

THE POLITICS OF MEDIA AND INFORMATION IN  
COUNTRIES EMERGING FROM TOTALITARIAN REGIMES:  
THE CASE OF ROMANIA

by

Georgeta V. Barbulescu

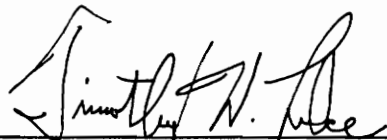
Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

POLITICAL SCIENCE

APPROVED:



Timothy W. Luke, Chair



Stephen K. White



David Barzilai

January, 1994  
Blacksburg, Virginia

C.2

LD  
5655  
V855  
1994  
B375  
C.2

## Abstract

This thesis problematizes the interplay of power and media institutions as a general difficulty in democratic societies and as a specific challenge in countries that are emerging from authoritarian regimes. Based on more comprehensive studies about power, dominance, compliance, resistance and information monopoly developed in the United States, the project approaches a particular case in modern history, namely Romania, during the period of transition following Ceausescu's overthrow, in December, 1989, and before the first free elections, in May, 1990. The bulk of the work concentrates on deconstructing political and media discourses developed throughout this period, while trying to address the role that the political and media environments had in reshaping post-communist Romania. My major argument is that, given a number of difficulties that have marked this period, ranging from economic setbacks, political ambiguities, and social confusion, the May elections have been monitored and orchestrated starting early in this period by the provisional authorities (a group of former communist bureaucrats), in tandem with a number of central media outlets. From this combination of power interests, the Romanian public was deprived of correct information on a number of issues that pertained to the future of the

country, and was trapped in the web of a carefully designed imagery that fostered a dissimulated totalitarian propaganda. The last part of the project advances these contentions and considers them in turn, while trying to capture how the specifics of the case inscribe themselves in larger patterns of dominance and compliance.

## Acknowledgements

I take the opportunity of expressing my deepest gratitude to all those who, whether through financial or emotional support, have made my graduate studies, implicitly this project, possible. My first thought goes to Prof. Nicolaus Tideman and his wife, Dr. Estill Putney, who have made my journey over the ocean and through the rough waves of adjusting to a new culture bearable. Their constant concern and guidance are invaluable.

The Political Science Department at Virginia Tech, starting with my mentor and adviser, Prof. Timothy Luke whose patience and helpful suggestions made me understand the hard road of research that I engaged upon, continuing with Prof. Stephen White and Prof. David Barzilai, and the rest of the faculty who decided to sponsor part of the expenses that this project entailed, were all supportive and sympathetic of the hardships that an international student encounters. To all of them, a warm Thank You!

A number of other people have facilitated the collection of the documentary material for this project. George Pale and the Group for Social Dialogue gathered part of the information I needed, while Vasile and Olimpia Gocan, and Victor and Dana Giugiutiu helped with the shipment of

documentary material to the United States. Prof. William Mashburn, and the Graduate Student Assembly financially contributed to the project as well. To them I am greatly indebted.

A special word of recognition to those who, through conversations or proof reading, helped me stylistically improve the text of the thesis and my power of expression in a language different than my own. Colleagues from graduate school such as Scott Case, Elisabeth Perry and Scot Nelson, guided me through the academic slang, while Kate Schubert and Eric Pourchot offered helpful suggestions with respect to the text itself.

Many other people were directly or indirectly involved in my achievements, helping me remain sane and not quit school in those moments of utter doubt that accompany academic research. Luba and Walter Fabrycky, Deloris Pourchot, pastor Gary Schroeder, the congregation of Luther Memorial Lutheran Church, have all helped me out in difficult moments. To all of them, my recognition.

## T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter I: Introduction	
1. An Overview	1
2. Post-Revolutionary Romania	7
3. Conceptual Assumptions and Methodology	15
4. Plan of Thesis	20
5. Possible Limitations	22
Chapter II: Media Studies. A Discussion on the Nature of News and the News Process	
1. Introduction	27
2. The Nature of News	29
3. The News Process	33
4. Closing Comments	54
Chapter III: Mass Media Discourses Surrounding Social and Political Events in Romania (December 1989 through May 1990)	
Introduction	59
Section I: December - January	62
Section II: February	94
Section III: March	111
Section IV: April - May	124
Chapter IV: The Politics of Information in Post-Revolutionary Romania	
1. The Specificity of the Romanian Case	146
2. Post-Revolutionary Media	170
3. Conclusions	200
References	214
Appendix	218
Vita	219

## Chapter I: Introduction

### 1. An Overview

This is a case study of mass media politics. Given the essentially contested ground that it covers, it is tentative and incomplete. This ground encompasses areas of social and political life which, within informational societies, have come to be defined as "mass mediated realities," and "electronically mediated politics." In the present study, I will explore the depths of these concepts as applied to a particular situation in modern history, the period of transition that followed Ceausescu's overthrow in Romania, starting in December, 1989, until the first free elections after four decades of communist administration, in May, 1990. The goal of the project is to re-evaluate this interval from a media politics perspective and address questions such as: In what ways did the political environment change so as to meet post-revolutionary public demands? To what extent did the media adjust to new political conditions and what was their role in post-revolutionary Romania? How was the informational transfer achieved and in what ways (if any) did it influence popular participation and political preferences? What lessons can be inferred from the Romanian case and in what theoretical ways are they relevant to studies about media politics?



Concerns about the role of the mass media within a wide theoretical frame which involves dominance, compliance, participation and resistance have been voiced at different levels in Western democracies. In the United States, they were formulated against the background of participatory politics advanced by a generation of pluralists. In their view, the openness of the American system permitted anybody interested to become involved in politics. They approached power and dominance from the perspective of visible, straightforward patterns of inducing people to act in ways that benefited elitist groups, and considered that lack of popular resistance to decisions was an indication that conflict was not present.<sup>1</sup> Low participation was similarly conceptualized as a non-political problem, a result of the human penchant to "inertia" and disinterest in politics.<sup>2</sup> Absence of resistance in an open political system of the American type was therefore explained as popular consent which, in turn, legitimized the system itself. This operationalization came to be called "the first dimension of

---

1. See Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1961; Nelson W. Polsby, *Community Power and Political Theory*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1963.

2. See Nelson W. Polsby, p. 119.

power" by critics who argued against its limited conceptualization.<sup>3</sup>

This latter category of theorists argued that the pluralists' assumptions about human beings' political apathy were far-fetched. They contended that non-participation and lack of resistance should be considered within a wider frame involving power relations through which overt, but mostly concealed, patterns of dominance quelled resistance and restricted participation. They believed that the reasons for non-participation had to do with

suppression of the options and alternatives that reflect the needs of the nonparticipants. It is not necessarily true that people with the greatest needs participate in politics most actively - whoever decides what the game is about also decides who gets in the game.<sup>4</sup>

Bachrach and Baratz elaborated on Schattschneider's contention and came up with the concept of "power's second face," where dominance was more subtly exercised through the limitation of political agendas to issues that were of interest to elites while excluding other issues and participants. "...[I]f issues are prevented from arising,

---

3. See John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness. Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*, Univ. of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1980, ch. 1.

4. E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1960, p. 105; Cited by J. Gaventa, pp. 8-9.

so too may actors be prevented from acting."<sup>5</sup> This troublesome contention pointed toward new ways of considering compliance, while enlarging the theoretical frame into which political dominance was problematized.

Further studies looked into situations of social inequality and oppression and came up with even more disquieting theories. Claus Mueller referred to "groups which cannot articulate their interests or perceive social conflict," and argued that their apparent consent was the consequence of a process of "socialization into compliance," where "they accept the definitions of political reality as offered by dominant groups, classes or government institutions."<sup>6</sup>

Steven Lukes pushed the issue even further and referred to a third dimension in which political dominance was exercised, through "thought control" facilitated by "the control of information, through the mass media."<sup>7</sup> He warned that open conflict was not necessary for propagandistic processes to occur: on the contrary, it "might have been successfully

---

5. Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, "The Two Faces of Power," *American Political Science Review*, 56, 1962, pp. 947-52. Also, *Power and Poverty: Theory and Practice*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1970; Cited by J. Gaventa, p. 9.

6. Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication: A Study in the Political Sociology of Language, Socialization and Legitimation*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973, p. 9. Cited by Gaventa, p. 18.

7. Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, Macmillan, London, 1974, p. 23.

averted" in the staging of needs and necessities.<sup>8</sup> Dominance and resistance were this time considered from the perspective of invisible effects of thought conditioning and propaganda achieved through media channels, as well as other means. Information as a political tool was acknowledged to influence, shape, mold, or determine life styles and choices, political preferences and conceptions, necessities and needs which were least challenging to dominant groups. In Lance Bennett's words, "power and influence in a ... society depend on the control and strategic use of information."<sup>9</sup>

With the rise of informational societies, the production of meaning and images which dissimulated propaganda through electronic and printed transfer of information became an ardent issue. Refined technologies and computerization led to a high level of "packaging" of political products, designed to fit partisan agendas, create consent and reaffirm legitimacy. The technologies of the mass media were redefined in the "context of political forces that control them, using them to reinforce their power or to defuse resistance while they enlarge their domination over

---

8. Ibid., pp. 24-5.

9. W. Lance Bennett, *News, The Politics of Illusion*, second edition, Longman Inc., New York & London, 1988, xii.

nature and the mass population." Under the circumstances, "the means of communication become critical tools for producing power and privilege for those who own, control, or manage them,"<sup>10</sup> and a re-evaluation of the subtle ways of reinforcing power through them was necessary.

Drawing on and borrowing from some of these studies, I will set theoretical guidelines for framing the terms of the political discourse as mediated by the Romanian media in the period of political transition, economic insecurity and social turmoil that followed the overthrow of a highly dictatorial and unpopular administration. By undertaking this project, I intend to highlight ways of reconsidering the birth of post-communist Romania, the role of the media outlets selected for study in conditioning and creating political meanings and symbols, and the nature of popular participation and resistance prompted by the information transfer. Ultimately, I conjecture on possible short and long term effects of media propaganda on the civil environment, on generalizable patterns of media behavior across cultures, and on possible solutions for some of the problems that the mediation of political information through the channels of the mass media pose.

---

10. Timothy Luke, *Screens of Power. Ideology, Domination, and Resistance in Informational Society*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1989, p. 12.

## 2. Post-Revolutionary Romania

Why Romania and why the particular timeframe? I argue that the political situation that will be discussed offers an interesting blend of uniqueness in its historical specificity and commonality in its identifiable power relations patterns that could be of use for further research, especially in the rapidly shifting passions and interests in the world political arena. A brief introduction to the political setting after December, 1989, will be helpful to that end.<sup>11</sup>

As already publicized in the electronic and printed networks throughout the world, the collapse of communism in its last fortress of the East-European block - Romania - in 1989, was marked by violence, bloodshed, confusion, ambiguities, and a sense of temporariness. The popular enthusiasm that accompanied Ceausescu's flight was followed by anxieties caused by his being at large. The satisfaction ensuing upon his capture was eclipsed by the attacks of forces called

---

11. The abbreviated and somewhat personalized summary of events that follows draws on several articles, studies and books published on the subject, such as M. Shafir, "The Revolution: An Initial Assessment," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jan. 26, 1990; D. Ionescu, "The National Salvation Front Starts to Implement Its Program," R. Linden, "Reaction to the Revolution, Part I: The Demonstrations in Timisoara and Bucharest," "Reaction to the Revolution, Part II: The Ceausescus' Overthrow and Execution," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Feb. 2, 1990; C. Stefanescu, "Free Romanian Television Losing Its Credibility," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Mar. 23, 1990; Nestor Ratesh, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution*, The Washington Papers/152, published with the Center for Strategic and International Studies Washington, D.C., New York, 1991; Daniel Nelson, *Romania After Tyranny*, Westview Press, Inc., 1992.

"terrorist" in the step-by-step electronic coverage of the Revolution. The relief brought about by his execution was draped in the mournful colors of the death-toll paid by young people for the liberation of the country from totalitarianism.

A sense of hope prevailed and was embodied in the authorities who assumed the provisional leadership of the country under the difficult conditions of anti-revolutionary cross fires. Grouped under the name of National Salvation Front (hereafter NSF), they stipulated that the country was freed from the "despotic dictatorship of the Ceausescu clan," while freedom and democracy were political goals to which they were committed before free elections were scheduled. Their program was widely publicized and was an immediate source of general enthusiasm. Among their reforms were the abolition of one-party government, the separation of executive, legislative and juridic powers in the state, a time-limit on the presidential terms, liberalized economy and restructured agriculture, free elections, freedom of travel, and the passing of the mass media from the control of "one despotic family to the hands of the people."<sup>12</sup>

Additional regulations such as a ban on food exports and a replenishment of stores with food products, and a detour of

---

12. For more, see *Scinteia Popcrului*, 23 Dec., 1989; *Libertatea*, 23 Dec., 1989.

electric and heat supplies from the external market to private homes amounted to improved conditions of living for the population at large. A sudden increase in wages and a refund for various unreasonable withholdings by the Ceausescu administration boosted public morale and increased purchasing power.

The elation produced by these regulations, perceived to represent popular demands, was gradually tempered by the inconsistencies of the provisional authorities with respect to the democratization process. In spite of the NSF's pledge to promote an open political system, they adopted legislation behind closed doors, with only a handful of top representatives making decisions in the name of the whole body.<sup>13</sup> They avoided taking a steady line regarding issues that had caused the economic decline of the country and the low morale of the population. The existing bureaucratic structures, the assets of the communist party, and the feared repressive apparatus -- the Securitate -- were issues left unaddressed despite popular calls for the removal of those who, in their complicity with the past administration, were considered responsible for the economic, political and

---

13. See A. Blandiana, "Oroarea de Politica," *Romania Libera*. Jan. 25, 1990, pp. 1, 2. In this interview, she refers to her life as NSF member and to the practices of adopting legislation by top politicians in ways reminiscent of former communist party meetings.



social decline of the country.<sup>14</sup> Instead, the authorities issued decrees which supported a preservation of old administrative bureaucracies and continued centralized control over enterprises. Such regulatory measures prompted critics to note that the NSF administration "had no intention of settling accounts with communism."<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, while formally holding that the mass media were free from the political tutelage of any ruling faction, the authorities retained monopoly over central outlets and electronic networks. Despite their pledge to secure equal access to media to all political groups engaged in the reconstruction of the political environment, they obstructed their adversaries' access to the central channels of electronic networks and actively used these networks for their own political benefit.<sup>16</sup>

The NSF's ideological position became a subject of controversy when their representatives started making

---

14. On January 12, after pressures coming from the population, the communist party was abrogated and its assets "put in the hands of the people." Less than 48 hours later, these decrees were annulled. For more, see Chapter III, Section 1. Similarly, after the Securitate was originally disbanded in December, 1989, and incorporated in the army units in February, 1990, another decree was issued to protect Securitate agents against unpopular reactions. See M. Sturdza, "How Dead Is Ceausescu's Secret Police Force?" *Report on Eastern Europe*, Apr. 13, 1990.

15. M. Shafir, "Promises and Reality," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jan. 4, 1991, p. 35.

16. See C. Stefanescu, "Romanian Radio and Television Coverage of the Electoral Campaign," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jun. 8, 1990; M. Shafir, "The Leadership Yet to Prove Its Credibility," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jul. 13, 1990.

alarming statements about the status of "democracy" and "political pluralism" in post-revolutionary Romania (especially in the foreign media). Their stances, indicating more of an authoritarian than democratic orientation,<sup>17</sup> coupled with the increasing awareness that some NSF members were former Ceausescu associates, sparked further distrust among social and political interests.<sup>18</sup> Groups with various political orientations as well as non-partisan groups challenged the administration to a dialogue over the future of democracy in Romania through the channels of the central media.

