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The Institutional Network of the Preservation and Maintenance of National Identity: Press and Media

Abstract

The article analyses the role of the press written in Hungarian outside the borders of Hungary: the printed press, with its old and new publications; the audio-visual media, and more recently the new medium of on-line press. It is also an important question, how these media are influenced and influencing themselves the social mobility in the areas where Hungarian nationals live as minorities.

1. The most important developments and tendencies between 1990 and 2006 and the present situation

From the beginning of the 1990s the Hungarian press of the neighbouring countries has been the most sensitive to the changes as it had frequently been directly involved on these changes. The changes of the media happened at three stages: in the sphere of the printed press, audiovisual and electronic media.

While the educational sub-system is more inert because of its character, press and especially printed press can react more flexibly to any kind of social changes (i.e. it is easier to start a paper than found a school). As a consequence a novel development of the printed press manifested itself after 1990, partly through the starting of new papers, partly through the renewal of the content of the old ones. While the new papers aimed frequently at the strengthening of the local powers, the renewed old papers became the outlet of the old-new elites which supplied the vocabulary necessary for the audience to understand the changes. In other words, this is the sphere where everyday ideology was created to preserve and maintain identities connected to minority life. Therefore the press became a constant bone of contention and the reordering of proprietorship was more frequently politically motivated than not.

Analysing the make up of the printed press it is apparent that (apart from certain re-namings) it has not been radically altered. In all the regions

the newspapers have been preserved which counted as important from the point of view of the Hungarian minority: in the Uplands *Új Szó* (since 1949), in Banat *Magyar Szó* (1944), in Transcarpathia *Kárpáti Igaz Szó* (1920) published at Ungvár. There have appeared important new papers through which the minority elite tried to ‘colonise’ the press through direct or indirect influence. Such papers are *Krónika* (the successor of old *Előre*, after 1989 renamed as *Romániai Magyar Szó*), *Új Magyar Szó* in Transylvania, *Kárpátalja* published at Beregszász in Transcarpathia, and characteristic is the fate of *Kárpáti Igaz Szó*, which now is being published as two separate papers of the same name (one printed in green, the other in black).

Besides the newly created system of the printed press, the important changes in audiovisual media – the second pillar – should also be mentioned. Local radio and television broadcasting was introduced in all the regions, and the development of the satellite dish and cable network television has enormously increased viewing. Since 1993 Hungary’s Duna TV has been available in all the regions and the transmission of Hungarian commercial channels can be received too. Commercial television of the individual countries has also developed offering a keen competition to broadcasting in the Hungarian language.

The third pillar of the Hungarian press beyond the borders of Hungary is represented by the new appearance of online news. This again is a great challenge for the printed press because of the novel ways of presenting new kinds of news. Albeit still slowly manifested but already there is a competition among the web sites offering news, as well as the institutionalisation of them along political trends. At the same time the media of the first, traditional, line also have created home pages to widen their readership as well as to overcome the problems of distribution and to reach regions farther away from their localities.

Since this is a new segment of the Hungarian press beyond the Hungarian borders, here is a list of the more important websites¹. In Transylvania the best known website is www.transindex.ro. The editors of the home page call it a ‘project’ and beside daily news there are forum, blogs, etc., too. The Transylvanian databank is also available with its data bases, research pages, chronologies and other links of scientific interest. There are news offered by www.hirek.ro and www.erdely.ma, but there are home pages of scientific, cultural, institutional interests, and also such of locali-

¹ So far the only concise summary of the topic is Balázs D. Attila: A határon túli magyar online médiumok tartalomfejlesztési trendváltozásai. *Médiakutató*, 2006/tél. 73-95. [Changes in the trends of content development of the Hungarian online media outside the borders of Hungary]

ties which serve their public with news and communal forum, e.g. www.relatio.ro, www.szatmar.ro, etc.

