor.<sup>7</sup> However, it was not until the next day when Ceausescu and his wife fled by helicopter that the institution of television proclaimed itself as pro-revolutionary. It seemed that the power of the medium had outclassed the power of institutional actors and what constituted one day earlier a misfortunate broadcast, the next day constituted an institutional stand. 'Brothers! Thank to God!' were the first words aired

live on the television that instantly positioned itself against its old atheist status.<sup>8</sup> The new name ‘the Free Romanian Television’ represented yet another sudden, abrupt dilapidation of the past. What followed next was a revolution unfolding live in front of the nation and television becoming the new locus of the power to be. Upon that, the institution committed a series of discontinuities with the past regime.

One such discontinuity was the immediacy and transparency of the live broadcasts, which contrasted sharply with the pre-controlled broadcasts that the institution had practiced until then. Soon after the fall of the Ceausescus, the Free Romanian Television switched on to live broadcasts from the main sites of action. The live broadcasts from the streets alternated with live broadcasts from Studio 4, where key actors of the revolution had already gathered and appeared in front of the camera nervous, tired, unshaved, wearing shabby clothes. Their presence on the screen opposed the manufactured and over-elaborate appearances that had until then served as television content. Parallel to the street struggles, a struggle was starting out inside Studio 4: those present were working at re-establishing a credible status of the medium as well as a credible status of the new emerging power. The broadcast of the revolution soon resembled the representation of a screenplay: there was first created a state of conflict between a new regime and the old regime, between revolutionaries and the old power, between the Free Romanian Television and alleged terrorists. Soon, a state of tension and panic was created: the public institution declared to be under the attack of enemies identified as terrorists, members of the *Securitate* and of the *Militia*.<sup>9</sup> Studio 4 was gradually presented as a target under serious threat. Appeals were made to the masses to come to the rescue of the public television. There followed a state of suspense concerning the shootings taking place around and inside the television, in which respect the television promised at regular timelines to come back with more information. The climax soon took place: the Ceausescus were prosecuted and shot. The images of their death circulated the screens continuously, in a way that punctuated the end of the old regime. The on-screen formation of the new power came as another climax point in the televised story of the revolution. The resolution of the event, appeared, thus, to flow naturally: there was declared a change of structures from a communist regime to a democratic one. Within this pattern of a screenplay, the conventional aesthetic opposition between the good and the bad was also created: the Free Romanian television, the revolutionaries, the characters of Studio 4 were soon associated with the forces of good, whereas the Ceausescus’, the *Securitate*, the terrorists became forces of the utmost evil. As well, there were created patterns of sympathy for the nation tuned in to the televised revolution. Strongly sympathetic connections were created between the viewers and the forces of good. It was these sympathies that played the crucial role in legitimizing the new public television and the actors of Studio 4, who were soon to become the new state power.

*Ion Iliescu (centre)  
at his first  
appearance in  
Studio 4, December  
1989. Source:  
Jurnalul National,  
13 December 2005*



Another important discontinuity of the Free Romanian Television with the old regime was the creation of an active, participant viewer who opposed the submissive viewer of the communist regime. With the broadcast of the revolution, Romanian television became a two-way communicative practice.<sup>10</sup> The viewers were repeatedly called upon to participate in the defense of the public institution: ‘There are 2,000 terrorists approaching the television building [...] come help us’.<sup>11</sup> Television also became the platform where the viewers could directly participate in the revolution. During the live discussions in Studio 4, a name seemed to pop up over and over again: Ion Iliescu. On such an occasion, his telephone number was even spelled out on the air and viewers were pleaded to call and urge him to come shortly to Studio 4. Iliescu did show up promptly and he was soon to become the head of the new interim power and after few months, the president of the new democratic Romania. ‘Had Iliescu gone on tv one hour later, the revolution would have failed’.<sup>12</sup>

The coming of Iliescu to Studio 4 at the right time was thus decisive in the course of the revolution and through the mediation of television the viewers were given the chance to directly participate in the historical moment. A public plea was also made for viewers to participate in the formation of the new power as Iliescu announced on live television the formation of the National Salvation Front later that day – an interim governing body with the aim of restoring the order. Moreover, a hotline was established for reactions of the public, which were scrolled over the television screen. At the request of the viewers, the state television even changed the evening schedule and replaced the broadcast of a Romanian film with news updates. Such communicative acts with the viewers were significant, as they created an apparent shifting of power into the hands of

## ALTE MOMENTE ALE VIZITEI (ÎN PAGINA A 3-A)

# DECRET PREZIDENTIAL cu privire la instituirea stării de necesitate pe teritoriul județului Timiș

Având în vedere încălcarea gravă a ordinii publice în județul Timiș, prin acte teroriste, de vandalism și de distrugere a unor bunuri obștești,

În temeiul articolului 75 punctul 14 din Constituția Republicii Socialiste România,

Președintele Republicii Socialiste România decretază:

**Art. 1.** – Se institue starea de necesitate pe întreg teritoriul județului Timiș.

Toate unitățile armate, Ministerului de Interne și formațiunilor gărzilor patriotice sînt puse în stare de alarmă.

**Art. 2.** – Pe timpul stării de necesitate se interzic orice intrări publice, precum și circulația în grupuri mai mari de cinci persoane.

Se interzice circulația pe timpul nopții începînd cu ora 23, cu excepția persoanelor care lucrează în schimburi de noapte.

**Art. 3.** – Toate unitățile socialiste din județul Timiș sînt obligate să ia măsuri imediate pentru desfășurarea normală a proceselor de producție, pentru paza bunurilor obștești, pentru respectarea strictă a ordinii, disciplinei și programului de lucru.

**Art. 4.** – Consiliile populare municipale, orașenești și comunale din județul Timiș sînt obligate să asigure respectarea strictă a ordinii publice, paza bunurilor proprietate socialistă de stat și cooperatistă, aprovizionarea în bune condiții a populației, desfășurarea normală a transporturilor, organizarea și desfășurarea în bune condiții a întregii activități economice și sociale.

**Art. 5.** – Întreaga populație a județului Timiș este obligată să respecte cu strictețe legile țării, ordinea și liniștea publică să apere bunurile obștești, să participe activ la înlăturarea normală a activității economico-sociale.

**NICOLAE CEAUȘESCU**  
Președintele Republicii Socialiste România

21 December: The decree instituting the state of emergency in Timisoara. Source: Scanteia Tineretului, 21 December 1989

the participatory audience: television was no longer the tower of control that had been during Ceausescu's regime, it became an institution of the people, who were granted with power. The 'rule of the people' – the principle at the heart of democracy appeared to be given a concrete, visible form.