The tensions and conflicts that ensued will be detailed in Chapter III. For now, suffice it to say that the central media (which included the electronic networks and some widely circulated newspapers) played a key role in creating and maintaining social anxieties.<sup>19</sup> Despite the evident flourishing of "independent" publications that followed the formal "liberation of the mass media,"<sup>20</sup> and the top grades

---

17. This orientation will be further discussed in Chapter III, Section 1.

18. See M. Shafir, "The New Romanian Government," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jan. 12, 1990.

19. See C. Stefanescu, "Free Romanian Television Losing Its Credibility."

20. Estimates show that between December and April over 1,000 new publications were published, not counting the party periodicals. For more, Dan Ionescu, "Romania," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Research Report*, vol. 1, no. 39, Oct. 2, 1992.

that the television administration won for their siding with the revolutionaries and for mobilizing the population to come to the support of the Revolution,<sup>21</sup> the activities of media outlets were not as free of partisanship as they pledged to be or as the authorities claimed.

The constant favorable coverage of NSF activities and negative, delegitimizing campaign vis-a-vis their political opponents by central outlets led to a formal delimitation of media networks into pro- and anti-NSF.<sup>22</sup> This dichotomy implicitly testifies to a seizure within the civil and political environments, where the issue of political choice was reduced to being on the side of the group who was popularly perceived to have "saved" the population from the Ceausescu clan or being against it.

Harold A. Innis and Marshall McLuhan would argue that there is a systematic bias in any society, related to the "distorting power of the dominant imagery,"<sup>23</sup> and therefore we should not expect the Romanian situation to be any different than others. What gives the situation a unique

---

21. C. Stefanescu, "Free Romanian Television Losing Its Credibility." D. Ionescu, "The National Salvation Front Starts to Implement Its Program."

22. See V. Socor, "National Salvation Front Produces Electoral Landslide," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jul. 6, 1990.

23. Marshall McLuhan, Introduction to Harold A. Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951, xi. Cited by Luke, p. 4.

specificity is that the "dominant imagery" was performed on behalf of a group of provisional leaders, who claimed moral authority to represent the country over other political groups on account of their participation in an anti-communist popular revolt, but who nevertheless adopted measures stalling the process of departure from totalitarianism. If we add that these leaders were, in large number, former communist nomenklatura, the puzzle of the case takes the form of a recurrent question addressed after the May elections by political analysts: How was it possible that former communists were elected in free elections in a country which paid in blood to get rid of a communist administration?

According to opposition groups, various foreign observers, and groups of civilians with an alleged non-partisan status, the propaganda packaged in the television, radio, and some printed matter coverages on behalf of NSF stifled other political agendas and created "good-guys-versus-bad-guys" types of images which weakened the trust of the population in opposition parties and buttressed NSF's overwhelming victory in the May, 1990, elections.<sup>24</sup>

While Chapter IV will address the Romanian puzzle in more detail, I do not contend to offer a final, exhaustive answer

---

24. M. Shaffir, "The Leadership Yet to Prove Its Credibility." C. Stefanescu, "Romanian Television Coverage of the Electoral Campaign."

to the many riddles that spawn from this singular situation. If we take the pluralists' approach, the May vote measured popular consent and legitimized the new governance. However, a host of concerns may have determined this vote, ranging from economic fears, to years of being socialized into compliance with the government's point of view, to fear of the unknown materialized into radical economic and political measures propounded by the opposition. None of these issues can be treated in a pluralist manner. They need to be approached in the context of a wider theoretical framework. As the story will unfold, the many loose ends that I must leave at large due to insufficient documentation, antinomic public stances of political figures, and antagonistic and unclear situations, will help the reader detect a sense of general confusion paramount in that period. While all the contingencies cannot be fully addressed or accounted for, we can, however, look at what is known to have happened and untangle some of the layers of subtexts and symbols in which post-revolutionary media and political discourses packaged the authorities' point of view.

This endeavor, guided by theoretical premises and gauged by methodological practices which will be specified in the next

section, will enable me to formulate conclusions, even though sometimes speculative, for the original research questions.

### **3. Conceptual Assumptions and Methodology**

As formulated, this study needs to be structured in terms of theoretical guidelines that will enable the researcher to organize the material and elaborate on the subject matter. I will approach the analysis of post-communist Romanian media politics in terms of a theoretical ideal; namely, the ideal of democracy formulated and adopted in December, 1989, by revolutionaries through their mouthpiece at the time: the National Salvation Front. I will use this ideal, materialized in the NSF program and later defined as "formal commitments," as a yardstick to diagnose political and media developments throughout the timeframe set for study, or what will be identified as "actual implementation" of the revolutionary demands by the authorities. Their program stipulated a number of objectives that, I argue, have been observed selectively, to the extent that they supported NSF's political interests, not necessarily the popular demands of December. My focus will be to analyze how one such objective, the liberation of the mass media, was observed and what political and social consequences this observance brought about.

Given the goals of the project, I will develop a discourse analysis which looks at printed and electronically generated media narratives contextualized within the network of social and political events that generated them and partly deconstructs the web of formal discourses that have defined this period from the perspective of the research questions. The deconstruction intends to reveal ideological biases woven into the informative grid, reconstruct image and meaning-making processes and advance decodings of media and political packaging procedures. I argue that this endeavor will provide helpful insight in some of the workings of power, ideology, compliance and domination in Romania that share paradigmatic similarities with other cultures. This last contention is mainly supported by my use of media studies developed in the United States, studies which enabled me to frame political and media processes, and analyze them in terms of formally accepted theoretical constructs.

The choice to frame the study between Ceausescu's overthrow and the first free elections is justified by the symbolics of December, 1989. Nationally and internationally, this moment marks the collapse of communism in the last country of what traditionally used to be called "the communist block," except for the (once) Soviet Union. With Ceausescu's overthrow, the study of a whole geographic area

was recast, this time in a different mythic spell. Nowadays it is called "the study of former communist countries," or "the former Soviet block." Researchers have looked for shared patterns of development among these nations, whether social, political, or economic and exceptions to a periodically accepted paradigm only makes the research more fascinating and challenging. It is too soon to tell whether Romania is that exception, or whether these countries are each an exception in their ways of shifting from one political system to another. Obviously, all of them encounter hardships that range from economic setbacks to ideological differences. Their post-communist economic and political directions have not been settled yet, and processes of development, change, and restructuring are on the way as this is written.

The present endeavor, in its reconstruction of the beginnings of one such process of democratization, intends to fill in the picture of this transition on both national and geographic levels. Some of its political paradigms can be used in a broader study of the region, while some of its specific findings can be utilized as "Caution! Do Not Enter!" caveats.

Various media outlets have been selected for the project and excerpts of their coverage of political events will be provided. I argue that these excerpts are symbolic



illustrations of a network of meanings and images developed at the time, which facilitated the transfer of a dissimulated, totalitarian in essence, propaganda. Since the production of meaning "cannot be easily nailed down,... never fully present... but [being] rather a constant flickering of presence and absence," as Eagleton argues,<sup>25</sup> the sometimes over-detailed contextualization of civil incidents intends to make up for a possible unfamiliarity of the reader with the events discussed.

By undertaking an analysis as formulated above, I also assume the existence of a societal frame within which the information exchange takes place, a frame not necessarily or feasibly captured by the mediascape in its entirety. The canvas charting daily events is assumed to be constantly shaped and redefined through a multitude of discourses, each with its own symbolic load, targeting various groups. As Bennett would put it, "mass media news remains our only broadly shared window on reality," and whatever we see through that window is what we assume to be real.<sup>26</sup> However, beyond the landscape visible from our window, I assume the presence of events which do not make the

---

25. Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From the Spectator to Post-Modernism*, London: Verso, 1983, p. 128; cited by Luke, p. 7.

26. W. Lance Bennett, xiii.

headlines due to the physical limitations inherent in the journalistic process. As we shall see, this provision is necessary in order to avoid approaching topics in a pluralist manner, with only visible and straightforward happenings as guideposts for the inquiry. Few practitioners would argue that journalists really cover all the events that deserve attention. Most of the time, limits set on time of publication of the newspaper, the location of some event, the inability to reach a geographic spot and broadcast live, and other shortcomings inherent in the profession make coverage a complicated issue. While I recognize these professional difficulties, my attention will be channeled in the direction of apparently intentional patterns of (non-)coverage, the practice out of which meanings, symbols, and images are fabricated and launched in order to become new myths with their characteristic of inviolability.

A last assumption that I make pertains to the nature of communication itself. Long acclaimed Western criteria of "media objectivity" have been demolished by studies who challenged that the nature of human communication is inherently subjective. Therefore, I do not intend to judge the performance of the Romanian media in terms of their "objectivity," a relative term itself. My assumption is that, even though not driven by political passions,

journalists cannot offer value-free information given the inherent subjective nature of communication. This issue will be addressed more extensively in Chapter II.

#### **4. Plan of Thesis**

Systematic media studies of the kind developed in modern Western societies are yet to emerge in Romania. Therefore, I chose to structure my study on already existing theories about politics and media that share theoretical commonalities with the case under discussion. The similarities emerge within the network of "mediated political realities" (a concept to be defined in the following chapter), at the interstices between theoretical constructs and information exchange patterns. Crisscrossing propaganda and packaging, for instance, leads to effects of "dominance," "compliance," or "resistance" within a network of power relations in nations with traditions in democratic practices, as well as in those with a non-democratic past, such as Romania. Beyond shared epitomes of information transfer, dissimulation of ideologies, submission through disinformation, each political system developed a culturally specific information process. Although the object of this study is not to highlight theoretical commonalities in particular, I use them as starting points for the analysis of the politics of information in Romania.

To that purpose, Chapter II undertakes a discussion of the nature of news and the news process in the United States that helps frame the dynamics of the Romanian political environment. The framework that captures most of the specifics and generalities of the American information system, as shared by a host of theorists, will be extended in later chapters so as to meet the specificity of the Romanian case.

Chapter III introduces the main events of the period under discussion as perceived and discussed by a variety of national and international media sources. These events, with their attached media rhetoric, constitute the raw material out of which images and symbols were worked out so as to elicit emotional popular reactions and condition political preferences on behalf of NSF.

Finally, Chapter IV analyzes the ways in which the post-revolutionary political and media environments changed so as to meet the December ideal of democracy. This analysis will be based on the evidence of social, political and media developments brought forth by Chapter III. Wherever necessary, additional material will document the analysis of the post-revolutionary background to the extent that it supports identifiable patterns of political or media behavior.

The goal of this final chapter is to make pertinent assessments about the post-revolutionary political environment, the inter-related workings of power institutions and media outlets, the nature of the popular resistance or compliance, and the consequences on the societal environment of having the central media monopolized by one political group.

### 5. Possible Limitations

Studies about this period in Romania's history have covered a broad number of topics, including the role of the mass media in the 1990 electoral campaign. Nestor Ratesh published a full documentary account of the December revolution.<sup>27</sup> Daniel Nelson edited a volume of essays concentrating on domestic and international issues in post-revolutionary Romania with the collaboration of scholars specializing in East-European studies.<sup>28</sup> Other authors covered the events under study and discussed their political implications in a number of publications like *The East European Reporter*, *Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Research Report*, and *Report on Eastern Europe*. However, even if many scholars and researchers agree that the mass

---

27. *Romania: The Entangled Revolution*, The Washington Papers/152, published with the Center for Strategic and International Studies Washington, D. C., New York, 1991.

28. *Romania After Tyranny*, Westview Press, Inc., 1992.

media played an important role in the political life of the country in the aftermath of the December Revolution, a study concentrating the rhetoric of media politics throughout the pre-electoral period has not been done.

The limitations of this analysis arise primarily from the difficulty of obtaining documentary evidence. The study will not look at all at the publications which appeared after December 1989, even if they contain articles that would be of interest to the project. The overwhelming quantity of newspapers and publications that appeared in this controversial period makes it virtually impossible to subject them all to a critical perusal. Regional newspapers and publications are not included. The newspapers that are subjected to the final analysis were circulated widely through the country and are assumed to have been read by a large audience.

Also, the visual material for analyzing the activity of the television station is scarce. The references that will be used for reconstructing its activity come from newspaper articles and from reports of television coverage by the *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Report: East Europe* (hereafter *FBIS-EEU*).

For the final chapter, a private videotape will also be used as reference. The tape was recorded by the Group for Social

Dialogue<sup>29</sup> and is a compilation of TV broadcasts and video clips recorded during some of the social and political events whose coverage will be analyzed.<sup>30</sup> The videotape covers events such as the formation of NSF, the aftermath of the Revolution, the aftermath of the January 28 rally, aspects of the meeting between Deputy Gelu Voican Voiculescu and members of the Committee for the Democratization of the Army, images from the University Square demonstration, and interviews with various intellectuals, members of the Group for Social Dialogue [hereafter GSD]. The tape also contains clips of events which are not analyzed in the present study, such as the violent removal of the demonstrators from the University Square by the miners of the Jiu Valley, in June, 1990. Parts of it have already been presented to private audiences in Romania and public audiences abroad. Some of the images that it contains have never been shown on Romanian television. These images provide information that, the study will argue, could have given the Romanian audiences a different perspective on some events that have activated social tensions and violence.

---

29. Founded on Dec. 31, 1989, the Group for Social Dialogue is primarily made up of prominent intellectual personalities who organized themselves as a non-partisan body of mediation. They promote dialogue as a democratic form for social and political interaction. They issued their own publication, 22, and presently have offices in several cities in the country.

30. The tape is available at the GSD central offices in Bucharest and at the Media Center, Newman Library, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg.

Another limitation pertains to the goal of the project. My task is to make the point of government interference in the activities of media outlets after December 1989. Consequently, the study does not contextualize the activity of the mass media within the political environment prior to this date, since the ruling faction changed. The argument can be made that a preservation of old administrative structures within some of the media institutions under discussion, such as the television station personnel, coached to listen to orders and follow instructions, may account for a tendency to sympathize with authorities in power, whether called NSF or otherwise.

However, the insistence with which the directors of the television station, the authorities in power, journalists and editors, advocated independence of media outlets from the ruling faction's political interference and the breach with the old subservience to state power (details follow in Chapters III and IV), determined the choice of contextualizing the mass media within the political environment following the Revolution. The implications of not having changed the media personnel entrenched in old patterns of compliance to the state power will be, nevertheless, periodically addressed.



The study is incomplete and imperfect. It can be argued that the transitional period in which the country found itself before free elections, together with the lack of practice and expertise in democratic practices and modern mass media coverage, are phenomena belonging to a brief period of rapid changes that cannot be considered fully conclusive for a media study. Given such caveats, this analysis intends to be an open-ended critical approach to a provisional, albeit important period in Romania's history from a mass media perspective, inviting to revision of how media worked to define or destroy meanings and values so as to fit into dominant political agendas.

**Chapter II: Media Studies.**  
**A Discussion on the Nature of News and**  
**The News Process**

**1. Introduction**

The present chapter explores some of the myths and basic assumptions about news and the information process as problematized in one of the oldest democracies: the United States. The necessity for the discussions that will be undertaken here is prompted by the need to address questions such as: What is the nature of news? Why is it important to know about it? How much do we know about it and how much of what we know is illusion? In what ways does news influence or condition our life choices and how aware are we of that? In what ways (if any) does news encourage political participation and public emancipation?

These, and other similar questions, have prompted analysts to search for answers beyond the immediate, visible aspects of everyday news programs. They conducted their endeavor in accord with basic tenets of democracy, such as freedom of speech, but also from the mythic angle of "media objectivity and neutrality" that was said to differentiate a propagandistic, authoritarian political system from a democratic, non-propagandistic one. In what follows, I will approach some of these discussions as they pertain to an understanding of media processes, patterns, and influences

on the public, and I will point out their expediency (or inappropriateness) for the discussion of the Romanian information system.

Section 2 addresses the nature of news and of language activities. It draws mainly on *Mediated Political Realities*,<sup>1</sup> a book which summarizes views that various political analysts hold about media "objectivity" and "neutrality" in the United States. As the synopsis will show, understanding media is an endeavor that needs to start with an understanding of the nature of information and of the channels through which it is mediated to the public. The authors review the relevant literature about media language and introduce the concept of "mass mediated politics" as a replacement for the long acclaimed "media objectivity" that Western, and especially American, media have used to describe their own status and activities.