There are such websites for the other regions in the neighbouring countries: in Transcarpathia www.karpatinfo.net, in Banat www.vajdasagma.info, www.vajdasagportal.com in the Upland www.felvidek.ma, as well as portals with topical, cultural, literary and other professional interests: in Banat www.zetna.org.yu, www.symposion.org.yu, in Transcarpathia www.hhrf.org/ungparty, in the Upland www.foruminst.sk, www.katedra.sk, in Burgenland www.langos.at, to mention only some of them.

The securing of the development of networks is important for the Hungarian government too. Kálmán Kovács ex-minister declared that the informational strategy for the next ten years must include the Hungarians beyond the borders as parts of the whole nation.² In November 2003 there was a conference at Nagyvárad with the title *Hungarians in a Society of Information*, founding a professional consultative body of the same name (by its Hungarian abbreviation: MA-ITT “today – here”). In April 2005 the institute Hungarian Minorities Abroad organized the first meeting of the internet-developers living beyond the borders of Hungary together with the representatives of on-line media of Hungary. The same year in September was the second conference of MA-ITT with participants from several regions outside the borders. The so called Budapest declaration on the modernisation strategy of the Hungarians was accepted, the 4. paragraph of which declares that the program of the Hungarian e-points will create communal links capable of advocating a sense of belonging and helping to development in the Carpathian Basin and over-seas. The aim is to strengthen the cohesion of Hungarians and to help them to succeed in their native country.³ Following up this statement in March 2006 came the opening of www.emagyar.net to connect eMagyar points at various parts of the world.

Reading the printed press in Hungarian language is facing serious technological/constructional challenge since the spreading of public service and commercial televisions of the countries, a similar TV service in Hungary and by the widening of the internet network itself.

How large is the media system beyond the Hungarian borders? Is it a homogeneous system? As to date there are no surveys of the media. The only register dealing with the Carpathian Basin has been the cultural survey carried out by the Research Institute for Ethnic and National

² <http://etech.transindex.ro/?cikk=1546>

³ <http://www.eurohirek.hu/modul.asp?name=cikk&file=article&sid=3930>

Minority Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences,⁴ which presents the printed press, electronic media and websites as separate segments. According to this survey the following data are available for each of the countries:

	Austria	Croatia	Serbia	Romania	Slovakia	Slovenia	Ukrainia	TOTAL
Printed press	5	8	65	140	45	1	28	292
Elektronic media	1	1	19	28	4	2	2	57
Internet portal	0	0	4	5	0	0	2	11

Though the data indicate that internet portals are proportionately less represented, maybe resulting from their nature, they are more markedly present in media consumption (even when allowing for the shortcomings of the fieldworking).

There are more comprehensive data of the regional media consumption. In Transylvania such surveys are regularly carried out,⁵ and there are data from the Upland too.⁶

Recent research have confirmed that the local Hungarian newspapers rule the market by a stable 20-30% which became characteristic by the end of the 1990s.⁷

Media consumption customs usually appear as a part of certain comparative research, e.g. the Kárpát Projekt in 1997 or Mozaik on young people in 2001. The latter revealed that media consumption first of all means

⁴ Blénesi Éva – Mandel Kinga – Szarka László (szerk.): *A kultúra világa. A határon túli magyar kulturális intézményrendszer*. MTA KI, Budapest, 2005. [Cultural world. The system of Hungarian cultural institutions beyond the borders]

⁵ Magyar Tivadar – Veres Valér: *A Duna Televízió erdélyi közönsége. Audenciaelemzés kérdőíves kutatás alapján*. Hungária Televízió Közalapítvány, Budapest, 1998. Magyar Tivadar: A sajtó önállóságának kérdése a romániai magyar köztájékoztatás esetében. *Korunk*, 1996. 1. szám. [The question of the independence of the press of the public information in Hungarian language in Romania]. Magyar Tivadar: A romániai magyar média. *Médiakutató*, 2000/6sz. 95-107 [Hungarian media in Romania]. Magyar Tivadar: Miből tájékozódunk a romániai magyarok? *Szabadság*, 2000. október 18., 8. [Who informs the Hungarians in Romania?]. Magyar Tivadar: Elemzések a romániai magyarok sajtóolvasási szokásairól. *Erdélyi Társadalom*, 2003. 1. szám. 113-131. [Analyses of the press reading customs of the Hungarians in Romania].