Yet, the most significant act of discontinuity with the old regime, performed by the state television, was the on-air formation of the new power on December 22nd. Dissidents, former Party members disgraced by Ceausescu, young revolutionaries participated in the event. In an office of the former communist executive headquarters in front of television cameras, the participants put together a brainstorming on the formation of a provisory mechanism of power: the National Salvation Front (NSF). Clear-cut democratic structures were proclaimed: the formation of a pluralistic democratic governing system, free elections, separate legislative, executive and judicial powers, the drafting of a new Constitution, equal rights to the national minorities, respect for the human rights and liberties, domestic and foreign policies that would reflect the interests of the people, etc. The televised representation of the event was decisive, as it made visible the changes of power and structure taking place. For the first time, the new power – (re)presented as the direct offspring of the revolution itself – was deliberated upon within the public space of the national television.

In December 1989, Romanian television was not only a mediator of the historical events, but it became an actor and a leader of the social and political movement. This status was due to the medial construction of television, which allowed for the abstraction of events from their actual context, which made possible the representation of selected specific topics.<sup>13</sup> It was through the artifice of dis-contextualization – understood as the act of the medium to isolate events from their concrete reality and endow them by means of liveness, immediacy and visibility with another, yet self-sustained reality – that the Free Romanian Television became the instigator of a televised revolution that paralleled the street events. Yet, television became also a leading actor of the revolution as the televised event shortly took over the street movement. This was due to the medial construction of television as a symbolic enunciator. As an enunciator television articulates, propagates and enforces, fulfilling thus what Raymond Williams denominated as the social function of television.<sup>14</sup> According to Williams, social function – alongside socialization and interaction – is part of the social processes that television produces. Yet, the technology of television makes it possible that the intentional forces behind such processes are often hidden. I dare add to this argument that the lack expressed through the concealment of such forces can be easily translated into a symbolic force that in turn promotes an abstract construction of television that makes the concealment of agency even possible. It is the concealment of agency and the abstract form of mediation that endows the enunciative social function of television with a symbolic status. Therefore, as a symbolic enunciator, the Free Romanian Television functioned so as to propagate and produce isolated pieces of historical events, enforcing thus a different, self-standing reality. It is within this understanding of television, that the Romanian medium led the course of events in December 1989. The acts of discontinuity with the past that Romanian television committed during the revolution were disseminated and reinforced as a change of structures. Such a change came as the resolution point in the televised representation of the revolution – a representation that reminds closely of the aesthetic sequences of a screenplay and which evolved on the background of a strong emotional engagement on the part of the viewers. After clear-cut climax points, which distinguished the good from the bad through the formation and the triumph of the new power led by Iliescu, on one hand and the death of the Ceausescus sustained by the defeat of his regime on the other hand, the change from the bad to the good, from the old regime to the new one relied already upon a strong popular acceptance. It was therefore by means of the dis-contextualized representations of the revolution and the symbolic, enunciative functioning of the medium, that the Free Romanian Television reinforced its acts of discontinuity with the past as democratic structural changes. It becomes justifiable at this point to pursue a deconstruction of these changes into the structures and practices that evolved in Romania after 1989.

## 2 The televised revolution as media text and media practice

The political and social changes of December 1989 appeared to bring about a democratic structure. Jürgen Habermas is interesting within this context by the way his concept of democracy becomes the result of a structural transformation.<sup>15</sup> According to him, the rise of the democratic bourgeois society equated to the rise of an authentic public sphere: a publicly, open, transparent platform where individuals from the private sphere could assert their public role as citizens and where the intellectual elite could construct ideologies and confront the state authority. However, Habermas' concept of democracy as a result of a particular structuring of powers, only holds within the historical specificity of the eighteenth century. Outside such context, the authentic private sphere as a locus for critical, democratic practice becomes just an idealizing discourse on democratic values. It is through the mis-acknowledgement of this specificity, that the use beyond history of Habermas' structuring of a democratic society becomes a mere symptomatic reading of a democratic value that bears no tangent points with a democratic practice. This draws attention to the great necessity of contextualizing structures of democracy. What happened in the case of post-revolutionary Romania was a structural transformation of the public sphere, a transformation that a Habermasian reading would have claimed as democratic, whereas in practice it founded the emergence of the new state authority.

The transformation under discussion refers to the new public sphere that arose in December 1989, when the old sphere of communist authority was overthrown and civilians took over the state television. With the old regime fallen, the mass-media institution lost its function as a locus for state control and its newly gained freedom brought along its potential for transparency and immediacy. Within a matter of minutes, the leaders of the civilian revolution – presented as the intellectual elite – took over Studio 4 of the public television and expressed themselves in front of live cameras. It appeared that the public space of the national television had opened up: people from the rioting crowd had managed to take hold of it. Shortly, national television became the transparent public zone where the intellectual elites of a civil society could discuss critically and take public decisions concerning the political future. For days, such people stood in front of live cameras, discussing on behalf of the public interest of those tuned in to their television sets. The television space became, in Habermasian terms, an authentic public sphere, originating in the private realm and hosting an open critical public debate. Nevertheless, the democratic structures that were disseminated and reinforced by means of the medium of television,<sup>16</sup> constituted rather symptoms of a change, than an actual change. Abstracted from the broader context of the revolutionary events and from their specific political, social and economic context, such tele-mediated structures had the status of mere democratic values, without constituting themselves as democratic practices.

*Civilians in front of the live cameras of Studio 4, December 1989. Source: Jurnalul National, 13 December 2005*



When democracy can be easily flagged as a mere value, the importance of a correspondent practice is precisely that it succeeds in ‘framing those wider values and thereby reproduce them as such’.<sup>17</sup> It is therefore crucial that the structural changes that were asserted at the end of December 1989 in Romania should be deconstructed into specific political, social and economic practices. The question arising at this point is: did the structures of democracy, advocated in the wake of the revolution, lead to a democratic verdict? In 1989-1990, a pluralistic system of governing was adopted together with a democratic Constitution and a free-market economy; an independent press and the independence of state television were also promulgated. Such structural changes have been considered by many to be symptomatic of democratic practices. It is a symptomatic reading of democracy in terms of structural dominants that I oppose to! Taking into account the centrality of television within the 1989 Revolution and the leading status the televised revolution had within the events, it becomes important to

understand the mediation of television in post-communist Romania ‘not as texts or structures of production, but as practice’.<sup>18</sup> I will however not consider the importance of structures, yet I am pointing out to the insufficiency of structures when separated from their practices. In fact, I will be arguing that in the Romanian case, structures that were advocated as abrupt discontinuities with the old regime, served as a vehicle for practices that continued communist traditions. A deconstruction of these structures into their relevant practices will be pursued further.