Section 3 advances a discussion on the news process as developed by W. Lance Bennett in *News, The Politics of Illusion*.<sup>2</sup> This is a comprehensive study of media biases and behavior in the United States and draws on views widely shared among American analysts. Among them, there is a large degree of consensus with respect to the failings of

---

1. Dan Nimmo and James E. Combs, Longman Inc., New York & London, 1983.

2. Second Edition, Univ. of Washington, Longman, New York & London, 1988.

the news reporting system, which makes a review of the literature superfluous.<sup>3</sup> These failings are generally called personalized, dramatized, fragmented and normalized news, which, as we shall see, share common characteristics with patterns of news coverage in Romania.

A final section will highlight theoretical symmetries and paradigmatic differences of media processes between the Romanian and the American news systems.

## 2. The Nature of News

Claims of 'media objectivity' and 'realistic news representation' of real life events have been part of the myth of a democratic environment trumpeted by Western nations vis-a-vis the ideologically tainted mediascape of the totalitarian part of the globe. These claims have been made by both media workers and political actors engaged in the informative endeavor of their governments.

However, starting with Arthur F. Bentley in 1908, who cautioned political scientists about the phenomenon of "mediation of political realities through communication," the central role that "language activity" should play in the

---

3. For more research on the news process, see Jarol B. Manheim, *All of the People, All the Time: Strategic Communication and American Politics*, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., Armonk, New York, 1991; Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964; Mark Fishman, *Manufacturing the News*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980.

political inquiry and the importance of the study of public opinion in the discipline,<sup>4</sup> a study of the nature of news and the news process was initiated.

Modern scholars probed into the relationship between political activities, mass communication and social activities, and tried to answer questions referring to mass media representation of political activities to mass audiences.<sup>5</sup> Some of these studies reached startling conclusions about the nature of news itself, let alone the news process. Their findings challenged the basic assumptions of media "objectivity" and "neutrality" advocated for decades in those parts of the world which were self-declared democracies.

In short, their evaluation stated that public awareness on social and political events did not come from personal, direct experience, but from mass communication mediated by the mass media. Things happen, "with which people do not deal directly. They hear, read, or see pictures of these things..." The pictures of "these things" are conveyed through communication, by eye-witnesses or people who heard them from eye-witnesses. However, for any given situation

---

4. Cited by Nimmo and Combs, xiii.

5. See for instance Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, New York: Macmillan, 1922; Paul Watzlawick, *How Real is Real?* New York: Random House, 1976; Nimmo and Combs, *Subliminal Politics*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:Prentice-Hall, 1980.

"there is no single reality, no objective truth, but multiple subjectively derived realities...and some are contradictory." This paradox was accounted for by human subjectivity and the beliefs that each narrator or witness holds. "What is real to one of us may be illusion to another," hence "what we call reality" is the result of a process of communication among human beings. In this process of communication, reality is "created and re-created" through language, symbols, stories, images, which achieve multiple versions of reality, or "multiple realities," function of the identity and beliefs of the story-teller, or the mediator of "realities."<sup>6</sup>

That was another way of saying that "objectivity" is a relative term, that people create "objective" moments of various realities from a conglomerate of eye-witness accounts and personal interpretations of those accounts, and that they transmitted their personal "objective" stories to other people in the process of communication. Bentley's caveat referred to the nature of the mediation of political realities through processes of communication.

If we accept that communication creates multiple realities, "then any means of communication that intervenes in human

---

6. Dan Nimmo, James E. Combs, *Mediated Political Realities*, p. 1-2.

experience is a potential mediator of reality."<sup>7</sup> Under such premises, the role of the mass media in mediating or shaping (political) realities needed special attention, since "[s]ocial reality is constituted, recognized, and celebrated with media."<sup>8</sup>

Once the nature of the informative process was acknowledged as "mediated" through communication, the very nature of the information coming through media channels was in question. Watzlawick argued that "real" (and for that matter "objective") was an arbitrary term whose meaning depended on the identity and beliefs of whoever used it. The basic claim of "media objectivity" was thus challenged and shattered: There was no absolute objectivity in human communication. If knowledge about events came through communication, and communication created "multiple realities," depending on the communicators' view of reality, the mass media information had a built-in subjective element: the personal beliefs of the mediators of reality, the mass media workers and the audience respectively.

The next question to address was in what ways such conclusions were relevant to social activities and human

---

7. Paul Watzlawick, *How Real Is Real?* Cited by Nimmo and Combs, *Mediated Political Realities*, p. 3-5.

8. David L. Altheide, Robert P. Snow, *Media Logic*, p. 12; Cited by Nimmo and Combs, *Mediated Political Realities*, p. 5.

communication. Was there something worth worrying about once knowledge of political and social events was acknowledged as "mediated" and "far from objective"? In a society where freedom of speech was part of the ABC of democracy, did it make a difference how "realities" were presented to audiences? Further studies strongly argued that there were serious problems to be worried about.

### 3. The News Process

For starters, Bennett described the informative process in terms of an ideal situation. Traditionally,

In the ideal civics-book version of American democracy, power rests with the people. The people, in effect, are the voice of the political system. Leaders are supposed to take cues from the people and express their voice politically. The journalist ... occupies the role of the independent "monitor" who reports to the people on how well leaders handle public trust.<sup>9</sup>

From this perspective, he defined the information process as an interplay between "three main actors, politicians, journalists, and the public."<sup>10</sup> At one end of the process, he identified the deliverers of information, the policy makers who make decisions in the name of "the people." Their responsibility was to report on how they serve public trust and democratic ideals. At the receiving end of the

---

9. L. W. Bennett, p. 178.

10. Ibid., xii.



process, he found the audiences traditionally called "the people," who listened to how their "representatives" spoke for their interests. In between there were mediators of information, the story-tellers customarily called "media workers," or journalists and editors. Their role was to "mediate" the political information from the "people's representatives" to "the people," in an "objective" and "neutral" manner, in accord with the ideal of a democratic environment.

Bennett further acknowledged the mythic dimension of this differentiation. In real life, he said,

*...leaders have usurped enormous amounts of political power and reduced popular control over the political system by using the media to generate support, compliance, and just plain confusion among the public.*

Therefore, he argued, in reality, the mass communication process looked more like an interaction between "producers, mediators, and consumers" of information, where "the three actors occupy different positions," which are "essentially unequal." These three postures were defined by the function of each actor, while the inequity among them arose from the detour of responsibility from the ideal situation that politicians and media workers had taken. The end result of

such evasions was "information control" prompted by "fears of an informed public."<sup>11</sup>

Further on, Bennett analyzed the ways in which the participants in the news transfer played their roles, and came up with a theoretical framework that captured their activities.

### 1. The Producers

Why "information control"? In his discussion about politicians, or as defined by their function in the news process, "the producers of political information," Bennett reinforced that the "fears of an informed public" that politicians secretly had pertained to the accountability they would face from those who elected them should their political abuses be made public.<sup>12</sup> In other words, politicians, in their role of "representatives of the people" abused the trust with which they had been invested and generated a political system which supported their power and influence a low degree of accountability to the people for whom they spoke.

Simultaneously, in order to preserve the mythic "representation" image, they kept audiences misinformed on

---

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

their policies. Compliance, therefore, does not arise so much out of public approval of their policies, as pluralists would argue, but out of unawareness of what the policies stipulate. The preservation of lack of awareness is done with the help of the mass media, through careful control of what information is released. The result of these practices is that, in the communication process, politicians occupy the most privileged position, as producers of information whose substance is determined more by themselves and the media than by the public interest.

## 2. The Mediators

In the discussion about the second set of actors, Bennett engaged the problem of journalistic bias in news coverage. While he acknowledged a built-in subjectivity of any storyteller, media worker or not, he problematized the idea of "choice" that journalists have, which materializes in monitoring the release of information so as to fit political interests. In his words, "...the media and journalists have choices about whom to carry messages for,"<sup>13</sup> which is when the issue of conscious bias and editing of news becomes essential.

---

13. *Ibid.*, xiii.

### A. The Question of Bias

Bennett continued by stating that "[m]ost debates about journalistic bias are concerned with the question of ideology," or, in other words, with the political preferences that the news mediators hold. Whether American journalists sympathize with Republicans or Democrats (in our case, whether Romanian journalists sympathize with the NSF or with other political groups), they are said to be biased towards a particular political group if their news reporting manifests constant favorable coverage of the political activities of the group with which they are perceived to sympathize.<sup>14</sup>

Looking at an overriding democratic principle of "objective reporting," which stipulates that journalists "do not embellish their stories, advocate particular interpretations of ambiguous events, or otherwise 'make up the news'"<sup>15</sup> in favor of any policy makers, the question of bias becomes even more problematic. In the above recommendation no line is drawn between what constitutes conscious embellishment on one hand, and a positive presentation of a positive real life event on the other hand. To draw that line implies the ability to set universally accepted standards of

---

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 2.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

"objectivity," which is, as we have seen, a difficult or impossible endeavor. Besides, defining "reality" is as much subject to one's own judgment as reporting "real events." Consequently, the principle of reporting news in an "unembellished" manner is dependent on one's own (read media worker's) interpretation.<sup>16</sup>

By the same argument, identifying presentations of ambiguous events in a manner particularly favorable to one political group over others is a somewhat subjective process. In Bennett's words, "[o]ne problem with ideological bias is that [it is] exaggerated by the ideology of the beholder."<sup>17</sup> In other words, coverage of an event may seem biased towards one political direction to advocates of the opposing political stance. As opinion research concludes, "perceptions of media bias correspond to one's own political bias."<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, "making up" the news is hard to define. When journalists choose to cover the same event in significantly different ways, there are few standards to judge which coverage was in conformity with the event itself. The

---

16. See Nimmo & Combs, *Mediated Political Realities*, pp. 23-29.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

18. Gallup-Times Mirror, *The People and the Press*, Los Angeles: Times Mirror, 1986, pp. 28-29. Cited by Bennett, p. 22.

differences may arise from the media workers' independent perceptions of the event, from ambiguities inherent in the event itself (Romania still does not have a coherent story about Ceausescu's overthrow, for example), from the physical impossibility that journalists be in all places at the same time, which limits their eye-witness experience, or from various other reasons which have to do with each mediator's interpretation of what they witnessed. The absence of universally accepted standards of "objectivity" makes it virtually impossible to set guidelines for what "embellished," "made-up," or "biased" news releases are. The requirement of "non-biased" media coverage turns out to be another unfeasible mythic ideal of democratic societies.<sup>19</sup>

Bennett addressed a further question: How can we identify biases in news coverage and what is the way to counter their effect on public perceptions? The dismaying findings of media research read as follows:

In the...political environments that generate most of [the] news, nothing is valued as much as power. If one cannot possess power...then the next best thing is to be on the "inside" with the powerful... Journalists who cooperate with powerful officials often receive recognition and flattery and are taken into the confidence of those officials.<sup>20</sup>

---

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 118, 125-145.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

This is how "...the news marches in lockstep with powerful elites" and "has become virtually a direct pipeline for propaganda from powerful organizations to the people." Since "Flaws in the news are the result of structural conditions in...[the] political system," and "...news is largely the product of convenient conventions between politicians and news organizations" then "it is not clear where to look for guidance in reforming the [news] product."<sup>21</sup>

In other words, mediators occupy the next best position in the news process, as regulators of public information to fit the political purposes of powerful elites and to mold the public perceptions in favor of dominant political figures. Under the circumstances, it is hard to determine biases in news coverage, hard to know where to look for a different news approach, how to reform the news system, or how to set the pace for less concerted action between media workers and politicians. Bennett argued that before speaking of reformation, "people like you and I [need to] recognize [the] problem and become convinced that something must be done." To that end, he encouraged an approach to news bias that "look[s] for ... universal information problems that hinder the efforts of most citizens, whatever their

---

21. Ibid., pp. 117, 13, xii, 112.

ideology, to take part in political life."<sup>22</sup> To these problems we now turn.

#### B. The Question of Patterned News Coverage

After warning about the ideological and mythic dimensions of the news process, Bennett proceeded to unravel patterns of information release dissimulated into what he termed "packaging" and "rationalization" of the news. Before we continue our discussion though, we need to clarify the connotations assigned to these two terms.

"Packaging" the news product is a term borrowed from the marketing practices of consumer societies where products, in order to sell well, need to be wrapped in attractive coverings. Drawing a parallel with market practices, news is treated as a product to be sold. The process of "packaging" therefore involves "the creation of attractive images" that will convince the client/audience of the products' worth. However, these images are often "fragmented, analytically superficial...rarely contain[ing] solid explanations about events," "dressed up and down [so as to] fit(s) into the audience's social image, life-style and daily schedule," "illusions" about "*who...we think we*

---

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 118, 22.



are...and what...we think we are doing,"<sup>23</sup> that have little resemblance to the real world.

By the same argument, political events, decisions and actors are "packaged" in ideology, mysteries, melodramas, personal scandals, and gossip which "create a world in their own image even when such a world did not exist to begin with." The packages of "orchestrated news" that are marketed by the media convey the "views of powerful political figures" (what Innis and McLuhan called the "distorting power of the dominant imagery"), while "blurring underlying realit[ies]." This "packaged" news keeps the public away from social and political undertakings, or as Bennett says, "behind the images in the news are real political developments that have profound effects on [the people's] lives," the effects of which the public is unaware. Packaging news in "emotionally appealing formats" can create two kinds of news: personalized and dramatized news.<sup>24</sup> We shall turn to them later.

"Rationalization" refers to the technique of "choosing" what news to release based on a prior "rationale" that is made by some decision-makers, whether producers or mediators. The rationales are rarely revealed to the public and audiences

---

23. Ibid. pp. 2-4, 14.

24. Ibid., pp. xv, 3, 14, xiv, 23-24.

tend to accept what comes through media channels, "our only window to the world." Justifications for not covering live events with loud social echoes (anti-Persian Gulf war demonstrations in Washington D.C., or anti-governmental rallies in Bucharest, for instance) are based on judgments made by persons who consider that showing troubling events on TV, or talking about them in newspapers, would bring more unrest and unjustified tension among the public. With these types of rationales in mind, news makers pattern fragmented and normalizing news.

Let us discuss, then, the four identified types of news formats: personalized, dramatized, fragmented and normalizing. Personalized news regularly focuses on political personalities and their lives while paying minimal attention to their policies or to the broader political environment in which they operate. It tends to reduce the political discussions about issues of wide interest to controversies around individual advocators of some policy or another. The politicians' worth and moral probity, their "family values" and hobbies become headline news in what Bennett called "emotional ... human-interest stories." These stories "invite the members of the news audience to project their own private feelings and fantasies directly onto public life," appealing to the "ego and conditioned emotions" rather than to the "intellect and critical

capacities." In this process, policies advocated by one political figure become viable as long as the meanings and images attached to his/her public picture "resemble one's beliefs and prejudices." This is how personalized news encourages a passive political attitude from audiences which are "*inclined to let [powerful] personalities do their thinking and acting for them,*"<sup>25</sup> as long as the personalities match human profiles with which the audience can identify.

Dramatized news is tuned into the same tendency toward emotional formats. It is created out of an event "with a potential for drama" and molded so as to enhance the dramatic side only. "Dramas," "crises," and "action news" leave audiences hung up on somebody's (mis)fortune, with a feeling of personal involvement and participation. Audiences feel they "are informed and understand" what is happening, and "exhaust" themselves in arguments about what they think they see in someone else's drama. A good example of this kind of "exhaustion" is the relatively recent controversy between Anita Hill versus Clarence Thomas. Audiences receive their knowledge about headline stories through packages of dramatic images, then further involve themselves in deciphering and arguing about what seem to be

---

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 27.

deeper semantic levels of various political events. In this way, "old political conflicts that divide [people] are reinforced," maintaining the level of public intolerance on issues which have to do more with every individual's moral standards than with a broader picture of the political scene or with political participation.<sup>26</sup>

Fragmented news falls into the format of rationalized information, which is delivered in portions, like separate pieces of a "jigsaw puzzle," "encapsulated 'happenings,' each with its own emotional coherence, but each isolated and mysteriously unrelated to the others," with the result that "*the whole [picture of an event] is decidedly less than the sum of its parts.*" In other words, fragmented news describes aspects of an actual 'happening' without incorporating all the segments that belong to the same chain of occurrences. The reasons for patterning such news, Bennett argues, are to leave audiences "*out of the important political discussions of their time,*" and make it difficult to see the connections across issues, or even to follow the development of a particular issue over time.<sup>27</sup>

The end result is that events "spring on the public full-blown from nowhere ...[which] gives political insiders a ...