⁶ Lampl Zsuzsanna – Sorbán Angella: A szlovákiai és az erdélyi magyarok médiapreferenciái és fogyasztói szokásai. *Magyar Kisebbség*, 1999. 1. sz. 231-248. [Media preferences and consumption customs of Hungarians in Slovakia and Transylvania].

⁷ Magyar Tivadar: Gyorsjelentés az erdélyi magyarok médiahasználatáról. *Erdélyi Társadalom*, 2005. 1. sz. 155. [Preliminary report on the media consumption of the Hungarians in Transylvania].

viewing television, secondly listening to the radio and reading news comes third. About 25% of the age group 15-29 years regularly read newspapers; it seems the proportions are somewhat less in Transcarpathia, maybe due to the lack of local papers.⁸

Besides the description of media constructions, the identification of media consumption customs, the sociological analysis of the operators of the system offers a special field of research. Though such research is fairly common in international literature, it is still rare in reference to minority situation. In the regions in question only Transylvania offers results relating to the Hungarian publicity in Romania.

The results of an inquiry among Hungarian journalists in Romania⁹ indicate that this group has similar characteristics to the ones revealed by international surveys.¹⁰ There is a tendency of social shift towards the middle classes and it is decidedly male centred. The most conspicuous difference appears between the age-groups: minority journalists became “elderly” by the end of the 1990s; it is an inheritance of the 70s and 80s at the same time it forecasts a rejuvenation of the profession which inevitably will influence the contents of the news too. The separation along the generations is already noticeable especially in respect of the use of the internet and knowledge of languages as well as in the attitude towards RMDSZ, the organisation representing minority interests. The contents appearing in the newspapers are the consequence of these changes.

There are characteristic generational features in social and geographical mobility as well. Social mobility is more frequent among the older generation than among the young, the result of the up grading of the prestige of journalism on the one hand and the changes in the school system on the other. In regards schooling, young people of today have more in common with their fathers, than the fathers with the grandfathers. However, the geographical mobility among young people has been decreasing in comparison with those above 40 years, probably because the

⁸ Szabó Andrea és társai (szerk.): *Mozaik 2001. Magyar fiatalok a Kárpát-medencében*. Nemzeti Ifjúságkutató Intézet, Budapest, 2002. [Young Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin]

⁹ Papp Z. Attila: *Keretizmus. A romániai magyar sajtó és működtetői 1989 után*. Soros Oktatási Központ, Csíkszereda, 2005 [The Hungarian press and its operators in Romania after 1989].

¹⁰ Cf.: Weaver Weaver, David – Wilhoit, Cleveland: *The American Journalist: A portrait of U.S. News People and Their Work*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1986.; Weaver, David – Wilhoit, Cleveland: *The American Journalist in the 1990s: U.S News People at the End of an Era*. New Jersey, Mahwah, Erlbaum, 1996.; Weaver, David H. (ed.): *The Global Journalist. News People around the World*. New Jersey, Hampton Press., Inc. Cresskill, 1998.; Weaver, David H.: *Journalists Around the World: Commonalities and Differences*. In: Weaver, David H. (ed.): *The Global Journalist. News People around the World*. New Jersey, Hampton Press., Inc. Cresskill, 1998.

old party-controlled recruiting of journalists has ceased and also new kinds of localities have developed.