### 3 The discontinuity of structures versus the continuity of practices

#### *The new old power*

Upon the formation of the National Salvation Front, it seemed that an authentic public sphere – in the Habermasian connotation – arose. Intellectuals, among which Iliescu, emerged from the private sphere, opposed the old regime and discussed the future of Romania. The situation was to change shortly: what came about as an authentic public sphere turned into the sphere of the new state power.

The initially provisory National Salvation Front became the newly elected power in the 1990 elections, whereas Iliescu became the president of Romania. Although the new power was instituted as a democratic structure, discontinuous from the old regime, its members and its coming about carried significant connections with the old system. Iliescu himself – who from his first appearance in Studio 4 was acknowledged as a true leader and greeted as such: ‘Esteemed viewers, we have the great joy to host here, in this studio, Ion Iliescu. He is the son of a revolutionary and patriot, he himself being a patriot’ – had had a rising career within the Communist Party.<sup>19</sup> By 1984, he had gained great popularity within the Communist Party, which caused Ceausescu to demote him from his party positions. However, by that time, Iliescu had the experience to become ‘a natural candidate for the highest office’ and the reputation of a ‘relaxed, understanding and enlightened party boss.’<sup>20</sup> That explains why on December 22, Iliescu became the new figure expected to seize power: ‘Indeed, for years his name had often been mentioned as a likely successor to Ceausescu at the top of the party and the country, in the event of the collapse of the latter’s rule’.<sup>21</sup> In fact, Securitate and Army members accepted to switch sides to the revolutionaries only on condition that the power would be seized by a ‘serious politician’, rather than ‘few crazy poets and intellectuals’.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the formation of the National Salvation Front appeared to have been prepared long in advance.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the new power instituted upon the fall of communism in Romania rather than being the offspring of the civilian revolution, was the offspring of former members of the Communist Party.

*On the premises of state television: civilians defending the institution, December 1989. Source: Jurnalul National, 13 December 2005*



The free elections that took place in May 1990 were another form of democratic structure that, however, reinforced – once again through the mediation of television – the one-party dominance on the political scene. Under circumstances that NSF dominated in the media and the new society lacked the civil structures to organize an opposition within a short time, NSF won the 1990 elections with a 2/3 majority in the Parliament and Ion Iliescu became the president with 85.1% of the votes.<sup>24</sup> The situation soon created dissatisfactions and on June 12, 1990 anti-Front activists and members of the Student's League protested against Iliescu and his government, demanding the demise of the two. Yet, by means of television, the riots took a convenient political turn. By televised appeals, Iliescu disseminated the image of protesters as hooligans and appealed to the population to come to the rescue of authorities. The tele-mediated mobilization that occurred during the revolutionary days was once again relied upon. What followed next were thousands of miners coming to the capital city armed with explosive bottles, clubs and pieces of metallic cable and instituting a state of bloody violence and terror against journalists, students and intellectuals associated with the opposition.<sup>25</sup> The freedom of the press together with the freedom of opposition fell under a severe attack.

'Ion Iliescu (...), through the appeals he made on television and radio, instigated the entire population of Romania to violence, starting with the afternoon of June 13th, when there was nothing out of order happening during the protests and the police crowds that had filled up the University Square had already the situation under control'.<sup>26</sup>

Upon the June 1990 riots, television undoubtedly became the instrument of Iliescu's political game. Live broadcasts of the events portrayed the anti-government activists as aiming to vandalize the city. The instigated riots went as far as an attack against television took place. Live on television, Paul Naum, a sports commentator was beaten up by what were presented as hooligans. A bloody struggle appeared to take place around the television building. During a broadcast of the attacks against the public institution, television had to interrupt its emission. Paradoxically, the same television that had emitted continuously while facing allegedly severe fire attacks in December 1989, had to stop its emission due to a crowd of hooligans armed with clubs and bottles. It was a convenient act in the storyline of the events.

The June events carried a significant connotative power in signaling the new order in post-revolutionary Romania. Firstly, it became clear that there was no desire for opposition under Iliescu's leadership. Secondly, independent press organizations were considered as a threat to the new rule. The editorial staff of the independent daily *Romania Libera* was devastated in response to the newspaper's stand against Iliescu's actions.<sup>27</sup> The emergence of an independent press was stifled as soon as June 1990. So, was the power of intellectuals not only by the violent attacks against them during the riots, but also by the heroic role attributed to the miners and the working class in the aftermath of the events – a role in itself reminding of the social hierarchies of communism. Chants such as 'We work, we do not think!' were heard during the riots in inconsideration of the intellectual class.<sup>28</sup> In fact, intellectuals, just like the state television, were used as legitimizing forces of the new political power: 'We [intellectuals] were dispersed by those who used our solidarity during December 1989, in order to consolidate their political power', said Octavian Paler, member of the intelligentsia.<sup>29</sup> Last, but not least, the June riots constituted themselves as a harsh confirmation on the submissive relation of the national television to the new state power. The institution reinforced itself as unable to raise opposition against the new government and to break off from its past traditions of state control. Having a central role in the June events, television remained an instrument at the service of the state. It became clear already at that point in history that staff of the institution was affiliated with the former Securitate and at the disposal of the ruling *NSR*. Not only was television manipulated into Iliescu's political game, but it also acted as a voice for the new regime. The fact that television stopped its emission while claiming to be attacked by anti-government protesters, confirmed further the infiltration of new government actors into the institution. The June events signaled the impossible premises for the formation of an opposition within the state, as well as the impossibility for the establishment of critical, alternative voices to Iliescu's regime. Such acts alluded to a continuity of practice with the old regime.

*Public television: old biographies, booming careers*

The June riots reinforced two important structural changes promulgated by the new power: the public television was to become an institution independent from the ruling power as necessary funds were to be arranged in that respect; and the Securitate was to be abolished. These were yet two other democratic structures adopted by the new power that failed to be traced back to corresponding democratic practices.

The Securitate, although officially abolished after 1989, did not disappear; rather it was carefully dispersed and transformed so as to suit the new structures. The newly established Romanian Service of Information took over the personnel and logistical facilities of the communist institution.<sup>30</sup> The recycling of the former Securitate within the new structures was crucial as it provided a reliable platform for control for the new power and a viable opportunity for activists of the former regime to become successful into the new system. The state television remained after December 1989 a key institution for the post-revolutionary evolution of Romania. The loyalty of the public-service television to the ruling power was guaranteed through the recycling of employees, formerly affiliated with the Securitate. There are few names that have remained prominent in the history of both communist and post-communist Romanian television.