---

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-41.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 45, 48-50.

lead in formulating policy solutions."<sup>28</sup> A public not introduced to the deeper causes that prompt disturbing events like anti-war or anti-governmental demonstrations, for instance, may not understand many or any of the reasons why protesters voice concerns about issues that seem irrelevant because they have not been problematized in advance. Therefore, the policy solutions formulated by political insiders (to repress demonstrations, not cover them at all, or minimize them) seem justified by the unnecessary "tension" created by groups who contest topics considered taboo. The fragmented news achieves thus a distancing of the public from further awareness of social and political conflicts and their implicit consent to the policy solutions advocated by dominant political groups.

Finally, the normalizing news feeds itself from the three other types described above. *"The potential for confusion and disorientation inherent in personalized, dramatized, and fragmented news leaves people vulnerable to old, familiar, reassuring images of how the world works,"* which is when the normalizing news steps in. It responds to dramas, crises, conflictual situations in society by expressing the views of powerful officials who reassure the public of their mastering of the situation and promise a quick return to

---

28. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

"normal." Normalizing news therefore invites audiences to "*trust officials to act in [the population's] interest,*" in recovering the "normality" they had before the crisis. Policy solutions seem again legitimized by the "back to normal" imperative, without much problematization of the normality which caused social tensions in the first place. Such solutions lead to a celebration of how "The System Worked," in an underlying assumption that "[p]roblems are due to individuals and human failure ... [while] the basic political system and its values are unquestionable."<sup>29</sup> The end result is that normalizing news legitimize official versions of "reality" and delegitimize voices that rise against such versions, whether these voices try to draw attention to alarming social or political problems, or to express distrust in the "normalizing cycle" of the official positions.

To conclude the discussion on media bias and patterned news coverage which enable media workers to preserve for themselves a next-to-best position in the news process, Bennett assessed that the mass media "*regulate the content of public information and communication*" to a degree where information acquires properties worthy of a "fantasy land." In the process of news content regulation, whether through

---

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 24, 54.

personalized, dramatized, fragmented or normalizing news, the news makers, sometimes in concerted action with the policy makers, sometimes independently, release small doses of "reality" to the public. These doses keep the audiences away from important social and political issues, limiting the degree of accountability of the policy makers to the "people" and the degree of public participation in the political life of the nation. In this process, fundamental myths about a democratic environment are preserved, while the public remains unaware of their powerlessness within the system.<sup>30</sup>

Consequently, the long-term serious problems with mass media communication pertain to the impact and effects that this mediation has on "the people." As Bennett summarized it, "When society becomes captivated by [news], it is hard to tell whether the news is a reflection of social life or whether the pace and mood of daily life are set by the news." This is how we end up "...living in a world where decisions and actions are cloaked in imagery, and energy is spent maintaining illusions [rather] than understanding reality."<sup>31</sup>

---

30. Ibid., pp. 14, 22.

31. Ibid., pp. 8, 17.

The managers of illusions make it possible to prolong and reinforce myths and ideology in front of their audiences, while the latter have little else to do than "buy" the packages of "democracy" that the media sells to them.

In order to complete and better understand the wider picture of the news process, the reactions and choices of the third actor in the process must now be considered.

### 3. The Consumers

News is produced and mediated for "the people." The people constitute the large mass of consumers who justify the existence of producers and mediators in the first place. To go back to the analogy with the "consumer society," if there is no demand for a product, no market where to sell it, the product is not produced anymore. The producers go out of business or change it. In the case of the news process, the news is sold to the "people", and as long as they buy it, the business goes on. A news process as described so far would not exist without consumers. They condition its very existence, just as they condition the existence of "representatives of the people" who make decisions in their name.

In their consumer role, "the people" need to be satisfied with the product, or so the laws of a free market require. Consequently, a great deal of what constitutes "news" needs



to meet the end of "marketability." Businessmen look at their business with an eye on the public demand and another on the sales. Whenever some product seems to sell better than another, they double the production and the advertising. Similarly, part of what constitutes news is determined by the public taste. The news that sells best (scandals, rumors, gossip, personal tragedies) are produced in increased amounts, satisfying the public demand for emotional personalized stories. These stories "fit the demands of the consumers" in that they project personal tragedies on the public scene, tragedies with which the public can more easily identify and sympathize.

News-makers have understood the weakness of a public who prefer comforting news, that "reproduces and...creates the illusions we hold about ourselves rather than challenging those illusions." They have also understood that "[w]hen faced with a choice between confronting an unpleasant reality and defending a set of comforting and socially accepted beliefs, most people choose the latter course."<sup>32</sup> Under the circumstances, they produce news that meets the above requirement of reproduction and maintenance of illusions that people hold. This approach to "information" enhances the public's trust in the media as long as the

---

32. *Ibid.*, xiii, xvi.

media tells them what they want to hear and does not disrupt their lives with unpleasant realities.

This approach, however, creates and feeds into a "vicious cycle of news and politics" in which the losers are "the public." They buy "what they regard as true, objective and real in the world around them," which is nevertheless an "'official' version of reality" which acquires an aura of "objectivity" because "official versions of events fall into familiar standardized patterns." They fail to see that "behind the images in the news are real political developments that have profound effects on [the people's] lives."<sup>33</sup> In other words, a cycle of images and illusions feeds into another cycle, which creates and duplicates others, all legitimized by the "objectivity" myth of the official version of reality. This going around in circles is hard to escape, if possible at all.

A final question still needs to be addressed: Why would "the people" believe the imagery created by the media or act upon it? Why not become self-educated citizens by informing themselves from various sources on contested and debated issues and act upon such information? Answering this question would throw some light on the choices and alternatives that the public have vis-a-vis information.

---

33. *Ibid.*, xvi, xiv.

First of all, as Bennett argued "mass media news remains our only broadly shared window on reality." If the public were to turn elsewhere for information, whether a more "independent" radio or television station, or specialized magazines, information would still be filtered through some personal biases. Second, trying to find documentation for oneself from history books or specialized publications would amount to more personal awareness of underground politics, but those who "take the time to do so may find themselves unable to communicate with the majority who remain trapped on the other side of the wall of mass media imagery." The antagonistic opinions would be maintained, and the group of self-educated citizens might not find any allies with whom to build a social alternative to the mode of information as it functions at present. Third, the penchant for non-challenging and comforting news leads a large majority of the public to "accept what one encounters in the daily news and pass over in silence the parts that do not make sense."<sup>34</sup>

To summarize, even in democratic societies, where myths about mass media objectivity and neutrality vis-a-vis political issues are strongly proclaimed, serious problems

---

34. *Ibid.*, xiii, xv.

with the mode of information of the public opinion exist. They are "the results of structural conditions in ... the political system" and can be summarized as "information control" prompted by "fears of an informed public" who ideally are able to call their representatives on the carpet for the political decisions their politicians make. Keeping the public away from an awareness of underground politics is essential to maintain the illusion of a democratic process in which politicians fulfill the function of "representatives of the people," make decisions in the "people's best interest," and are accountable for their decisions.

Under the circumstances of a democracy of American type, an empowerment of the people is subtly denied by means of (among others) the active and persistent promotion of illusions about society in the electronic and printed transfer of political information. The constant blurring of issues and "the removal of choice and accountability from popular grasp"<sup>35</sup> materializes in the low accountability of political representatives, an uninformed public trapped in the mirage of ideology and mythology, and ultimately in diminished popular participation.

---

35. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

To conclude, Bennett says: "These effects are normally associated with propaganda systems."<sup>36</sup> Ironically, he referred not to the kind of political system that has been traditionally considered propagandistic, the communist system (of which Romania has been a part for over forty years), but to one of the oldest and most reputed democracies in the world.

#### 4. Closing Comments

If this is the situation in "the great America," what are we to make of the workings of power and media in countries with less tradition in "democratic" practices such as Romania? There is no easy answer to this. While the discussions developed in this chapter enabled us to look beyond the surface value of news and problematize aspects of politics and the information process in the United States that some Americans may take for granted, they also raised more organic and general questions about the role that information, and implicitly the channels through which it reaches its target, has in our lives.

As this chapter showed, information has a major dimension in the social and political settings. Consumers rely on printed and electronic networks for documentation about the

---

36. Ibid.

world around them, about matters that directly, or indirectly, affect their personal activities, and about the workings of their political representatives. Information can sometimes forge life styles, preferences, opinions, choices, and it is important to be aware of this powerful potential, especially in its political dimension.

When the molding of public opinion with respect to popular representatives is done through media channels, any insight into the ways of all media can be helpful to determine the direction of the propaganda pouring out through apparently "objective" TV shows, or printed articles. Effective propaganda operates in subtle dimensions and amounts to the kind of thought conditioning Mueller had in mind when arguing that social groups socialized into compliance tend to accept political definitions as presented to them by dominant figures. It operates in disguise, behind claims of objectivity and non-partisanship by the mediators of political information.

The end result of this conglomerate of political information, power and influence, disguised propaganda, and alleged media neutrality, is a misinformed public, a preservation of influence for some political actors, a conservation of the image of "democracy," and a low degree of popular participation. None of these results are

stipulated in the ideal civics book of American, or any other, democracy.

In the United States, however, these acknowledgements did not lead to pessimism or to an abandonment of the pursuit for a better political or news system. Individually or in some kind of group, resistance to the problems brought about by propaganda through media channels is being organized. Political analysts problematize these issues and approach them from various perspectives. Structuralist and semiotic studies are the latest attempts to capture and explain as much of these flaws as the methodology allows. Media people have come up with independent, specialized television programs, which offer more critical and analytical news shows, as opposed to the uniformity of the dominant television networks. The film industry started producing movies such as "Network" and "Bob Roberts," where the issues of packaging politics and the media are approached in a cynic-ironic-humoristic manner.

Therefore, there is a tendency to lift the veil of mythology and boldly criticize the media, even though an ideal alternative has not yet been provided. Probably it never will be. The drive to evade accountability and responsibility will be there, in various forms, in different cultures. Given this tendency, attempts to persuade politicians to honor their pledges to serve the public, or

media workers to be on the outside with the powerful, as Bennett would put it, and inside with the powerless, will be a constant endeavor.

Even if the discussion on media studies in America provided helpful insight into these various difficulties, it did not intend to suggest that media politics as problematized in the United States necessarily fit into the patterns of all the other cultures. Rather it facilitated a more introspective consideration about the joint workings of power and dominance through the media, and made the assertions about "thought control and conditioning" more understandable. However, problems of propaganda, compliance and resistance are not restricted to one political environment. They develop within their own specific cultural background and need to be critically approached within the particulars of that setting.

This study is conceived as an act of resistance to abuses in the Romanian political system, in its endeavor to reconstruct misuses of the channels of the mass media. It reclaims some of the specifics of a historical situation and outlines a pattern of dominance through information transfer. I argue that this pattern shares theoretical commonalities with the American news system while being implemented in a culturally unique way. Given this cultural uniqueness, I do not indiscriminately borrow concepts and



frameworks only because they are formally acknowledged constructs in other cultures. Basic assumptions about accountability and responsibility do not match the situation under study either, as future chapters will show. Such assumptions will be treated in the historical context of the analysis and evaluated in conformity with their own standards.

With these caveats in mind, I encourage a reading of the following chapter in terms of a wide theoretical framework, which involves "socialization into compliance" achieved primarily through "thought conditioning," in the "packaging of political information." The end result of these theoretical goals and practical techniques is "submission through imagery," "creation of consent," "reaffirmation of legitimacy," and "preservation of political dominance over social groups."

Chapter III: Mass Media Discourses  
Surrounding Social and Political Events in Romania  
(December 1989 through May 1990)

Introduction

The present chapter offers an account of the main events occurring in Romania during the period under discussion and incorporates the activity of the national media in terms of the political dynamics at work. By so doing, I intend to accomplish two tasks: to introduce some of the most contested events that took place at the time, and to provide a selection of media excerpts illustrative of the coverage and imagery in which the events were cast by printed and electronic outlets chosen for study. This endeavor will facilitate a re-evaluation of the political life in the country from a mass media perspective.

Specifically, I sorted excerpts from the national media's rhetoric from two referential points: 1. whenever coverage of the same event was significantly different across the outlets that make the object of the study, and 2. whenever the imagery into which political actors and groups were cast particularly supported the claims of opposition and non-parliamentary groups about a manipulation of the public opinion away from political alternatives other than NSF.

Given the length of the documentary material, a blow-by-blow inventory of articles containing coverages of events would be tedious and to some extent repetitious. Instead, a selective listing of excerpts seen as most representative for the above two counts accompanies the presentation of these five months.

The main collections of newspapers that I used to provide media excerpts are: *Adevarul* (The Truth), *Romania Libera* (Free Romania), *Tineretul Liber* (Free Young People), *Libertatea* (Freedom), and *Romania Muncitoare* (Working Romania). Incomplete collections of *22* (a publication of the Group for Social Dialogue), and *Zig-Zag* were also utilized. All the issues that were used for the documentation of Chapter III are listed in the Appendix.

The chapter is divided into four sections, each following a monthly chronological order of events. Section 1 introduces the events of late December and January. It highlights the major political changes brought about by the collapse of the Ceausescu regime, and exemplifies ideological debates over the status of democracy in Romania. It incorporates discussions about the role of the post-revolutionary mass media and refers to main (anti-governmental) street rallies that started to take place more frequently towards the end of the month, as a result of ideological inconsistencies of the leading NSF team. Their announcement that they would

become a political group and run candidates in elections stirred positive, but also negative reactions. Exemplifications of both instances are provided. Events such as the student meeting on January 7, the January 12 rally, and the January 28 rally are presented, with their attached media coverage.

Section 2 refers to the events of February. Against the background of increasing social unrest caused mainly by the electronic coverage of the January 28 rally, several institutional groups petitioned the government to dismantle old structures and personnel in various sectors of activity. The FRTV technicians demanded a television station free of state interference. A group of army officers asked for the purging of the army of compromised officers. Demands for a dismantling of the Securitate led to several street rallies, the most notable of which was the February 18 rally. This street demonstration ended with a break-in of the governmental building by some protesters, an event whose electronic coverage concludes this section.

Section 3 relates the most notable episodes of the month of March, which were the drafting of the Timisoara Proclamation and the inter-ethnic incidents in Transylvania. Controversies surrounding the activity of the electronic media, the sessions of the Provisional Council for National Unity (an interim legislative organism incorporating

representatives of all the political forces in the country), and debates around central political actors are also included.

Finally, Section 4 concentrates on the months of April and May, particularly on the electoral campaign, the political groups engaged in it, the profiles of the presidential candidates, and the media coverage of the campaign. The chapter will conclude with a presentation of the students' marathon demonstration in University Square, and the media controversies surrounding it.

#### **Section 1: December - January**

As already mentioned in the introductory chapter, the NSF group was born during the December 1989 Revolution and assumed political leadership of the country for the period of transition from the former totalitarian regime to a popularly elected government. In its original composition, there were people who symbolized anti-totalitarian stances. Dissidents from the previous regime (the most notable of whom was human rights activist Doina Cornea), previously persecuted cultural personalities (poets Ana Blandiana, Dan Desliu and Mircea Dinescu), reform-minded political personalities who had opposed Ceausescu (Silviu Brucan, Dumitru Mazilu, Ion Iliescu), people who fought together in the Revolution (Petre Roman, Cazimir Ionescu), formed the

basic nucleus of Romania's representatives. The economic and political measures that their program included were in consonance with the demands of the revolutionaries for a democratized and free country. This program was read on television on December 22, 1989, and published in several newspapers the following days. It included provisions for the democratization of the country, decentralization of the economy, the introduction of a pluralist political system, and the emancipation of the mass media (see also Chapter I).

On December 28, the NSF Council issued a decree dealing with its own structure and organization, and defined itself as "the supreme body of state power." It specified that the Front was a provisional organization that would disband after democratic elections take place. The NSF Council declared itself the provisional legislative power, and specified that the government constituted the executive power. NSF local councils were legislated as provisional administrative structures at the level of enterprises and work groups. The original NSF program was reformulated with some changes, one of which explicitly guaranteed "freedom for the press, radio, and television."<sup>1</sup>

Geared into this aspiration, popular opinions about the role of the mass media developed as early as December 26, 1989.