If the starting point is that the press is an important scene of national identity politics, it is important to know what and how do the contents of the press reach its minority public. There are numerous analyses of discourse and content, but comprehensive description aiming at synthesis can be found only in connection to the Transylvanian communities. According to Magyari¹¹ the major characteristics of the Hungarian press in Romania is its literary style, minority neurosis, a-commerciality and lack of professionalism. He claims that the literary inclinations of the minority press (the journalist has to be a ‘good writer’) leads to the neglect of strict media-economic aspects, the overestimation of minority ethos resulting in an almost exclusive minority observation of the world’s affairs.

Keeping Magyari’s observation in mind during the present qualitative and quantitative research¹², the content matters of minority press has been put into a larger context, which revealed that the battle between minority ethos and the logic of the profession is always noticeable. The minority journalists move within the limits of their own *morbis minoritatis* ideology, which they cannot, dare not or will not leave.

When operating minority public, a regularly and selectively recurring inheritance has to be counted with. This ‘inheritance’ defines the journalists’ limit of operation and is in close connection with the minority existence itself. To be creative as a minority intellectual presumes the conscious or unconscious acceptance of a minority ideology. The acceptance helps to define the seemingly constant framework of the minority press. It will be called *framism*, where the element *-ism* suggests the existence of a kind of ideological definition. The journalists define themselves as the best ‘frame experts’ and knowing their position, they act within the limits. They also contribute to the forming of the frame, since the existence of the limits facilitates their daily work. Being led by the framework they do not question issues which disturb the entity of the framework. Being minority journalists they also serve as the protectors of their own ethnic group, assuming a relationship between themselves and their presumed audience. Though the operation of the framework can contradict professional arguments or conflict with the journalists’ conscience, it is, notwithstanding, preserved partly due to routine, but mainly to ‘agenda setting’ within the minority

¹¹ Magyari Tivadar: A romániai magyar média. *Médiakutató*, 2000/ösz. 95-107 [The Hungarian media in Romania].

¹² Papp, Z. Attila op.cit.

press generated by the limits themselves. Journalists most probably prefer topics reinforcing the framework of their work.

Professional logic and minority ethos contradict one another, sometimes exclude one another. Albeit a kind of confrontative professionalism appeared at the end of the 1990s, it did not necessarily mean logic to gain ground, it was halted by *framism*. Professional settling down does not lead to the loss of minority ethics permeating public thinking of the Hungarians in Romania. Exclusively professional and minority ethical values should be understood as values existing side by side which may distinguish certain journalists, but can also appear intermingled in the case of given persons, prompting them to strive for equilibrium.

The gaining ground of professional logic would not discontinue the deeply rooted frames, which define the operation of the press offering forums to open discussion. Because of *framism* the ideological and cultural frameworks have been preserved; their major features will be described in the various mechanisms, first of all in the process of creating taboos. Minority journalists feel compelled to protect their audience (i.e. minority itself) therefore operating the framework could conflict with professional logic.

The range of the present press publicity is defined by ideology assuming political, cultural, interethnic dimensions; these are constantly changing under the influence of inherent professional reasons as well of interactions (e.g. model-seeking, model-borrowing attitude toward the majority Romanian and Hungarian press). The plural and multi level character of the system of journalism have developed different measures at the various levels but the battle between public norms and professional expectations is still going on. There will never be a winner, this being the constantly recreating feature of minority public: if professional logic would get the upper hand, the guardians of minority ethics call the attention to the minority sense of mission based on the question of 'where we come from, where we go to'; if the minority feeling prevails, the profession would protest against its one-sidedness, as it actually happened in the second half of the 1990s.

To understand the workings of the minority press, it is not enough to observe it in the relationship between majority and minority as was done by authors of earlier publications¹³, but can be better grasped through the Brubaker-theory known from the theory of nationalism.¹⁴

¹³ Riggins Riggins, Stephen H.: *Ethnic Minority Media: An International Perspective*. London, Newbury Park, Sage Publications, 1992.