Nicolae Melinescu was a news reporter and presenter for the public television until 1989. He was also a Securitate informer inside the news department. His duty was to report on different gatherings and provide recommendations for those seeking a visa to travel abroad.<sup>31</sup> His name appears in the Securitate archives as 'Melinte' and he was referred as the source. After the fall of communism, Melinescu continued to work within the news department of the Romanian Television. Two years after, he was appointed a foreign correspondent of the public television in Washington, a position envied by many.

Paul Soloc was another recycled employee of the state television. Before 1989, he was a news reporter and a Securitate informer. He activated under the code name 'Sandu' and was also referred to as S.P. His informative notes were fierce and rich. One of such notes dated back to 1981 and offering abundant personal details on one of his colleague's intimate relationship, resulted in the accused being banned from traveling abroad.<sup>32</sup> He submitted the informative notes out of his own initiative as it was recorded in the Securitate documents. After 1989, Paul Soloc remained within the news department as an external affairs editor. Shortly after, he was promoted as head of the News Department until 1996. After 2000, he became the coordinator of the presidential elections programmes.

Viorel Grecu has been director within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs up to the end of 2004. Before 1989, he was a fierce informer within the cultural department of television, where he was in turn a reporter, editor and editor-in-chief. He collaborated with the Securitate under the code name 'George'. In one

of his informative notes that generated the dismissal of an old colleague from television, he wrote:

‘Among her fellow colleagues, she gives the impression she has not maintained any relations with her sister. Nevertheless, last autumn, I found out she was in the possession of a VCR, which she humbly admitted she had received from her sister in Germany (...) I do not believe she informed the superiors about her sister’s visit, she communicated this information to me at a moment of anger and lack of control. (...) She is a difficult colleague, because of her tendency to complain and blame, because of her selfishness and jealousy. In fact, such flaws left their trademark onto her personal life, at present she is a widow.’<sup>33</sup>

After the revolution, Grecu was a television reporter; vice-director of the Cultural Center in Paris and Bern; first secretary of cultural and mass-media affairs; director of the cultural department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After Grecu’s collaboration with the Securitate was revealed in the media by the journalist Andreea Pora, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied Grecu’s former status as an informer.<sup>34</sup>

Andrei Magheru occupied important political positions since 1990, his latest position being state secretary of the Ministry of Culture. Before 1989, he worked for the Romanian Radio and Television, coordinating programmes for the foreign market. As a Securitate informer, he submitted notes on gatherings and receptions held at embassies, exhibitions and international fairs, all under the code name ‘Radu Manoliu’.<sup>35</sup> George Marinescu, the head of external affairs within the news department went as far in his informative notes to the Securitate so as to turn in his in-laws for their intentions to leave Romania and express in written his regret for being related to them. Fonica Orzan, a Securitate officer within the International Relations Office of television, was in danger of being arrested in 1990. However, he was saved by the Iliescu regime on behalf of his contributions to the new government, contributions that were probably related to the anti-government riots in June 1990, in which the Securitate was alleged to have been involved. After 1989, Orzan continued with a teaching career in international law and retired as a Professor Doctor in 2003. Stoica Meteleanu, also known as the ‘Stoicescu’ source and a trustworthy man in the communist television, wrote informative notes that led to the imprisonment of his fellow colleagues: ‘Stoica Meteleanu sent me to prison for 12 years’ says Dumitru Iuga, one of his victims.<sup>36</sup> Meteleanu stayed on the barricades of the Securitate until December 18th, 1989, the date of his last informative note. On December 22nd, he grabbed the arms to defend the revolution and has continued working in television ever since. Nowadays, he has reached the age of retirement for a few years, and nobody seems to approve his retirement anymore. ‘[What I find the most revolting] is that time seems to have stopped in the same place. There are four-

teen years since the Revolution and I have the same impossible feeling that there are people still controlling our lives.’ said Jana Gheorgiu the day she received the note of retirement from her position as a director of TVR 2, the second channel of the public television.<sup>37</sup> Paradoxically or not, her retirement came on the same day that her name appeared in the media as having been one of the targets of the Securitate informers. Cornelius Rosiiianu, an employee that distinguished himself during Ceausescu’s period, was shortly appointed as an interim successor to Gheorgiu’s position.<sup>38</sup>

Under the communist rule, from the site of the state television, the Securitate seemed to have spread its infiltration deep into the society. Andreea Pora’s investigation on the Securitate archives remains illustrative of the extensive control exercised over the state television, a control that went beyond the institution itself: from the production processes to the employees and their social networks, but also to of all those elements that expressed any kind of relation to the institution – whether foreign journalists or discontent viewers.<sup>39</sup> An important platform for the Securitate, communist television had managed to surpass its (dis-)informative duties, so as to serve as a watchdog of the society. Taking into consideration the centrality of television in the manufacturing of the revolutionary outcome, the biographical continuities within the post-communist television appear to be a strategic political act. Such continuities not only provided loyalty to the ruling power, but they also shaped an institutional development of the Romanian televisual landscape that did not spring too far from old communist traditions.

#### 4 Television between the Old and the New

The personnel continuities within the state television together with the power vacuum that opened up inside the institution upon the fall of the old regime, were the decisive factors in the institutional evolution of Romanian television. Despite democratic changes – such as the development of alternative networks, the diversification of content, the access to Western programming, the rise of private, independent broadcasters, the development of production techniques – the public state television did not assert itself as an independent mass-media institution and remained at the service of political and economic powers.

In 1990, the Romanian Radio and Television remained an independent state institution, yet dependent on the state budget. Advertisement revenues as well as the audio-visual public fee were scarce supplementary sources of income for the state institution. For a few years, the public-service institution remained the major sender on the market. Several private television stations were set up in the first months of 1990: TVI Timisoara, TVI Oradea, SOTI Bucharest, TVI Brasov and others. Yet, due to the lack of any other legal framework, they were allowed to broadcast on the second state channel, TVR 2, in the time slot between 22.00

and 23.00 hrs. Later on, their time slot was moved between 24.00 and 1.00 hrs. In the meantime, the public television had increased the broadcasting hours from four hours a day in 1989 to eighteen hours a day in 1990.<sup>40</sup> The number of employees nevertheless remained the same: 2,500 and the fact determined changes in the type and structure of programming: news broadcasts were decreased, whereas an increase in entertainment and sports programming took place. American film productions dominated television content, a process of Americanization that served to symbolize democratic values.<sup>41</sup>