---

1. Reuter and AFP (Bucharest), 13 Jan., 1990.

Young revolutionaries, student representatives, workers, and intellectuals called on media institutions to conform to the NSF program and "inform promptly and correctly" the public opinion about the measures taken throughout the country for "a transition to a pluralistic society,...real economic democracy,...[and for] the press to be free." They emphasized the active role that these institutions should play in supporting the transition to a new political environment and demanded that the "free press and Television mediate direct contacts between the youth organizations and the elected representatives of the country [and] organize live reportages and interviews" that will help the population understand the political and social circumstances of post-revolutionary Romania.<sup>2</sup> Letters from citizens urged media workers to depart from old practices of subservience to the powers that be and to inform the population "promptly and correctly" about current events, without "waiting for orders from 'above' [about what news they should release]." "A free press," it was argued, "should question the government [about their economic and political measures because] the population has a right to be informed correctly."<sup>3</sup>

---

2. V. Salagean, "O Delegatie a Tinerilor...la Redactia Adevarului," *Adevarul*, Dec. 26, 1989, pp. 1, 3.

3. T. C. Uba, "O Presa Libera...", *Adevarul*, Jan. 6, 1990, p. 3.

Popular requests for removal of media personnel who had served under the previous regime and who were perceived as "popular prosecutors" during the Ceausescu era, because of the inquiries they used to make, were formulated. These changes were perceived as a break with the past and a vitalization of the news process with new people. The media workers who resuscitated feelings of distrust and discomfort were "implored ... not to show themselves in public anymore ... not even to excuse themselves."<sup>4</sup>

By the end of December, the NSF Council abolished Ceausescu's anti-democratic laws and supplied the population with food products and heating. Other measures for a better standard of living were also passed.

The abolition of one-party government led to the proliferation of political groups and the rejuvenation of parties which had been eliminated from politics after the communist take-over in 1947. The former category was made up of new groups with a variety of profiles, some not clearly defined. Four of them had a "green" orientation promoting a safe environment. A host of other small parties, with "humanist," "democratic," "liberal," "conservative," or "monarchic," orientations were born, some

---

4. Matei Gulea in *Romania Libera*, Dec. 31, 1989. Cited by C. Stefanescu, "Free Romanian Television Losing its Credibility," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Mar. 23, 1990.



of which were believed to represent regional or religious interests.<sup>5</sup>

The latter category included three parties with historical traditions, the National Liberal Party (founded in 1876, hereafter NLP), the National Peasant Party/Christian Democracy (dating back to 1869, hereafter NPP), and the Social Democratic Party. All three had been banned from existence in 1947 and their leaders sent to Romanian or Russian gulags. The re-emergence of these so-called "historical" parties was to some extent made possible through the efforts of former political dissidents who had been confined to communist jails, such as NPP leader Corneliu Coposu, or those who had been active in the 1947 youth organizations, such as NLP leader Radu Cimpeanu, future presidential candidate in the May elections. These people re-entered the political stage as representatives of the old parties that had been mistreated (in their opinion) by communists, and renewed their political goals.<sup>6</sup>

Towards the end of December, questions from various social groups regarding the implementation of the NSF's objectives became insistent. Conceptual controversies over political

---

5. For more, see V. Socor, "Political Parties Emerging," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Feb. 16, 1990, pp. 28-34.

6. *Ibid.*

meanings were triggered by the ambivalence of the NSF authorities. Apart from the unclear dividing line between the legislative and executive branches, both nominated by the same NSF Council, on a number of occasions their representatives made equivocal public statements regarding the future of democracy and the multi-party system in Romania. Prime Minister Petre Roman defined pluralism as

a new form of political coexistence ... where we would allow any constructive tendency that will help rebuild the country ... a new form of political pluralism so to say [based on] maintaining and even consolidating the national consensus

without giving explicit guidelines about what the novelty entailed.<sup>7</sup> Ion Iliescu insisted that the innovation was "not merely [based] on the existence of more than one party but on the use of a wide democratic framework ... involving all creative forces of the country in constructive work."<sup>8</sup> Later on, in January 1990, he stated his position in more alarming terms. "Many confuse democracy with political pluralism," he said. "But the multiparty system is a historically obsolete model. We do not wish to follow any model..."<sup>9</sup> Finally, an article in the central press signaled that Mr. Iliescu and Mr. Roman in their interviews

---

7. Interview in *Adevarul*, Dec. 31, 1989.

8. Radio Bucharest, Dec. 28, 1989, 10:00 p.m.

9. Radio Moscow (in Romanian), Jan. 23, 1990, 6:00 p.m.

with foreign journalists "express confidence in the lasting values of communism."<sup>10</sup>

Debates surrounding such statements, which to some political analysts sounded like "a large detour back to communism,"<sup>11</sup> as well as the hints of NSF's chief ideologist about their group preparing to run in the coming elections,<sup>12</sup> were launched in several publications. Journalists highlighted the political inequality between NSF, with "its image of 'organism of the Revolution'" and the other political groups, in their "embryonic" administrative and ideological stage. They considered that "the abolition of unpopular Ceausescu decrees," the "nationwide sympathy" towards popular NSF personalities, and their image of "deliverers" of the population from the Ceausescu clan gave NSF "incontestable electoral advantages" which could not be surmounted by any other group.<sup>13</sup>

Octavian Paler<sup>14</sup> called attention to the NSF's original commitment to be a "provisional political organism" whose

---

10. F. G. Marculescu, "Pentru Dialog," *Romania Libera*, Jan. 12, 1990, pp. 1, 2.

11. Ibid.

12. Silviu Brucan in an interview in *Romania Libera*, Dec. 31, 1989.

13. I. Popescu, "Nevoia de Opozitie," *Romania Libera*, Jan. 9, 1990, p. 1.

14. Director of *Romania Libera* and well known essayist, whose works had been censored by the Ceausescu regime.

task was to "mediate ...[and] prepare the transition to democracy" by organizing free elections. He warned that "any unconformity with the original plan would look like an abuse of the political and moral capital conferred by the revolutionary movement of December" and emphasized that "the Front could be suspected of wanting to appropriate the emotional capital of the Revolution for its own political ambitions."<sup>15</sup>

The equivocal stances of the provisional authorities went beyond conceptual levels. Increasing popular demand favored an investigation of the December Revolution, the punishment of those involved in repressive actions against the population, and the removal of all former communist bureaucrats from high-echelon positions. These reactions were triggered by the postponement of a penal follow-up of the mass shooting of civilians and the appointments to the new Romanian government of former Ceausescu associates.<sup>16</sup> As one citizen cautioned in early December, "the mysterious silence preserved on these issues leaves room for

---

15. "Incertitudini Alarmante," *Romania Libera*, Jan. 11, 1990, pp. 1, 5.

16. Following protests in press and on TV, one such appointee (Constantin Bostina) was dismissed as Deputy Minister for the National Economy, an office to which he had been appointed by the President of the Council of the NSF, Ion Iliescu. See Reuter, 30 December 1989.

speculations, suspicions and rumors of an alarming nature."<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the month of January was marked by events with an increasing tense character. The members of the Students' League and other student organizations held their first meeting at the Bucharest Polytechnic, on January 7. According to the official press release, students manifested discontent with educational measures taken by the Ministry of Education and formulated a request to the NSF Council that their representation in the Council be decided by students themselves.<sup>18</sup> The latter request came as a reply to the student appointments that the Council made without consulting with the League. FRTV broadcast video clips which endorsed the official releases.<sup>19</sup>

Some publications, though, revealed that students had more than educational concerns on their agenda. While *Adevarul* resumed to say that students did not consider their meeting "to have a political character,"<sup>20</sup> other newspapers signaled student discontent with the NSF administration.

---

17. T. C. Uba, "O Presa Libera..."

18. Rompress (in English), January 7, 1990.

19. M. F. Sandru, "Mare Miting Studentesc," *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 9, 1990, p. 3.

20. R. Banu, "Primul Miting Liber," *Adevarul*, Jan. 9, 1990, p. 1.

Complaints had been formulated against prolonged practices of making decisions "at the top" and implementing them without regard to the people's (in this case students') choice. The NSF youth commission which had been nominated "in the students' name" was perceived to represent "the government among students," recalling the totalitarian patterns of the former administration. Calls for abolition of communist practices were consequently spelled out.<sup>21</sup>

Other newspapers warned that television censorship still existed. The clips selected to illustrate speeches by various students had been fragmented to match the official version and leave out disclosures about the Council "not being a democratic group."<sup>22</sup> The students' dissatisfaction with the press reiterating old "festive tones" towards the authorities in power and refraining to criticize "the bureaucracy and dogmas" of the new leadership were not included in the television broadcast either.<sup>23</sup> Letters from participants in the meeting accused FRTV of having

---

21. Sandru, "Mare Miting Studentesc."

22. One such example was Marian Mierla, a student who had been appointed to the NSF Council. At the student meeting, he said that student representatives were mere "pieces of furniture" in the Council's discussions, their opinions were disregarded, and the overall impression was of being "used for decorative purposes." Quotes of his speech were published in *Studentimea Democrata*, Jan. 11, 1990. For more, see C. Pompey, "Students and the Revolution," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Mar. 2, 1990, p. 27.

23. *Studentimea Democrata*, Jan. 11, 1990. Cited by C. Pompey, "Students and the Revolution."

"cosmetically treated the videotape to eliminate delicate sequences" which might have hurt the authorities.<sup>24</sup>

In response to these charges, the television administration invited to their studios the students who had prepared the tape of the meeting for broadcast. The latter assumed responsibility for having shortened the visual material due to limited amount of air time and declared that FRTV had not imposed any censorship on them.<sup>25</sup>

Another disquieting event took place in Bucharest, on January 12, National Funeral day in memory of the martyrs of December. Religious commemorative services were followed by a spontaneous popular rally held at the governmental building which was partly broadcast live. Demonstrators supporting the anti-communist goals of the December revolt considered that the maintenance of Ceausescu's former associates in the provisional government was a continuation of communist dominance. They demanded an investigation of the Revolution, the reinstatement of capital punishment for those responsible for the casualties of December, the

---

24. L. Stoicescu and D. Verdes, "Cum A Aratat Primul Miting...La Televiziune," *Romania Libera*, Jan. 11, 1990, p. 2.

25. *Ibid.*

dismantling of the Securitate, and the formal abolition of the communist party.<sup>26</sup>

NSF personalities such as Dumitru Mazilu (Vice Prime Minister), Petre Roman (Prime Minister), and Ion Iliescu (president of the NSF Council) engaged in a dialogue with the demonstrators. The protesters' interpellations touched on the concepts of democracy and political pluralism, on NSF's ideological line and on Iliescu's political orientation. Late at night Iliescu and Roman announced that the capital punishment was reinstated, the communist party declared illegal and its financial assets appropriated by the entire nation.<sup>27</sup>

A few hours later, the same NSF representatives declared that the issues of capital punishment and abolition of the communist party would have to be democratically decided through a national referendum, scheduled to take place January 28. On January 18, the referendum was canceled by authorities on the grounds that the decisions taken on January 12 at night were forced on them by demonstrators and were therefore undemocratically adopted.

---

26. Radio Bucharest, Jan. 12, 1990, 8:35 p.m.

27. I. Marin, "Adevarul despre Mitingul din Piata Victoriei," *Adevarul*, Jan. 14, 1990, pp. 1, 2.



The printed media's reaction to the demonstration was unanimously negative. *Adevarul* gave a somewhat different account about the original intention of the rally, which was "in support of the present authorities," but "against the preservation of former compromised communist bureaucrats in leadership positions." The demonstrators were reported manifesting against "the breach created between the emerging democratic organisms, the mass media, and the 'oasis' of bureaucrats persisting in enterprises," mainly in the NSF councils that had been recently legislated.<sup>28</sup>

Several public figures voiced their disapproval of the demonstration but their attitudes with respect to the origins of the unrest differed radically. While Paler suggested that the turmoil was due to suspicions that "the NSF ... might undergo a metamorphosis from National Salvation Front to Nomenklatura Salvation Front,"<sup>29</sup> Darie Novaceanu<sup>30</sup> blamed the emerging political parties for the disorder created on that night. He considered that the opposition "undermined the NSF's authority by requesting representation in the legislative body of the country

---

28. Ibid.

29. "Intrebari, Dupa," *Romania Libera*, Jan. 14, 1990, pp. 1, 2.

30. Director of *Adevarul*, a cultural personality best known for his translations of Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

without having any right to do so." He also deemed the electronic media's live coverage of "that protester mob" as mere "sensationalism." In his opinion, the January 12 demonstration "should not have gotten any coverage."<sup>31</sup>

The demands of the demonstrators at the January 12 meeting raised a set of economic and political issues debated in the printed media. While some analysts considered that the NSF Council had "the Romanian society's unanimous approval, as the unique representative of the people's will," and their councils in enterprises "represented the State power" throughout the administrative subdivisions in the country,<sup>32</sup> others argued that the councils maintained a kind of "central control" over the industry, which was "a source of discontent among workers ... and a disincentive to work."<sup>33</sup> The Front was also questioned about their electoral intentions.

To clarify their position, on January 23 the National Salvation Front announced that they would register as a political group and present candidates in the May elections. FRTV broadcast clips from the meeting in which the decision

---

31. "Sa Fim Lucizi: Tiranul e Mort," *Adevarul*, Jan. 14, 1990, pp. 1, 2.

32. F. Radulescu-Botica, "Oricit l-am Drapa, Politicul...", *Libertatea*, Jan. 18, 1990, pp. 1, 2.

33. T. Serbanescu, "Sa Ne Regasim Puterea," *Romania Libera*, Jan. 18, 1990, pp. 1, 2.

to run was voted. Further disclosures spoke about an omission in the television broadcast. Some NSF members considered Iliescu's option to run as his personal choice, which he forced on the rest of the participants. The antagonistic discussion which ensued did not get coverage.<sup>34</sup> Some personalities resigned from NSF to protest against what they considered an abusive settlement.<sup>35</sup> The historical parties issued a joint protest against the paramount position that NSF occupied on the political stage and their non-observance of the separation of powers.

The announcement triggered contradictory reactions. Some analysts welcomed it, but acknowledged that the choice to run "was not an easy one, given NSF's original promises to dissolve itself at the end of the transition period." They found that "working class people laid 'pressures' on NSF to run," a legitimate enough reason for NSF to depart from their initial project.<sup>36</sup> The Front was praised for "wanting to give something to the Revolution," while the political

---

34. M. Mincu, "Democratie Nu Inseamna Intoleranta," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 1, 1990, pp. 1, 2. M. Mincu, "A Existat Consiliul PSN?" *Romania Libera*, Feb. 6, 1990, p. 3. Ana Blandiana, "Oroarea de Politica," *Romania Libera*, Jan. 25, 1990.

35. Doina Cornea, Ana Blandiana, and later Radu Filipescu, all symbols of opposition and dissent against communist practices.