¹⁴ Brubaker, Rogers: *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

According to Brubaker's concepts it is expedient to operate in a threefold division: national minority, nationalizing state (the territory where the minority lives) and the mother country (the state the majority nation is linguistically/culturally common with the minority which are not its citizens). In contradiction with Riggins it is not only the strategies of the state and the minorities, which are at play but there is a third relationship, the one between the minority and the mother country. The question of taboos can be inserted into the model as their existence depends on the interaction among the three participants. To all this, the system of minority representation can be added which, playing an important role in the (political) life of the Hungarians in Romania, can also generate taboos.

Albeit the above description was about the Hungarian media in Romania, it could be successfully extended to the whole media system. The model seems to be valid in all the regions at least in three points:

1. Similar to the Transylvanian situation, the press should be treated in the threefold relations as described by Brubaker: the role of the mother country and the relations to the majority is important to operate every press;
2. the local representative organisations of the minorities, the minority political organisations want to 'colonize' the minority publicity. May be it is not as true in the case of the Upland in Slovakia (though there is only one daily newspaper of great circulation), but in Transcarpathia and Banat the parties of the minorities often try to influence the local press;
3. interethnic and intraethnic conflicts are present in every region's press and frequently serve territorial controversies, cf. the relationship between Szabadka and Újvidék, Ungvár and Beregszász, West and East Slovakia.

2. Current tendencies and processes

In addition to the above described threefold relationship, minority press in all the regions will meet the challenge of wrestling with the growing influence of globalization and the upgrading of localities. In order to be able to give authentic answers to the challenges, the present qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the Hungarian journalistic training should be reassessed. The only offer for higher education in journalism is in Transylvania, at the Babes-Bolyai University at Kolozsvár; there are schools for journalists at Nagyvárad and Újvidék, but no special training is offered in the other regions. The recurrent question is whether young

journalists should be educated at home or rather in Hungary.¹⁵ Under the present conditions of globalization education and further training should be considered at various venues and in addition to the training in journalism media economic and managerial skills should also be included.

The question of instruction and further training of journalists have become timely in all the regions as a local interest and as one concerning the entire Carpathian Basin. In May 2005 the Convention of the Associations of Hungarian Journalists Abroad was founded at Szeged, the members are the Association of Hungarian Journalist in Romania, Association of Hungarian Journalist of Banat, the Association of Hungarian Journalists in Transcarpathia, and Association of Independent Hungarian Journalists in Croatia. The aim of the convention is to help sustain the European quality and Hungarian mentality of journalism, the cooperation between the Hungarian editors and journalists in Hungary and beyond the borders as well as to cooperate with press organizations in Hungary.¹⁶ The second meeting of the convention too was held at Szeged in May 2006 the central topic being the education and further training of journalists. It was decided that education should primarily take place in local communities and continuous further training be compulsory.¹⁷ The question of authority is eminently important both for the audiovisual and online press as well as the traditional printed press. These forums operate mostly on marketing basis but their upkeep is unstable because of the smallness of their target groups (which could also be the reason of the absence of local, national or international investors) thus upgrading the role of the subsidies from Hungary (and from local resources). Hungarian grants (if not budget funded) arrive through the Illyés Foundation, the National Cultural Fund, and since 2005 the Szülőföld Fund. There has been no professional evaluation how these grants were used; the grants were frequently distributed according to political lobby-interests with overlaps of professional and political spheres, making the results sometimes questionable.¹⁸

¹⁵ Cf, *A délvidéki magyarság jövőképe*. Logos, Tóthfalu, 2003 [The vision of the future of Hungarians in the south].

¹⁶ Interview with Attila Ambrus. <http://www.brasso.ro/cikkek/cikk.php?n=292>

¹⁷ Tóth, Lívía: Legyen a nemzetstratégia része. *Hét Nap*, 2006. május 24. [Be a part of the national strategy].

¹⁸ An example is the issue of the Transylvanian television which was planned to broadcast all day in Hungarian. The project enjoyed top priority support during the time of the Medgyessy government.