The 1990 Constitution failed to provide a concrete legal framework for the development of the media. While it allowed for freedom of expression, freedom to found publications and the abolishment of censorship, it also claimed that freedom of expression should not create prejudices to the dignity or the public image of any individual.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, anyone who injured someone's honour or reputation by words, gestures or any other way was to be subject to a penal punishment.<sup>43</sup> The same applied for any publication that affected and exposed a person in public, or for 'any expressions of disdain for the signs of authority in Romania'.<sup>44</sup> Such constitutional stipulations failed to provide a concrete status for freedom of speech and the abolishment of censorship. Although the first democratic Audio-Visual Law provided that the budget of state radio and television should be approved by the Parliament at the beginning of each calendar year, which was to diminish the potential of government intervention, such intervention was facilitated through other means. One of such means was the National Audio-Visual Council (CNA) targeted at monitoring the development of broadcasting. The members of CNA were appointed by the governing structures. Although the organization was apolitical by law and meant to represent the public interest, the extent to which CNA remained dependent on the governing power was problematic. In 1992, the request of Ion Ratiu – a member of the opposition – for a broadcasting license was rejected by CNA without any justification.<sup>45</sup> In 2002, the license of the private station OTV was revoked on the grounds that the network propagated an anti-Semitic, discriminatory and xenophobic activity that would harm the public interest. CNA's decision was based on the statements that were made live on television by guests of the live talk-show *DAN DIACONESCU IN DIRECT*. The Romanian Association for Human Rights – the Helsinki Committee, classified the act as an unacceptable measure within a democratic society where freedom of speech should be hold at high value.<sup>46</sup> The Association concluded that revoking a network's license for what guests might say live on television might lead to a (self)censorship that would only endanger mass media's freedom of speech. By 1994, through the Law concerning the Establishment and Operation of the Romanian Broadcasting Company and of the Romanian Television Company, the Society of Romanian Radio and Television was founded. State television was re-organized as two channels – TVR 1 and TVR 2 – that were to serve the public interest and guarantee freedom of speech. Yet, members of the opposition or of the intelligentsia were prevented from

becoming part of the managerial board of state television: philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu was prevented by the government to be part of the executive council of the institution.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, the 1994 law failed to create the economic framework for the setting up of national private networks, leaving TVR as the only broadcaster with national coverage.

From 1990 until 1995, the state television was subject to severe political criticism: the institution was criticized by the pro-government press because of its lack of performance, although it was never discussed what the performance of public-service television ought to entail.<sup>48</sup> Criticism was also targeted towards the management of the institution as well as towards employees in the news department. As a result, in six years the state television had six general directors, and reporters and editors in the news department were changed constantly. At the core of such changes were political accusations against employees. In reality, such changes facilitated a delay in the formation of a consolidated management that was to impose a certain direction in the choice of programmes and in the news selection. The alibi of such decisions was considered to be the response to the social pressures made on the government to cleanse all institutions from activists of the former Communist Party and the Securitate. As a result, the public-service television was maintained in a state of institutional derail, whose effects were threefold: the political interference remained concealed due to the lack of any consolidated institutional power of the medium and the absence of any criteria of programme and news selection; obedience and mediocrity were encouraged among the employees, which in turn generated another effect: the lack of means for employees to assert their professional legitimacy and thus, create a springboard for a new period that was to delimitate itself from the old regime. The lack of legitimacy of the old personnel was crucial within the development of the medium. While television had been at the core of socialist propaganda and had had a strong infiltration of the Securitate, under the new political circumstances a demarcation needed to be drawn between those who had collaborated with the Communist Party and the Securitate and those, who had only been caught up in the system. Such a demarcation failed to be drawn, mainly because the new power failed to hunt down and account for old Securitate members.

In 1994, the Romanian audio-visual landscape underwent transformations upon the rise of alternative, private networks. Several private stations emitted locally: TELE 7ABC, ANTENA 1 and PROTV. The rise of cable networks covering the urban areas of the country and the rise of cross media ownerships which allowed media moguls to invest into private stations made it possible for national private stations to function. Although the public-service television maintained its dominance on the rural market, it lost its lead in the urban areas. By 1997, the viewer ratings classified the state television the third on the preference list with 46% of the ratings, preceded by ANTENA 1 with 47% and PROTV with 62% of the audience ratings.<sup>49</sup> With the advent of private stations, competition arose, which in itself created a proper environment bound to generate the premises for the

shaping of a critical distance towards the state television. The alternative programming offered by private stations as well as the migration of employees from state television to the private stations created the framework for a general dissatisfaction towards public television, a dissatisfaction which was no longer politically maneuvered, but rather generated by the station's poor programming and its partisan position towards Iliescu's regime. Soon, the audience lost interest in the public-service television and the institution decided to enter competition with the other stations. With the rise of alternative networks serving as comparison measures, the state television was exposed as the medium taking biased sides with the government.

The partisan position of state television became clear during the 1996 elections. At the local elections in June 1996, although PSDR – the ruling party and the direct offspring of the former NSF – lost the elections, the public television celebrated the party as a winner. The institution's favorable position towards PSDR continued during the presidential election campaign between September and November 1996, whereas the rest of the mass media held a partisan position to the opposition. The political competition seemed to have engaged also a competition between the public-service television and the other private networks, each of them taking different political sides. Three weeks before the elections, PROTV, an American consortium with the majority of shares owned by Central European Media Enterprises, began to display a balanced coverage between the government and the opposition. PROTV hired a private company for public opinion research, which revealed the electorate's intentions to vote for the opposition. The night of November 3rd, 1996 when the results of the first private poll in Romania were issued, PROTV reached ratings of 98% of its possible audience.<sup>50</sup> PROTV continued with pro-opposition broadcasts, which brought an increase in their audience up to 9 million. While the opposition was seizing power, PROTV was seizing the lead in audience shares. The political competition for power paralleled the competition between the private networks and the public-service television. The great audience shares of PROTV emphasized that the public was turning its back not only on the Iliescu regime, but also on the state television.