36. A. Perva, "Frontul, in Competitia Electorala," *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 25, 1990, p. 1.

parties were labelled "power driven groups."<sup>37</sup> NSF's "political mistakes" were traced to the pressure that "parties lay on them... [by] gathering their supporters and urging them to take to the streets to protest," entertaining an atmosphere of tension.<sup>38</sup> The political aspirations of the emerging parties were denounced as "leaning towards a 'rightist' economic mentality" while "NSF helps us re-discover the 'leftist' orientation in its noble aspirations for real democratic values." The "left" tendency was "the way of thinking of large masses of the working class," and NSF's participation in elections was determined by their "representation of considerable masses of the population, not by partisan political positions."<sup>39</sup>

Other analysts opposed NSF's decision and considered that "the detour of the Revolution moved from a behind the curtains stage, to an official stage," with the Front "preparing an abusive take-over and leaning on old communist structures and methods" to that end.<sup>40</sup> Iliescu was accused of having "imposed his own will" in the NSF meeting where

---

37. I. Olteanu, "Opiniile....," *Libertatea*, Jan. 23, 1990, pp. 1, 2.

38. D. Novaceanu, "Analfabetismul Politic," *Adevarul*, Jan. 26, 1990, pp. 1, 3.

39. M. Coman, "Puterea si Destinul....," *Adevarul*, Jan. 27, 1990, p. 1.

40. O. Paler, "Iluziile au Durat....," *Romania Libera*, Jan. 25, 1990, pp. 1, 2.

the decision to run was voted.<sup>41</sup> NSF's electoral campaign was denounced as having started "in December," by forging a "moral authority as representatives of the Revolution" which gave them a unique political advantage.<sup>42</sup> The specter of another powerful one-party rule was flagged.<sup>43</sup>

Street rallies against the NSF's political monopoly took place in Bucharest and segments of the population formulated demands for a coalition legislature. The electronic networks scarcely covered these demonstrations, with the television "barely putting on the air any of the criticisms against NSF." The rallies were either "ignored" or "presented as if students manifested in support of historical parties, by whom they were manipulated." According to eye-witnesses, the television "detoured public attention from the protesters' demands for freedom of speech and correct information for the population" by assimilating them to the historical parties' supporters, instead of covering live their demands against the television's attempts to "omit" or "embellish" criticisms of the leading NSF team.<sup>44</sup>

---

41. M. Mincu, "A Existat Consiliul FSN?" *Romania Libera*, Feb. 6, 1990, p. 3.

42. A. Uncu, "Alegerile. Cind?" *Romania Libera*, Jan. 23, 1990, pp. 1, 3.

43. T. Serbanescu, "Criza de Incredere," *Romania Libera*, Jan. 27, 1990, pp. 1, 2.

44. L. Stoicescu and D. Verdes, "Vrem Ratie de Televiziune Libera," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 2, 1990, p. 2.

In two instances, television audiences had the opportunity to hear some of the concerns voiced by demonstrators. A videotape recorded by students was put on the air "only with the support of the television technical team," while a second tape "was shortened from 40 to 15 minutes" and then broadcast at a very late hour when "few people, if any, watched it."<sup>45</sup> Some clips from one of the rallies were broadcast, showing "mainly gypsies."<sup>46</sup>

Some central newspapers mentioned the street marches. The demonstrators were described as "people who believe in the Revolution," whose political opinions adverse to NSF were prompted by "inaccuracies that NSF had left unaddressed." However, without insisting on NSF's accountability, analysts encouraged readers to trust the Front and justified the "unaddressed inaccuracies" as a consequence of the difficult social and economic situation inherited from the previous regime.<sup>47</sup> Meetings between workers and NSF representatives

---

45. Ibid.

46. "Opinii de la Miting," interview with F. Tomescu, *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 30, 1990, p. 3.

47. A. Perva, "S-au Oprit Motoarele Revolutiei?" *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 27, 1990, pp. 1, 4.

were reported, with workers approving of the Front's decision to run in elections.<sup>48</sup>

Against a background of street rallies and demands for the NSF to give up its monopoly over power, on January 27, NSF representatives announced in a televised address that they were considering negotiations for a coalition government with the other political forces in the country.<sup>49</sup>

On January 28, at 6 a.m., Radio Bucharest broadcast an official statement by the National Peasants Party. It summarized talks that took place between NSF and the historical parties representatives for a joint legislative venture. NSF agreed to negotiate a coalition legislative body but asked political representatives to move the rally they organized for January 28 from Victoria Square, where government offices were located, to University Square. In exchange, the Front representatives promised to make a public statement about their intention to negotiate in accordance with the demands of the three parties. The parties' delegates considered that the Front's televised address had been ambiguous and considered themselves not bound to respect the Front's solicitation about the location

---

48. G. Stanciu, "Intilnire...", *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 27, 1990, p. 4. R. Bogdan, "Dialog cu Muncitorii," *Adevarul*, Jan. 27, 1990, p. 5.

49. Gabriel Andreescu's declaration on Radio Bucharest, Jan. 28, 1990.

of their rally. They announced that the march would proceed as originally planned.<sup>50</sup> The rally started late morning, on the same day, in front of the governmental building.

Simultaneously, NSF proponents organized a meeting of support in Banu Manta Square. On television, this demonstration was presented as "a spontaneous manifestation in favor of the Front by workers from Bucharest enterprises." Later acknowledgements revealed that the demonstration had been staged by top NSF members. A former member in the NSF Council declared that "a counter-demonstration to the historical parties' rally was being discussed by NSF top representatives as early as January 25."<sup>51</sup> Workers were told that participation in the rally was compulsory and leaflets bearing slogans against the historical party leaders were distributed. The party leaders were accused of intending to "sell the country" to the West and turn the masses of workers into exploited toilers through massive privatization.<sup>52</sup>

Peaceful during the day, the rally of the historical parties became violent with the coming of night. The reasons

---

50. Cited by M. Shafir, "The Provisional Council for National Unity: Is History Repeating Itself?" *Report on Eastern Europe*, Mar. 2, 1990 p. 20.

51. F. Iaru, "Parlambadarii," *Romania Libera*, Mar. 29, 1990, p. 2.

52. M. Shafir, "The Provisional Council for National Unity."



prompting the demonstrators to turbulent action are still a controversial topic. Apparently, historical parties' demonstrators broke into the governmental building and devastated offices. The official version was that the parties attempted a take-over of political power and used the demonstration as cover-up.<sup>53</sup> In what follows I will reconstruct how this event, a key moment for the ensuing evolution of public sympathies and antipathies, was introduced to radio and television audiences.

At 11 a.m., the radio station reported the rally to be peaceful. Around 3 p.m., it interrupted its pop music program and announced: "We received the following appeal from the NSF Council: those who support NSF, the revolution, and democracy, should come now to Victoria Square." The request was repeated several times within the following thirty minutes.<sup>54</sup>

Simultaneously, on television, Iliescu appealed for calm, expressed disapproval vis-a-vis the historical parties' pressures on the Front, and warned that violence might occur if intolerance and impatience prevailed. While he was speaking, TV anchormen broke in with the news that turbulent events had been reported at the governmental building.

---

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-23.

54. FBIS-EEU-90 230 29 Jan., 1990.

During the afternoon, they continued to interrupt the program to launch dramatic appeals to the population to "rush to the aid of the Front," and took turns to describe "the violence" in Victoria Square.<sup>55</sup> No live broadcast of the "violent" encounters was offered due to "exceptionally foggy weather conditions."<sup>56</sup> A young man allegedly coming from the rally called on the viewers to leave their TV sets and come to the aid of the NSF which was "in danger."<sup>57</sup> Other groups of people appeared as well, to call the population to the rescue of NSF.<sup>58</sup> An eye-witness declared that there were "thousands" of human casualties in the streets.<sup>59</sup> A Rompres (Romanian press agency) address read on TV announced that NPP demanded the NSF's resignation.<sup>60</sup>

Later in the evening, the television gave live footage from inside the governmental building. Corneliu Coposu read the

---

55. M. Mincu, "Democratie nu Inseamna Intoleranta."

56. R. Balas, in *Romania Libera*, Feb. 13, 1990, p. 1.

57. FBIS-EEU-90 230 29 Jan., 1990.

58. M. Mincu, "Democratie Nu Inseamna Intoleranta." F. Iaru, "Parlambadarii."

59. His name was Cazimir Ionescu and he ran in the May elections on NSF lists. See F. Iaru, "Parlambadarii."

60. This apparently fake address was read in a moment of increasing tension during the afternoon. As it was formulated, it endorsed the official version about political pressures by historical parties on NSF, and made the agitation of the TV anchormen look justified. The historical parties, however, claimed that they never wrote this address. See F. Iaru, "Box Populi," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 8, 1990, p. 1. Also, F. Iaru, "Parlambadarii."

NPP official statement of the negotiations, which revolved around the request of the historical parties that NSF give up its monopoly over power, become a legally constituted political group, form a legislative body in coalition with all the other political forces, and disband its councils in enterprises so that a fair chance be given to other political groups as well.<sup>61</sup>

The clarification of their position came too late. By the time it was done, citizens and workers from Bucharest factories were already pouring into Victoria Square. According to their statements, "the television broadcast made us see the historical parties' unwillingness to engage in a fair dialogue with NSF and their use of street demonstrations to pressure NSF into political decisions in the parties' best interest." People were "outraged by what they had seen on TV," and some of them declared that the parties were probably intent "upon taking over power and selling the country to rich Westerners."<sup>62</sup> Demonstrators who gave interviews to some central newspapers unanimously declared that they came "of their own will," as a consequence of "the television's appeals for help," leaving

---

61. F. Iaru, "Box Populi," p. 1; G. Inoan, "Martor...", *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 30, 1990, p. 2.

62. C. Gheorghe, "Aven Prea Multa Treaba...", *Adevarul*, Jan. 30, 1990, p. 3.

"homes and jobs ... boiling pots on stoves ... [and other household activities]," gathering "neighbors, children, friends and relatives," and heading for the government offices "to defend Iliescu and the Revolution."<sup>63</sup> Shifts of workers from Bucharest enterprises made similar statements.<sup>64</sup> Nobody seemed aware of the requests that the historical parties addressed to NSF as read on television by the NPP chairman.

Late at night, while the appeals of the anchormen did not cease, FRTV broadcast live a large meeting of support for NSF at the governmental building.<sup>65</sup> Thousands of people chanted encouraging slogans for NSF, Iliescu, Roman, and the Revolution.

On January 29, at 6 and 7 a.m. (also on January 31), the NPP and the NLP read a communique on Radio Bucharest in which they restated the goals of their rally, as described in the address read on television. They accused the television of tendentious presentation of their rally, which caused it to look "like a coup," and complained that the electronic media

---

63. L. Munteanu, "Si-au Stapinit Minia," *Adevarul*, Jan. 30, 1990, p. 3; C. Gheorghe, "Avem prea Multa Treaba." Ghe. Ionita, O. Zamfirescu, "Luni, 29 Ianuarie," *Adevarul*, Jan. 30, 1990, p. 3.

64. Ghe. Ionita, O. Zamfirescu, "Luni, 29 Ianuarie," p. 1.

65. M. Mincu, "Democratia Nu Inseamna Intoleranta," p. 2. F. Iaru, "Box Populi," pp. 1, 2; "Parlambadarii," p. 2.

deliberately cast the historical parties in an injurious light.<sup>66</sup>

In the evening, miners from the Jiu Valley arrived in Bucharest, prompted by "what they saw on TV,"<sup>67</sup> to protest against the historical parties' pressures and to manifest their allegiance to NSF. They thanked the television administration for "showing the game of the historical parties," and in a sign of disapproval of the latter's politics, ransacked the parties' headquarters.<sup>68</sup>

The echoes of the January 28 rally died hard and had devastating consequences for the historical parties. Meetings organized by their supporters in other towns (Bacau, January 28, for instance) were boycotted by NSF supporters who beat the demonstrators.<sup>69</sup> Historical parties' headquarters across the country (Botosani, Iasi, Rimnicu Vilcea) were vandalized on January 29. Further cases of severe reactions against persons suspected of not

---

66. M. Shaffir, "The Provisional Council of National Unity: Is History Repeating Itself?" p. 21.

67. C. Moraru, "Tineti Seama...", *Adevarul*, Jan. 30, 1990, p. 2. Ghe. Ionita, "O Calatorie din Convingere...", *Adevarul*, Jan. 31, 1990, p. 2. V. Mihai, "Democratia Televiziunii," *Libertatea*, Mar. 10, 1990, p. 3.

68. *Romania Libera*, Jan. 30, 1990.

69. *Romania Libera*, Jan. 31, 1990.

siding with NSF and being party supporters were reported on January 29.<sup>70</sup>

More NSF supporters from all over the country rushed to Bucharest to manifest support for the provisional authorities. They also emphasized that "the television broadcast" made them give up their daily routines and come "to the aid of the Front."<sup>71</sup> They asserted that they came out of a civic duty to defend the achievements of the Revolution, and expressed their belief that those who demonstrated against NSF had probably been "bribed with champagne and money" by historical parties to do it.<sup>72</sup> Some of them considered that the historical parties "should be held responsible for the economic stagnation provoked by the workers' reaction to come to the aid of the Front instead of observing their professional duties." "If it weren't for the historical parties forceful attempt," some declared, "people would have had a normal working day."<sup>73</sup> Banners carried all over Bucharest read "'We do not sell our

---

70. *Romania Libera*, Feb. 2, 4, 1990.

71. Ghe. Ionita and O. Zamfirescu, "Luni, 29 Ianuarie."

72. L. Munteanu, "Si-au Stapinit Minia."

73. Ghe. Ionita, and O. Zamfirescu, "Luni, 29 Ianuarie."

Country,' 'Down with the Country's Traitors,' 'NSF is the whole Country.'"74

Media controversies around the historical parties' rally and its aftermath fell again into roughly two categories, those who sided with NSF against the "coup" of the parties, and those who protested against the "farce set up by FRTV in making the rally look like a coup."75

The former accused the historical parties of having attempted "to sell the country to foreign monopolies,"76 and having "paid people to participate in the January 28 rally" with "clothing and shoes,"77 or with "dollars, lei78 and alcohol."79 The people who started the violence in the streets were reported to have been found with "150 dollar bills in their pockets." Reports read that "children have been promised clothing in exchange for shouting anti-NSF slogans."80

---

74. I. Tanasache, "Lasati-ne sa Muncim," *Adevarul*, Jan. 30, 1990, p. 3.

75. M. Mincu, "Democratie nu Inseamna Intoleranta."

76. A. Iancu, "Tara si Revolutia," *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 30, 1990, p. 3.

77. Note by Ioan Pater, in *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 30, 1990, p. 3.

78. Romanian currency.

79. "Sa Auzi...," *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 30, 1990, p. 3. V. Mihai, "Democratia Televiziunii," *Libertatea*, Mar. 10, 1990, p. 3.