3. Developments expected during the next fifteen years: tendencies, perspectives, fallacies, conflicts

It is difficult to formulate a scenario for the operation of public life which would describe the developments of decades to come as this sphere operates along the logic of the market and depends – as has been pointed out above – on subsidies received from minority and mother country political sources. The two ‘pillars’, however, are unpredictable on the long run because the interaction of supply and demand within the press market can change just as the political decision makers come and go in democratic societies. There are four basic conditions for the planning of three scenarios in order to predict future possibilities:

1. The existence and widening of a global web culture
2. The spreading of online journalism and media
3. Existence and organisation of minority political and professional logic
4. The upkeep of political, professional and financial support (at some level) from the mother country

3.1. Scenario for the media network

This scenario assumes the minority press/media to be able to work genuinely within the conditions of globalisation; recognises that it cannot live without network-like cooperation therefore national and international connections are vital, of which the widening of professional cooperation with Hungary is of eminent importance. It envisages more common forums, more possibility for education and further training together resulting in the developing of common professional language and ethics. Constant exchange of news and the institutionalised rotation of journalists is part of the plan. It means that every journalist outside the borders of Hungary has to work both at home and in the mother country for a set period of time. Network cooperation can be extended to the media of Hungarians living in the west, thus Hungarians of the west, the mother country and those living outside the borders could get in closer contact. Special target programs could be outlined for young journalists to cover EU events live.

In this scenario the role of newspapers and portals is not only to transmit information but also to become cultural and initiative institutions. The basis of the scenario could be a Hungarian media strategy for the regions beyond the border with an outstandingly important common special digital strategy. In order to increase ‘consumption’, e-points,

tele-houses should be reinforced and where possible, developments to be launched to make the output marketable.

In the media net the professional values of journalism could gain more importance, albeit political influence would not cease, the institutional basis for a real cultural autonomy could still be created.

3.2. Media inclusions

According to this scenario the Hungarian minority media beyond the borders is not able to react to the challenges of web culture creating a big gap between written and electronic press. Written press carries along its cultural inheritance which, however, is not able to communicate, to make itself acceptable to the operators of the new media. This creates only a media gap but a social one too: there will be those who lag behind, living their present still closed in their past and others who live in a virtual world and look down at the real one from their ivory towers.

The rift of the media cannot create a stable framework for minority self-organisation, the chances for cooperation lessen because of the conflicting interests and dispositions within the institutions. There is the danger of scattering the available (meagre) material and human sources, 'clans' directing the institutions instead of autonomous communities. In the meantime autonomy is constantly in the centre of the news, albeit without the participation of the press and its operators themselves.

3.3. 'Social' support from the mother country

According to the third scenario the central role of the support coming from Hungary remains, preserving mechanisms based on hierarchic role distribution and patronage excluding partnership. The central role of Hungary is also that of a provider of positive and negative models. If the support plays an important role in the operation of the press beyond the borders, the political segmentation in Hungary will have its repercussions.

A partial development of the media system can be observed; there is strict division between segments following the demands of the market and those which, thanks to their lobby contacts, enjoy greater support and there are always the ones who lag behind. Instead of cohesion, divided press and society can be envisaged, hopefully still with some leading force left. The world of press is particularly vulnerable and politics is using its influence over the whole system. The lack of a mutual media strategy leads to striving for political and financial support in order to realise individual aims and ideas; in reality the whole system remains in stagnation and social supports serve mere survival.

Conclusion

Possibly none of the above scenarios would be realized in a pure form but in a combination of them. In certain regions different scenarios would be followed. In Transcarpathia and Banat there is the danger of media inclusion while in Transylvania there are movements toward networking. If genuine form of cooperation could develop in the field of the press the exchange of models could be livelier, Hungary could professionally 'oversee' the process and allot support by well thought over strategy. Local autonomy could be the outcome but the possibilities of cooperation within the press could be a real instrument of the policy of national identity.

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