The coming to power of the opposition caused changes in the executive leadership of the public institution. It had become clear that the management of the public sender TVR needed to be changed due to its openly partisan attitude towards the former government. The new management consisted of a young team of Romanian specialists who had been trained within private networks or within BBC. Paul Soloc was dismissed from his position as head of the News Department and blamed for his activity during the Ceausescu regime:

[Paul Soloc] had been the head of the News Department for many years; the news presenters of the Ceausescu period continued to write, edit and present news, they had the same enemies and the same friends. It was clear that the

department had to be cleansed of its communist elements [...]. Paul Soloc was not dismissed from the department; he remained there as an editor of external news'.<sup>51</sup>

After running a report on the institution, it resulted that the state television had a debt of more than 18 million ECU.<sup>52</sup> As a consequence, the programme schedule was reorganized and the institution entered direct competition with the private networks for certain sectors of the market. Soon, the network's audience ratings started to increase at the expense of PROTV's ratings. The public-service institution appeared to regain credibility and its advertising revenues increased significantly. In the fall of 1997, the reorganization of the institution continued. A law was drafted with the help of BBC experts, which decreed the separation of public television into four distinct companies: TVR 1, TVR 2, TVR INTERNATIONAL and a video production house. This resulted in a better coordination, a decrease in personnel as well as in the possibility of privatizing some activities.

However, despite the increased audience shares and despite the reorganization of the institution, state television failed to gain the status of an independent medium. Soon after the instauration of the new power, it adopted an openly pro-government position. Members of the former government opened up strong and harsh criticism towards the institution.

'The way the main news bulletin is written, the selection of the news and the tone of reporting – the aggressive and partisan attitude of TVR's reporters and editors – are a clear proof of the extent to which TVR has been subjected to the new power. (...) I have repeatedly asked for the dismissal of Alina Mungiu from the position of head of the News Department'.<sup>53</sup>

Such criticism was evidently harsh, especially coming from actors who had previously used the institution for the consolidation of their own political power. Nevertheless, the criticism was justified: the public-service television was displaying an anti-Iliescu and anti-PSDR position. During several news broadcasts, Iliescu was personally attacked on the grounds that he was living in a grandiose villa while allegedly having no right of being there. No mention was made that Constantinescu – the new president – was living in a similar villa during the 1996 election campaign. It was said at the time that the new management of state television had a strong political affiliation with the governing power. No wonder, since political affiliations were a good old remnant of the late regime. Yet, the explanation lied within a greater context. Upon the fall of the Iliescu regime, a political cleansing of the institution was attempted. This happened within a mass media landscape where there mainly dominated either pro-government media or opposition media. For a while, the opposition media, above all the printed press, was mistaken for an independent media. It was yet far from being independent, since it was still partisan in its reporting. The notion of

apolitical was barely present within the post-communist Romanian mass media. What was mainly understood by political cleansing was taking a position against a former governing power. In the case of the state television, Iliescu's maneuvering strayed the institution from a democratic path. Partly, it came as natural that a political cleansing of TVR needed to imply a cleansing of Iliescu's deeds within the institution. From such a cleansing to engaging in severe attacks towards the ex-president and his party, the line was a thin one. With a consistent history of similar journalistic practices in the Romanian media, it wasn't too difficult for the state television to cross the line. Besides, after the years of institutional and professional derail inflicted upon it by the Iliescu regime, the state television finally got its turn to talk politics. And such politics were mainly anti-Iliescu and anti-PSDR, rather than in favor of the present governing coalition. The changes that took place inside the institution were catalogued in the media of that time as a change for the worse. Far from being good, such changes nevertheless brought the institution out in the open and made it available for publicly open critical scrutiny, a fact that was not possible during the Iliescu regime. The fact set an important foundation stone in the rise of a critical public space in post-communist Romania. The printed press as well as the private networks became public spaces where open criticism against the public-service television could be formulated by journalists, political and media analysts. Not long into the new regime led by Emil Constantinescu, the anti-Iliescu attitude of the state television turned into an overt pro-government attitude. The end of Constantinescu's mandate was the period when the governing coalition was losing grounds in front of the opposition and television was the right means by which there could be attempted a change in the balance. During the 2000 election campaign, the history therefore repeated itself: the public television took up a strong pro-government stand. During the televised campaign, members of the government were overly present on the screen, whereas members of the opposition were entirely absent. Constantinescu's era generated little break with past practices within state television. In fact, it consolidated the state control over the medium by making revisions in the Penal Code that only served as an obstacle to journalistic practices and the democratic development of the media. The 1996 updated Penal Code contained restrictive provisions, such as jail condemnation for those accused of libel and slander.<sup>54</sup> Terms such as insult and calumny remained vague in the provisions of the Code, which made it possible for the state to use censorship and even calumny for suppressing news concerning political and business corruption.<sup>55</sup> One may say that there was not much difference in the public network's practices during Iliescu's and Constantinescu's reign. Whereas the institution remained under state control and subject to pro-government practices, the major change that took place was the degree of public and critical awareness towards such practices as well as the extent to which these practices were externalized. In other words, a critical public space started being shaped in relation to the public-service television.

In 2000, Iliescu's return to power reunited once again old directors and editors-in-chief inside the managerial board of state television. Those who had been retrograded by Constantinescu in 1996, resumed their positions. Paul Soloc moved up on the career ladder by becoming the head of electoral programmes of TVR 1. The institution's partisanship was out in the open, but so was criticism on the issue, coming from the printed press. I underline the importance of such a fact, since it created a forerunning framework for what was to happen right after the 2004 elections, when Iliescu lost presidency. During the 2004 presidential elections, the state television once again played an important role. Its role culminated on the day that the fraud of the elections was made public. The day that Basescu – the runner-up in the elections – held a press conference, in which he revealed the fraud and appealed for a re-run, the state television did not broadcast the conference. Shortly after, Alexandru Costache, a news reporter of TVR talked publicly about the fraud of information that the national television had engaged into during the 2004 presidential elections. Other TVR reporters followed him and denounced censorship and political manipulation as the core of the institution's journalistic practices. In a letter Costache sent to the daily newspaper *Evenimentul Zilei*, he told about political pressures made on the public-service television and which were well served by the management.<sup>56</sup> The denunciative acts that came from within the public institution itself were important, since they shaped a relevant critical discourse against the institution and confirmed the incipency of a critical public space within the Romanian mass-media landscape.

## 5 Recycles of the past within post-communist Romanian mass-media

Whereas the personnel continuities within the state television were mainly due to political interferences within the institution, another series of continuities spread around the rest of the Romanian mass media through the mediation of financial powers and media moguls. After 1989, alongside the political powers, economic powers evolved. The two relied heavily on each other and it was through their collaboration sustained by – yet again – the mass-media platform, that 'the privatized communist party' was formed.<sup>57</sup>

Economic powers started being crystallized as soon as 1990, the year when 'most of the Securitate uniforms were transformed into Armani suits'.<sup>58</sup> The most financially potent at that time were old Securitate members and Party activists, in fact the same actors who had been privileged before 1989. Privatization in Romania took place through the transfer of state funds into private companies with the mediation of the Securitate. Bancorex, a state bank, went bankrupt after giving out significant loans – some of them, without any guarantees – to officers, colonels and members of the old Securitate under the supervision and support of the new political power. The strategy of such acts was based on

reciprocity of favors: people who had proved themselves useful in various political circumstances were rewarded, so were those who mediated the return of such favors. It was a practice that reminded of the rewarding mechanisms pertaining to the former Securitate. Great financial resources ended up in the hands of old Securitate members who were also loyal supporters of the Iliescu regime. The new economic powers were constituted in symbiosis with the political arena and a nest of corruption was created that could only strengthen the political power to a greater extent. Those who made it financially and had not been part of the old Securitate relied still on the former body of control by using its logistical resources and the expertise of former Securitate members.