80. V. N., "Nu Folositi Copiii...," *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 30, 1990, p. 3.

NSF was praised for "having been with [the people] in the fire of the Revolution...[while] the historical parties have not."<sup>81</sup> Iliescu and his team were described as "honest, brave, intelligent, knowledgeable people ... who have suffered with us in the long years of communist rule."<sup>82</sup> The issues raised by the historical parties about NSF's cumuli of both executive and legislative powers were dismissed as "petty legal technicalities."<sup>83</sup> The parties' representatives were described as "former runaways from the Ceausescu regime who come now to claim representation for the whole people," former "exiled princes and princesses who threw themselves into airplanes to head for Bucharest," who came to "teach us [Romanians] democracy."<sup>84</sup> Coposu and the other "political deserters" like him were said to have "drunk coffee and eaten their croissants in the Paris cafes while ... Romanians were eating plain bread and water."<sup>85</sup> He was accused of "wanting foreign aid and funds to come into the country" for his own political ambitions.<sup>86</sup>

---

81. E. Stanciu and R. Iatcu, "Noua Minerilor...", *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 31, 1990, p. 2.

82. I. Baiesu, "Cui i-e Frica...", *Adevarul*, Jan. 30, 1990, p. 2.

83. G. Nastase, "Nevoia de Claritate," *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 31, 1990, p. 1.

84. I. Baiesu, "Cui i-e Frica..."

85. Ibid.

86. E. Ionescu, "Scrisoare Deschisa...", *Adevarul*, Feb. 1, 1990, p. 1.



Parties were considered to "have appeared like mushrooms after a good rain," ready to confiscate the "achievements of the Revolution," and to "destabilize the country."<sup>87</sup>

The media analysts and public personalities, such as the Minister of Culture, who considered that FRTV was the main "manufacturer" of the "coup" of the historical parties rallied to condemn Iliescu's attitude in "condoning, if not encouraging" the anchormen to "stage the tension" and "alarm" the TV viewers into believing that NSF was in danger. In fact the rally had been "up to a point a peaceful one," with people "booing" Iliescu and his team for their "undemocratic practices of monopolizing power," and asked NSF "to respect their own commitments made in December." Critics accused Iliescu of "having allowed the TV editors and anchormen to appeal to the population, and to the miners, to come to Bucharest, and stage a dangerous counter-demonstration of NSF adherers ... which incited the citizens ... and looked more like a civil war instigation."<sup>88</sup>

This category of analysts rallied to call "what happened on January 28...[an instance of] how an event can be worked up

---

87. I. Stefan, C. Varvara, Gh. Ionita, A. Papadiuc, "Doua zile...", *Adevarul*, Jan. 30, 1990, p. 2.

88. M. Mincu, "Democratia Nu Inseamna Intoleranta," p. 2. F. Iaru, "Box Populi," pp. 1, 2.

by the mass media in order to influence public opinion" and elicit "mass loyalty"<sup>89</sup> for one political group: the NSF in this case. FRTV was openly accused of deliberately "lying" about how events proceeded,<sup>90</sup> and of having "systematically misinformed and incited the population with the goal of intimidating and annihilating the opposition political forces."<sup>91</sup> Analysts deplored the "tactics of intimidation" through "violence" and complained that the "incitations of the television team created a social rift mirrored in slogans like 'Death to Intellectuals and Students!' [because they supported the historical parties] and 'We do not Sell our Country,'" that NSF supporters shouted on January 28 and 29.<sup>92</sup>

The Minister of Culture publicly requested the FRTV administration to "rapidly replace the personnel who...[with the manner they handled the January 28 rally] have extremely harmed the country's interests."<sup>93</sup> Victor Rebengiuc, well-known actor, a participant in the anti-NSF rally,

---

89. Ibid.

90. L. Stoicescu and D. Verdes, "Vrem Ratie de Televiziune Libera."

91. M. Mincu, "A Existat Consiliul FSN?" p. 3.

92. L. Stoicescu, D. Verdes, "Vrem Ratie de Televiziune Libera."

93. A. Plesu, "E Nevoie...", *Romania Libera*, Jan. 31, 1990, p. 1.

protested against the network's presentation of the January 28 rally, calling it deliberately biased towards NSF.<sup>94</sup>

For the remainder of January, further cases of intolerance against those perceived to be antagonistic to the NSF were selectively publicized.<sup>95</sup> The students of the School of Architecture complained that neither the television nor the radio stations broadcast their letter of protest against the vandalism of a group of "so-called NSF supporters." These people broke into their school on January 29 and demanded that photos displayed on the walls, showing Ceausescu in Iliescu's company, be removed. In the face of the students' refusal, they ransacked the building and the labs.<sup>96</sup>

The television administration felt obligated to answer the accusations of dishonesty in their coverage of the rally. The two anchormen who appealed to the population justified themselves by stating that they presented facts as they were reported by people coming from the rally. Technical difficulties were invoked for not covering the rally live and relying on hear-say for information.<sup>97</sup> They also

---

94. M. Shafir, "The Provisional Council for National Unity."

95. A. Daniel, "Un Chip al Democratiei?" *Romania Libera*, Feb. 2, 1990, p. 5. A. Stanescu, "Pe Cine Aparau Atacatorii?" *Romania Libera*, Feb. 4, 1990, p. 1.

96. "Semnal," *Romania Libera*, Jan. 31, 1990, p. 1. Also C. Stefanescu, "Free Romanian Television Losing Its Credibility."

97. *Romania Libera*, Mar. 29, 1990.

countered criticisms of their "bias" with the presentation of piles of letters said to come from viewers all over the country in support of their activity and confident in their honesty.<sup>98</sup>

However, their statements were contradicted by further breakthroughs. A group of FRTV technicians published a note stating that the equipment necessary for a live broadcast of the demonstration on January 28 was ready before noon, but "the FRTV directors did not authorize the transmission ... and sent people home."<sup>99</sup> In an interview with 22, a television editor admitted that "the president of the country said that the rally should not be broadcast."<sup>100</sup>

Following these disclosures, the publications who rushed to condemn the historical parties for their attitude admitted that "there had been some scarcity in the broadcast of the January 28 rally,"<sup>101</sup> with a certain "degree of intentional manipulation of the information" in a tendency to broadcast "what should be covered [by former state standards] and not what there is to cover."<sup>102</sup> The public was nevertheless

---

98. *Adevarul*, Feb. 8, 1990.

99. *Romania Libera*, Feb. 1, 1990, p. 1.

100. T. Serbanescu, "Clarificare," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 25, 1990, p. 1.

101. I. Parhon. "Razboi la Televiziune," *Romania Muncitoare*, Feb. 7, 1990, p. 3.

102. M. Boianciu, "Dictie si Sinceritate," *Adevarul*, Feb. 13, 1990, p. 1.

urged to "tolerate and trust" the FRTV administrative team.<sup>103</sup> By that time, public opinion was already massively opposed to the historical parties.

## Section 2: February

The beginning of February was marked by two events: The constitution of the Provisional Council for National Unity (hereafter PCNU), and the petition of the FRTV trade union addressed to the authorities for an institution free of government interference.

On February 1, the coalition legislation was formed. Theoretically, the PCNU was designed to meet provisions for a democratic society, with all the political forces represented until free elections took place. It was supposed to give each political actor and group a fair chance and to represent the germs of pluralism in the country. In practice, half of the council were NSF supporters and the other half representatives of all the emerging political parties, including NSF.<sup>104</sup> The NSF was therefore preserving a majority of votes.

The PCNU sessions were broadcast live and polarized media attention. Most analysts expressed satisfaction with the

---

103. I. Parhon, "Razboi la Televiziune."

104. Rompres (in English), Feb. 1, 1990.

implementation of pluralism and reproached the historical parties for the distrust with which they forced the issue of representation on January 28.<sup>105</sup> The parties' performance raised media criticisms pertaining to their programs and ideas. Proposals for political and economic reforms were surmised to be "hidden interests" for "power and influence."<sup>106</sup> The financial and administrative difficulties they faced, given their fresh start in politics, the hardships in procuring office space, printing materials, technical equipment to publicize their goals and thus gain more adherents, were dismissed as deliberate whining. The parties were encouraged to finance themselves from "membership support." The demands made in PCNU that a part of the funds of the former communist party be used to support their start in politics, since "communists banned all other political parties from existence," were admonished as "money driven" demands.<sup>107</sup> Overall, the opposition was highly distrusted by media analysts.

On February 4, the FRTV's new trade union of technical workers, headed by former dissident Dumitru Iuga, petitioned

---

105. A. Perva, *Tineretul Liber*, Feb. 3, 1990.

106. S. Motiu, "Programe, Platforme, Partide," *Libertatea*, Feb. 10, 1990, p. 2.

107. A. Gavrilescu, *Adevarul*, Feb. 16, 1990. F. Radulescu Botica, *Libertatea*, Feb. 12, 1990.

the provisional government for a television station free of state interference. Their request came against a background of recurrent street protests at the television building calling for the removal of the anchormen who staged the tension on January 28. Demonstrators blamed the administration for the "manipulative" and "distorted" presentation of several anti-governmental demonstrations, culminating with the January 28 rally, and demanded the resignation of the television's director,<sup>108</sup> Aurel Dragos Munteanu.<sup>109</sup>

Some journalists condemned the trade union's initiative and accused Iuga of "wanting to appropriate the television station for himself."<sup>110</sup> The union members as well as the protesters who rallied to their requests were labelled "professional demonstrators," probably "siding with or paid by" some political group,<sup>111</sup> "sheep in a fold,"<sup>112</sup> blindly following Iuga, who had been "paid to create chaos and

---

108. AP (Bucharest), Feb. 5, 1990.

109. Former dissident, poet Aurel Dragos Munteanu was originally nominated spokesperson for NSF. Therefore at the above date, he was fulfilling two functions, one political and one supposed to be non-partisan: director of the television station.

110. D. Novaceanu, "Democratie in Transhumanta," *Adevarul*, Feb. 6, 1990, p. 1.

111. I. Parhon, "Razboi la Televiziune."

112. D. Novaceanu, "Democratie in Transhumanta. Also "Cumpar Tun...", *Adevarul*, Feb. 20, 1990, p. 1.

anarchy inside FRTV."<sup>113</sup> Novaceanu even recommended a "return to the three hour programs we had before the Revolution," since audiences "did not appreciate the efforts of the TV team to meet the demands of their subscribers."<sup>114</sup>

The following day, Ion Iliescu and Petre Roman met with members of the union. The officials turned down the request for Munteanu's deposal on the grounds that "only the body of state power, as representative of the whole nation, has the prerogative to appoint the president and the executives of the radio and television."<sup>115</sup> Nothing was mentioned about the autonomy of the FRTV.

For three days in a row, increasing numbers of citizens demonstrated at the television building in support of the trade union's demands. The rallies were not covered live by FRTV. Short announcements and some clips were broadcast on the nightly news but the requests of the demonstrators were not specified.<sup>116</sup>

In order to ward off the impression that the television was a partisan institution, its editors conducted a televised

---

113. Letter from P. Aniculesei, *Libertatea*, Mar. 3, 1990, p. 4.

114. D. Novaceanu, "Democratie in Transhumanta."

115. *Rompres* (Bucharest), Feb. 5, 1990.

116. S. Rosca-Stanescu, "T.R.L. - Ieri....," *Libertatea*, Feb. 12, 1990, p. 2.



public. TV reporters questioned passers-by whether they considered "FRTV to be a free institution."<sup>117</sup> Most of those interviewed answered affirmatively.

Some analysts, however, considered the poll "statistically invalid ... obviously selected before airing to show affirmative reactions." The wording of the questions had been engineered "to elicit positive answers," and the intention of the poll was to "rally public opinion to FRTV's side."<sup>118</sup>

On February 9, after large street marches and public pressures, Munteanu forwarded his resignation. In an open letter published in several newspapers, he clarified that he had been abroad at the time of the January 28 rally and that upon his return he found the political situation in the country radically changed. He pointed out that his attempts to correctly inform the population had been jeopardized by "political ambitions" and "conflicts" that had become "intolerable."<sup>119</sup> On February 12, Razvan Theodorescu, a reputable historian, was appointed director of the FRTV through a PCNU decree signed by Ion Iliescu.

---

117. D. Oprescu, "Libertatea de a Mistifica Libertatea," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 6, 1990, p. 1.

118. Ibid.

119. *Rompres* (Bucharest), Feb. 9, 1990.

In another attempt to tone down increasingly pervasive acknowledgements about the course of events on January 28, the television administration initiated a show called "Opinions." Citizens were invited to voice their recommendations about FRTV's activity or about political issues.

Some analysts complained that the show "selects for broadcast opinions which aggravate the social rift already at work...between students and workers." Intellectual personalities such as Doina Cornea or Octavian Paler were "vehemently condemned" for their opposition to NSF, with "disparaging and even offending remarks being put on the air, while the group of those who support them 'froze' at FRTV's gates." The perception that FRTV was committed to promote NSF was maintained by the "heavy scheduling of opinions supporting NSF" and by "criticizing the social groups who held different opinions, such as students and intellectuals." "Xenophobia was reinforced with remarks such as 'political parties should go back abroad where they came from,'" and people who held views antagonistic to NSF "should not and must not express their arguments in public."<sup>120</sup>

---

120. L. Stoicescu and D. Verdes, "Orele de Invatamint...", *Romania Libera*, Feb. 15, 1990, p. 2. D. Doru-Chirca, "Opinii," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 14, 1990, p. 3.

In this confrontational social setting, members of army units from Timisoara, grouped under the name of the Committee for the Democratization of the Army (hereafter CDA), appealed to the NSF government for a purging of the army of compromised officers. On February 12, FRTV broadcast their appeal, which echoed rumors about a possible destabilization of the armed forces in the event that officers who had been compromised by their activity in the previous regime and had been involved in the repressive events of December did not step down from their high-echelon positions. The appeal called for an official assessment of the role of the army in the December Revolution and for the removal of the Minister of Defense (Nicolae Militaru) and the Minister of Internal Affairs (Mihai Chitac) on account of their direct involvement in the December repressions in Timisoara.<sup>121</sup>

The members of the committee tried to gain access to President Iliescu but did not succeed. They met with Iliescu's personal representative and their meeting was recorded by FRTV cameramen at the insistence of the CDA members. However, the tape disappeared before it could be aired, under circumstances that were not explained.<sup>122</sup> FRTV

---

121. "Appeal to the President of the Council of National Unity," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 14, 1990.

122. C. Stefanescu, "Free Romanian Television Losing its Credibility."

broadcast only some clips that showed "the officers hammering on the table as they made their points."<sup>123</sup>

At the end of another two days, the Prime Minister received the CDA representatives. The meeting was closed to the press from the Prime Minister's order, against the CDA's requests.<sup>124</sup> Outside the government headquarters, thousands of army officers from various sections of the army demonstrated in support of the CDA appeal. Civilians joined them in a general protest against the Securitate officers who had been reintegrated in the army ranks, demanding an army purged of compromised officers.<sup>125</sup> Official releases stated that demonstrators had been found with "butcher knives...dollars...and lei in their pockets,"<sup>126</sup> while flyers calling for "anarchy, disorder and distrust in the government" were distributed among them.<sup>127</sup>

Although the Prime Minister rejected demands for the two ministers' demotions, he agreed to appoint special

---

123. *The New York Times*, Feb. 18, 1990. Cited by C. Stefanescu, "Free Romanian Television Losing..."

124. Horia Manguirea, Tudor Prelipceanu, and Coman Sova, "The Media, and Through It the Public Opinion, Must Not Know?" *Romania Libera*, Feb. 15, 1990.

125. AFP and Reuter, Feb. 13, 1990.

126. *Rompres*, Feb. 16, 1990.

127. A. Florescu, "Putea fi Totul Pasnic," *Adevarul*, Feb. 16, 1990, p. 3.

commissions to analyze the requests of the CDA. On February 17, Militaru was "released" from his position as Minister of National Defense, with no particular explanations about his role in the December repressions.<sup>128</sup> Another group of generals and officers who had been recalled to active service after the Revolution, and who had been especially singled out by the CDA appeal, were transferred to the army reserve in the beginning of March. Again, no justifications were offered for this decision.<sup>129</sup>

The final significant event of February was the storming of governmental offices by a group of demonstrators on February 18. Against the background of a protest demonstration calling for the demotion of the communist nomenklatura still appointed to the post-revolutionary government and supporting CDA's appeals, a handful of people broke into the building, forcing the entrance doors with iron bars and chains, then vandalized some of the offices.<sup>130</sup>

On television, this intrusion was introduced in the form of an official communique stating that "turbulent and violent elements, trampling underfoot democratic and civilized life, illegally penetrated the government headquarters as far as

---

128. "Noul Ministru al Apararii Nationale," *Adevarul*, Feb. 17, 1990.