The rise of financial powers inevitably led to the rise of private networks in post-communist Romania. PROTV was set up at the end of 1995; the main shareholder was the Central Media Enterprises with 66% of the shares.<sup>59</sup> The rest of the shares were owned by Adrian Sarbu, a former cameraman for the public television before 1989, minister within the Iliescu's regime between 1990-1991 and one of Iliescu's allies during the June 1990 riots. The same ownership runs the television stations PROTV INTERNATIONAL, PROCINEMA, ACASA and the radio station PROFM. ANTENA 1, another major national private network, is owned by Dan Voiculescu, an important bank director during communism, the leader of the Conservatory Party after 1989 and a supporter of Iliescu's rule. Voiculescu owns also the television stations ANTENA 3 and EUFORIA, the daily newspaper *Jurnalul National*, the sports newspaper *Gazeta Sporturilor* as well as the radio station RADIO ROMANTIC. He is a media mogul, whose position not only granted him dominance in the media landscape, but it also permitted his media to take openly biased political positions. PRIMA TV, another highly ranked private station, was founded in 1997 by Cristian Burci, a former Romanian emigrant to the United States during the communist regime. In July 2001, the network faced serious financial difficulties, which caused the main shareholder SBS to withdraw itself. However, the network managed to avoid bankruptcy by means of a strategically complex transfer of money from the government to few other intermediaries and eventually to Cristian Burci, owner of PRIMA TV. Burci also controls the production house Creative Vision International as well as the radio stations RADIO STAR and KISS FM. The taking over of KISS FM by Cristian Burci was described as 'the move [that] could be seen as part of a wider strategy by [Iliescu's ruling party] PSD to take control over or establish new media outlets in order to gain more visibility and influence before the parliamentary elections scheduled in 2004'.<sup>60</sup> Other relevant private stations rose up after 2000: B1 TV, owned by the Paunescu brothers, also owners of national and local papers, and managing businesses in the hotel and oil industries. The Paunescu brothers were investigated in the Bancorex case for allegations of questionable loans. They are among the richest people in Romania and are declared supporters of Iliescu's party.

With an economic landscape determined by a privatized Securitate, the rise of private networks facilitated the consolidation of members of the old regime

and the reinforcement of practices pertaining to the former Securitate into the new post-communist system.

## Conclusions

The present study traces back a development of the Romanian public television within the conceptual framework of continuities versus discontinuities with the old regime. Upon its post-revolutionary course, the state institution displayed a dual, paradoxical role: a modernizing role that positioned television as a mediator and reinforcing mechanism of formal democratic structures; and a conservative role that allowed for decisive biographical, practical and institutional continuities with Ceausescu's regime. In between these roles, public television remained a key institution in the political, social and economic evolution of post-revolutionary Romania. The resolution between the two contrasting, yet very much inter-related roles lied primarily within the formal medial functions of television as a symbolic enunciator and a dis-contextualizing mediator. Later onto the path of transition, other factors became reconciliatory to the double-sided utility of television: a concealed political interference performed on the background of an improper critical public space; personnel continuities veiled under the disguise of democratic institutional laws and liberated television programming; and the formation of a democratic audio-visual landscape through the rise of private, alternative networks – a formation, however, that relied on a recycling of the old Securitate.

During the revolutionary days, Romanian public television asserted itself as a leader in the political change. The symbolic force of the medium, together with its isolated mediation of events, generated a televised revolution that marked an abrupt disruption with the Ceausescu's era: the live broadcasts, the transparency of information, the interaction with the public, the confrontation against Ceausescu's regime were all tokens that announced the advent of a new television. The death of the Ceausescu on television as well as the formation of the new interim power on the screen, were events that symbolized the climax points in the televised revolution, that inevitably was resolved with the abolishment of the old regime and the beginning of a new one. The televised form of the revolution conferred a great deal of popular legitimisation to the newly instituted Free Romanian Television, to the new state power and to the structures that resulted from the democratic status adopted by the two institutions.

A significant structure that enjoyed the popular recognition was the independent institutional framework of the public television, which was settled through organizational laws that appeared to ensure freedom of speech and a free mass media. Such popular recognition equated to an absent critical public space in relation to the state television. Consequently, political interference within the institution performed at its best. The personnel continuities within

the public service television – which allowed for former Securitate affiliates to have a flourishing career after 1989 and encouraged thus, a continuity of televisual practices – were both a result of and a starting platform for political manoeuvrings. Nicolae Melinescu, Paul Soloc, Viorel Grecu, Andrei Magheru, George Marinescu, Stoica Meteleanu were just few employees among the many who collaborated with the Securitate and whose careers flourished after December 1989. All this happened under a liberalization of content expressed through an increase in broadcasting hours, diversification and Americanization of programming.

The specific institutional positioning of the public service television constituted the main consolidation mechanism for the ruling political parties after 1989. The 1996 local and presidential elections during which the state television remained faithful to Iliescu – the direct leading offspring of the televised revolution – although he had lost the elections, were a major proof of the extent to which the public institution was loyal to the new power. However, the coming to power of the opposition in 1996, although it caused a radical change of the executive personnel within the public television, failed to witness the rise of a politically independent institution. History repeated itself and the state television became politically faithful to the new ruling power. Yet, by that time a change took place: the political partisanship of the mass media institution was externalized and performed out in the open, which constituted appropriate premises for the formation of a critical public space. This was also sustained by the advent of alternative networks, which by comparison, helped to disclose the political bias of the public institution. A proper critical discourse and implicitly, a critical public platform appeared functional at the end of 2004, when Alexandru Costache – an employee of the state television, joined later by other employees – denounced the censorship and political pressures under which the institution performed.

A different sort of continuities plagued the rest of the Romanian mass-media landscape. Such continuities were ensured by the rise of the media moguls – a phenomenon of recycling former Securitate members and old Securitate's logistical facilities. The main private networks that appeared since 1995 concealed financial powers that had either been previously affiliated with the Securitate or were open partisans of Iliescu's party. The support of media moguls for Iliescu does not appear accidental, since it was under Iliescu's rule that the main economic powers – among which the media moguls – arose as a direct result of illegal loans that were given out from state funds to convenient actors on the Romanian scene.

The present study has attempted to initiate a start in the writing of a history of public-service Romanian television, since such a history has lacked from academic discourses. It has tried to portray the paradoxical and at the same time, central role that the public television has had within the political development of

post-communist Romania. By a means of a historical, deconstructive perspective combined with a prosopographical approach that has tried to break down structures into their corresponding practices, Romanian television has proved to be both a modernizing and a conservative agent in the post-revolutionary course of Romania.

## Notes

1 Relevant discourses in this respect are: D. Berry, *The Romanian Mass-Media and Cultural Development*, Hampshire, 2004; I. Stavre, *Reconstructia societatii romanesti prin audiovisual*, Bucuresti 2004; A. Mungiu-Pippidi, 'Romania's "end of transition" deconstructed' in: *Journal of Political Science*, 2002; M. Tatulici (ed.), *Revolutia Romana in Direct*, Bucuresti 1990; N. Ratesh, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution*, New York 1991; S. D. Roper, *Romania, the Unfinished Revolution*, Amsterdam 2000; M. Preoteasa, 'Romania' in: Id., *Media Ownership and Its impact on Media Independence and Pluralism*, Ljubljana 2004; A. Teodorescu, 'Disguised Players Waiting in the Wings: Romania', in: Id., *The Development of the Audiovisual Landscape in Central Europe since 1989*, 1998.

2 The Free Romanian Television was the new name the public television took upon on December 22, 1989.

3 Berry, *The Romanian Mass-Media and Cultural Development*, p. 23

4 The term of 'tele-revolution' was established by Ratesh, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution*.

5 Berry, *The Romanian Mass-Media and Cultural Development*, p. 120.

6 Timisoara was the city where the first revolutionary riots began on December 16 in response to the eviction of bishop Laszlo Toekes from the Timisoara Reformed Church on the grounds of 'indiscipline against the state'.

7 Kept under strict state control until 1989, Romanian television had until that date primarily been used as a mechanism of reinforcement and state mediation, and had functioned less as a social actor.

8 Ratesh, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution*, p. 47.

9 Securitate was the main coercive body of control during the communist regime, whereas Militia was the police department associated to the regime.

10 A practice based on the democratic value of reciprocity and mutuality.

11 Tatulici, *Revolutia Romana in Direct*, p. 65.

12 Dinescu quoted in Ratesh, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution*, p. 52.

13 R. Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, London 1994, p. 119.

14 Idem.

15 J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Massachusetts 1989.

16 See previous paragraph.

17 N. Couldry, 'Theorizing Media as Practice' in: *Social Semiotics*, 2003, p. 22.

18 Idem, p. 1.

19 Ratesh, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution*, p. 48.

20 Idem, p. 52.

21 Idem, p. 49.

22 Mircea Dinecu qtd. in Ratesh, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution*, p. 52.

23 Idem, p. 54.

24 B. Szajkowski, *New Political Parties of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, Harlow 1991, p. 224.

25 Berry, *The Romanian Mass-Media and Cultural Development*, p. 47-48.

26 L.I. Stoiciu, *Jurnalul unui martor. 13-15 iunie 1990*, Bucuresti 1992, p. 234.

27 Berry, *The Romanian Mass-Media and Cultural Development*, p. 42.

28 In fact, the denigration of the Romanian intellectual class became emblematic since the beginning of 1990 when a split was made between intellectuals and former dissidents on one hand and the new political leaders of the NSF on the other hand. Writers, literary critics and dissidents were made to resign from their political involvement.

29 P. Chihaia, *Fata cernita a libertatii: 20 convorbiri la Europa Libera*, Bucuresti 1991, p. 117.

30 'Arhivele Securitatii ascunse la Bran', 28 March 2005, in: *Jurnalul National*.

31 'Cei din conducerea TVR erau informatori', 26 May 2004, in: *Evenimentul Zile (EVZ)*.

32 'Tudor Vornicu si Securitatea', 14 June 2004, in: *EVZ*.

33 'Televiziunea ceausista, citadela turnatoriei', 24 May 2004, in: *EVZ*.

34 Idem.

35 'Tudor Vornicu si Securitatea', in: *EVZ*.

36 'Omul care a turnat tot ce misca in TVR', 31 May 2004, in: *EVZ*.

37 'Cea mai urata zi din viata mea', 1 July 2004, in: *EVZ*.

38 'Rosiiianu, director interimar la TVR 2', 30 September 2004, in: *EVZ*.

39 Andreea Pora has been the first and only journalist to make a public investigation on the Securitate archives.

40 Teodorescu, 'Disguised Players Waiting in the Wings: Romania', p. 289.

41 In fact, the phenomenon also represented a liberalization of the content, which if contrasted to the communist period, also alludes to the rise of democratic values within state television.

42 In chapter 2, art. 30.

43 In art. 205.

44 In art. 206 and 236, respectively.

45 T. Mollison, 'Television Broadcasting Leads Romania's March Toward an Open, Democratic Society' in: *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 1998.

46 Apador-CH ia apararea OTV', 26 September 2002, at: [www.serverpress.ro](http://www.serverpress.ro). Last visited on July 25, 2005.

47 Mungiu-Pippidi, 'Romania's "end of transition" deconstructed'.

48 Stavre, *Reconstructia societatii romanesti prin audiovisual*, p. 58.

49 M. Coman, *Media in Romania (1990-2001): A Source Book*, Bochum 2004, p. 30.

50 Teodorescu, 'Disguised Players Waiting in the Wings: Romania', p. 303-304.

51 'Alina Mungiu-Pippidi: Conducerea Televiziunii trebuie sa inceapa curatenia', 15 June 2004, in: *EVZ*.

52 Teodorescu, 'Disguised Players Waiting in the Wings: Romania'.

53 Ion Iliescu quoted in 'Actualitatea unei lozinci: "Nu mintiti poporul cu televizorul"', 14 November 1997, in: *Dimineata*.

54 Coman, *Media in Romania*.

55 Berry, *The Romanian Mass-Media and Cultural Development*, p. 81.

56 'Cenzura din TVR', 6 December 2004, in: *EVZ*.

57 M. Oprea, *Mostenitorii Securitatii*, Bucuresti 2004, p. 212.

58 Idem, p. 20.

59 Preoteasa, 'Romania'.

60 Idem, p. 413.