129. Radio Bucharest, First Program, March 1, 1990, 7:00 p.m.

130. AFP, Feb. 18, 1990.

official offices."<sup>131</sup> Again, no live coverage of the break-in was offered. Three miners appeared to summon the population to defend the government against "hooliganic" elements.<sup>132</sup> A short clip showing a young man penetrating the building through a window and protesters shouting 'Arrest him!' reinforced the official version that the demonstration was an attempt against the government.<sup>133</sup>

Late in the evening, TV crews broadcast live from inside the building, where groups of curious passers-by were walking up and down the halls. Nobody seemed in charge of protecting the headquarters and no guards were in sight. Broken windows and doors were shown. An injured guard with scratches on his face was interviewed. A reporter admonished some curious strollers for being inside the building. They seemed to have been pushed inside the building by a whole wave of demonstrators, and denied having initiated the "attack." However, the tone of the reporter was accusatory, implicitly blaming those interviewed for the vandalism. His commentaries referred to the damages caused to the building as demonstrators broke in, to casualties

---

131. FBIS-EEU-90-034 Feb 20.

132. G. Negreanu, "Un caz Flagrant," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 20, 1990, p. 1.

133. N. Manolescu, "Pe Micul Ecran si la Fata Locului," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 20, 1990, pp. 1, 2.

among the guards, and to the anarchic coup that had been tried.<sup>134</sup>

The appeals made on FRTV to "all the democratic forces throughout the country to come to the rescue of the government" brought the miners from the Jiu Valley to Bucharest the following day. Their meeting in support of the NSF and in protest against the vandalism was broadcast live. Iliescu addressed them from the balcony and thanked them for coming to their help. He accused "rightist forces and former Iron-Guardists" of instigating a coup against the Romanian government. He stated that "apparently forces financed from abroad wanted to establish a nationalistic-rightist government."<sup>135</sup>

The same evening miners requested that they meet with representatives of the political parties. This meeting was also broadcast live. The miners told politicians that they had been forced to come to Bucharest again, when the television warned that the government was in danger. They blamed the political representatives for the chaos reigning in Bucharest and for the renewed coup attempt. They told politicians that miners did not approve of the policy that parties be funded from the state budget. Political parties

---

134. Ibid.

135. FBIS-EEU-90-034 Feb 20.

should subsidize themselves from popular appeal and membership, not from the workers' labor. They expressed concern about the conditions in which the government was forced to work and warned that they would remain in vigil in Victoria Square to defend it. They verbally attacked Cimpeanu (the NPP future presidential candidate) and accused him of having stayed abroad in luxury when Romanians were starving.<sup>136</sup>

For television audiences, the February 18 demonstration was an "anarchic coup against the government by anti-social elements," an attempt to "establish a rightist government," in Iliescu's own words. Further official releases boosted this perception. According to a report by the Bucharest Police, the meeting had been "premeditated" but it was not clarified by whom. The report also mentioned flyers calling for an "anti-Securitate and anti-NSF rally" that had been distributed in Bucharest on the day prior to the meeting, "from a car which departed from the premises of a party headquarters, the identity of which was not disclosed to the press."<sup>137</sup> Media releases described the demonstrators as being "gypsies, psychopaths, former convicts ... and

---

136. FBIS-EEU-90-035 Feb 21.

137. S. Motiu, V. Voiculescu, "Filmul Rusinoasei Demonstratii...", *Libertatea*, Feb. 20, 1990, pp. 1, 2. P. Popa, "Ce Aflam de la Politie...", *Adevarul*, Feb. 20, 1990, p. 5.



unfortunately some students,"<sup>138</sup> and that "they were smoking foreign cigarettes and carrying whiskey bottles." Some of them were reported "looking for a car full of alcoholic beverages that had been promised to them."<sup>139</sup> The person(s) who promised the reward in alcohol was not identified.

Other publications gave a different account of what happened on that day. *Romania Libera* laid accent on the first part of the February 18 demonstration. Analysts described the meeting as starting around noon, but it had "barely been mentioned on TV and no live images had been shown." Participants were outraged that "Securitate agents shadowed the population as they had been in Ceausescu's times." They considered that "the state power was being maintained with the Securitate's help," and "communism was not dead in Romania." They warned that they would keep demonstrating until communists would no longer rule the country. "Fear of Securitate," "disapproval of the maintenance of former communists in key governmental positions," and the "need for truth about the Revolution and about other issues that were not clarified by NSF," were the reasons for the original demonstrators to be at the governmental building. Since

---

138. S. Motiu, V. Voiculescu, "Filmul Rusinoasei Demonstratii."

139. N. Luchian, E. Popescu, L. Simion, "Destabilizarea Continua," *Libertatea*, Feb. 19, 1990, p. 1.

"the ambiguity over these issues was considered to be fostered by the present authorities...there were also demands for Iliescu's resignation."<sup>140</sup>

The meeting was reported to deteriorate with the arrival of an armed governmental deputy.<sup>141</sup> Some demonstrators apparently tried to enter the building with him, but did not succeed. Irritated, they started breaking windows and forcing the entrance doors. The majority of the demonstrators, however, stepped back and shouted that there were "provokers" among them. Neither army nor police guards offered any resistance. The end of the demonstration had been presented on television.<sup>142</sup>

*Romania Libera's* prevailing suspicion was that some obscure forces (although not spelled out, that phrase popularly signified the Securitate) took advantage of a civilized demonstration to mount a sham attack on the building in order to shift the responsibility for the vandalism on those who demonstrated regularly at the governmental building and thus obscure their real demands. Assigning symbols of "hooligans" to all the people who gathered in Victoria

---

140. M. Georgescu, "Ce Doreau Primii Manifestanti," C. Sova, "Primul Moment de Violenta," N. Manolescu, "Pe Micul Ecran si la Fata Locului," M. Roznoveanu, "Maladia Terorii," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 20, 1990, pp. 1, 2.

141. E. Munteanu, "Revolutia se Cistiga...," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 20, 1990, p. 2.

142. C. Sova, "Primul Moment de Violenta."

Square "made large audiences believe that those who attend demonstrations are social pariahs attempting to break into buildings, not people with serious concerns about the political future of the country."<sup>143</sup>

Eye-witness journalists noted inconsistencies justifying such suspicions: "We were told on TV that the intruders had clubs, but nobody saw them."<sup>144</sup> One of the "miners" who called on the population and on his peers to "come and defend the government against hooligans" was identified as a former communist nomenklatura member, possibly a Securitate agent.<sup>145</sup> A walkie-talkie of the type Securitate used was found lost at one of the entrances in the building.<sup>146</sup>

Analysts also revealed that FRTV cameras "were ready for broadcast as early as 2:30 in the afternoon," before the demonstration had deteriorated, but they did not give any live coverage.<sup>147</sup> By this action, the television administration "manipulated public opinion again...with respect to a popular demonstration." Eye-witnesses declared

---

143. N. Manolescu, "Pe Micul Ecran si la Fata Locului."

144. Ibid.

145. G. Negreanu, "Un Caz Flagrant....," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 20, 1990, p. 1, 2.

146. M. Creanga, "Tare Mai Sintem Curiosi," Semnal "RL," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 25, 1990, p. 1.

147. C. Sova, art. cit.

that "what FRTV showed on the nightly news did not match what they had seen in Victoria Square," and that the "sense of the demonstration had been misconstrued for television audiences." Protesters' concerns were eclipsed by the vandalism and it was hard to "make any of those who watched the demonstration only on TV believe that in reality, it had been peaceful and essentially patriotic."<sup>148</sup>

Effects of the TV broadcast on audiences were mentioned: "People who had not been in Victoria Square were hysterical with fear after the TV broadcast...some suffering from nervous break-downs."<sup>149</sup> The new television director was held responsible for the anxieties generated in viewers' minds through "another instance of television misconstruction."<sup>150</sup>

Ironically, the newspapers who considered the demonstration a "vandalism," rallying to the official releases, highlighted destructive effects of the TV broadcast on viewers as well. The broadcast "showed scenes worthy of a fascist nightmare,"<sup>151</sup> and "reminded the aged population of

---

148. N. Manolescu, "Pe Micul Ecran..."

149. Ibid. *Adevarul* also mentions the tensions created by the demonstration in "Elogiul Normalitatii," D. Novaceanu, Feb. 24, 1990, p. 1.

150. N. Manolescu, "Pe Micul Ecran..."

151. C-tin. Sorescu, "Sindromul Violentei," *Tineretul Liber*. Feb. 20, 1990, p. 1.

the feared 'green shirts' [the outfit which Iron League members used to wear]," while the overall impression was that "someone was trying to destabilize the young Romanian democracy."<sup>152</sup> However, they shared the opinion that the demonstrators had been "manipulated" with "money and promises," being told "to shout slogans for starters," and end up in "destruction." The population was at the same time cautioned about the "promises of all these parties," whose real intentions "are not clearly defined," and who "might maneuver those who joined into other obscure and illegal activities."<sup>153</sup> Journalists doubted "the honesty of the parties" because of "the film of the February 18 events," and reprehended those (unknown) who "destroy the future [of the country] with clubs, dollars and guns."<sup>154</sup>

On February 27, following renewed criticisms against the television's mal-performance, the Group for Social Dialogue (see Chapter I) took the initiative to organize a Civic Committee for the Independence of the Romanian Radio and Television. The Committee was made up of representatives of various social and political groups and was intended to help the two institutions acquire independent status.

---

152. L. M. Calber, "Cine Sint Autorii?" *Libertatea*, Feb. 21, 1990, p. 2.

153. S. Chelcea, "Despre Manipulare," *Adevarul*, Mar. 4, 1990, p. 3.

154. D. Novaceanu, "Cumpar Tun..."

The month of February came to an end in an atmosphere of anxiety. More meetings against the Securitate took place, which were not covered by either FRTV or the majority of publications. *Romania Libera* mentioned them, with brief descriptions of the demonstrators' demands that the Securitate be dismantled.<sup>155</sup> *Adevarul* published an article about the frequency of the rallies in Victoria Square with no further coverage.<sup>156</sup>

### Section 3: March

Again in the center of public attention, FRTV and its new director generated another wave of media disputes. While *Romania Libera* complained about the television workers' political partisanship and lack of professionalism, other publications praised the variety and quality of programs they offered.<sup>157</sup> Letters coming from the public, read on the nightly news or published in various newspapers, congratulated the television editors for their activity and expressed trust in their non-partisanship. Some citizens complained about the frequency of rallies requesting the

---

155. Feb. 27, 28, 1990.

156. Mar. 2, 1990.

157. I. Parhon, "Partial...Color," *Romania Muncitoare*, Mar. 15, 1990, p. 2. I. Parhon, "Spini si Trandafiri," *Romania Muncitoare*, Mar. 28, 1990, p. 3.

"freedom of FRTV," which were thought to "cause more tension and anxiety among the population."<sup>158</sup>

For the first part of March, the public was further coached on political topics. The printed media elaborated editorials on how to understand and interpret public standpoints that various politicians were taking.

Iliescu was deemed a good leader, "well-intentioned and appealing to civic responsibility [of the other PCNU members]," who "needs to be defended against the hooligans ... who call him a traitor and Securitate agent,"<sup>159</sup> and as "honest and...interested in finding appropriate political and economic solutions for the present and the future."<sup>160</sup> The suggestion he made in a PCNU session for the removal of Lenin's statue from a public square in Bucharest was decoded as "a symbol of his dissociation from communism."<sup>161</sup>

Political parties' representatives "displayed an extreme right political orientation," and media analysts wondered whether "democracy and pluralism necessarily means accepting fascist and former Iron-Guardist groups in the political

---

158. "Ginduri de la Cititori," *Adevarul*, Mar. 2, 1990, p. 3.

159. I. Parhon, "Arta Conversatiei," *Romania Muncitoare*, Feb. 24, 1990, pp. 1, 3.

160. M. Boiangiu, "Dupa Votarea Legii," *Adevarul*, Mar. 17, 1990, p. 1.

161. A. Perva, "Mitinguri Duminicale," *Tineretul Liber*, Mar. 13, 1990, p. 1.

life of the country."<sup>162</sup> This paradox was correlated with an apparent rejuvenation of the Iron League<sup>163</sup> in Bacau (Moldavia).<sup>164</sup>

Cimpeanu and Ratiu, top representatives of the NLP and the NPP, were presented as having recently come from abroad, and driven only by profit.<sup>165</sup> The political probity of those PCNU members who had lived in exile prior to December, 1989 (the above two being the most notable), was doubted. They were said to have "flown away from the country like migratory birds when the cold sets in," only to come back "when it gets warmer [when communism was defeated]." Their claim to know democracy "better than Romanians" was regarded as a "subtle way to claim power positions."<sup>166</sup>

Rumors, coming mainly from the Western media, that the December revolutionary uprising of masses of people had been used by the NSF authorities to cover up a coup against Ceausescu that they had long been planning spread widely.

---

162. Ibid.

163. A fascist organization which played an important role in Romania between the World Wars and during World War II. Their violent methods of reducing to silence all those who did not approve of the country's affiliation with Germany, the crimes and terror they spread, were well known as the "Green Terror."

164. *Adevarul, Romania Libera*. Feb. 23, 1990.

165. "Despre P.N.T.c.d.," and "Scrisoare Deschisa lui Radu Cimpeanu," *Tineretul Liber*. Feb. 22, 1990, p. 2.

166. D. Novaceanu, "Exilul...", *Adevarul*. Mar. 17, 1990, p. 1.



NSF was said to have been constituted prior to December 1989. Its members had addressed two open letters to Ceausescu which had been read on Radio Free Europe in August and September, 1989. The letters asked for Ceausescu's resignation on account of the economic and civil rights disaster into which he had pushed the country and were signed "National Salvation Front."<sup>167</sup> Under the circumstances, publications challenged the legitimacy of NSF as "emanation of the Revolution," and dared the authorities to give explanations.<sup>168</sup>

In reply, *Adevarul* published a note from a professor at the University of Bucharest. He acknowledged to have written and mailed the two letters to Radio Free Europe to protest against the regime and explained that the signature he chose had been arbitrary. He refuted any connection between the present NSF leadership and the two letters.<sup>169</sup>

On March 11, an anti-communist rally organized in Timisoara by leaders of the December Revolution ended with the adoption of a programmatic document which came to be known as the Timisoara Proclamation.

---

167. Nestor Ratesh, *Romania: The Entangled Revolution*. The Washington Papers/152. Published with The Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C. Praeger, New York, 1991, pp. 89-91.

168. O. Paler, "Nevoia de Calm," *Romania Libera*, Mar. 1, 1990, pp. 1, 2.

169. A. Melian, "Marturii pentru Istorie," *Adevarul*, Mar. 30, 1990, pp. 1, 3.

The same day, at the nightly news, anchorman Rusiiianu gave a briefing about the rally and presented the demands included in the document. In addition to provisions for democratization of the country, he said the citizens of Timisoara demanded territorial autonomy of the Banat county (a Western region of the country whose capital is Timisoara) and its economic reintegration in Europe.<sup>170</sup> The following evening, another anchorman announced that the Proclamation had been presented on TV in conformity with the demands of the participants in the rally.<sup>171</sup>

Some newspapers protested against Timisoara's desire to secede and ironically speculated whether "Romanians would need passports to travel to Banat."<sup>172</sup> Others published the articles of the Proclamation<sup>173</sup> and pointed out that the remarks of the anchormen had given a "distorted interpretation" to the requests of the Timisoara citizens.

---

170. I. Stoica, "Cine are Interesul?" *Romania Libera*, Mar. 14, p. 1. F. Gabriel Marculescu, "Dialog cu Conducerea Radioteleviziunii," *Romania Libera*, Mar. 17, p. 3. Dialogue between the Committee for an Independent Television and FRTV director R. Theodorescu, 22, Apr. 13, 1990, pp. 2, 3.

171. F. Gabriel Marculescu, "Dialog..."

172. M. Cuibus, "Timisoara, la Sfirsit de Martie," *Adevarul*, Mar. 27, 1990, p. 1. To be noticed that the statement was made after the Proclamation was read in full on TV and the so-called "intention to secede" was acknowledged as a media misconstruction. Also, S. Andon, "Porto-Franco pe Bega?" *Adevarul*, Mar. 13, 1990, p. 1.

173. *Romania Libera*, Mar. 13, 1990, p. 3.

"Nowhere in the Proclamation is there a claim to Banat's autonomy," it was shown.<sup>174</sup>

In a subsequent meeting between the Committee for an Independent Television and the television director, requests were made that the Proclamation be read in full and anchorman Rusiiianu reprimanded for his commentaries.<sup>175</sup> In the dispute between members on the committee and Theodorescu, it was acknowledged that the Proclamation had been "truncated" and the material presented on TV had been "manipulative."<sup>176</sup> The open question still remained: Why did the anchorman scramble words and sentences to make them look differently than what they were meant to say?

The answer came when the integral text of the Proclamation was televised. The document proved to have a strong anti-communist content. It emphasized the symbolism of the December Revolution as not only anti-Ceausescu but also anti-communist, and refuted political attempts to present it otherwise. Article no. 8 of the declaration explicitly demanded that former communist activists and Securitate officers be barred from running for political positions for three terms, and that former nomenklatura be forbidden to

---

174. I. Stoica, "Cine Are Interesul?"

175. F. Gabriel Marculescu, "Dialog..."

176. "Dialog...", 22, Apr. 13, pp. 2, 3.

run for the position of President of Romania.<sup>177</sup> If such restrictions were included in the electoral law, Iliescu and some other important NSF personalities would have been barred from running.

The GSD publication 22 disclosed that only after pressures on the government had the Proclamation been read in full on television, nine days after it had been adopted as programmatic document by the citizens of Timisoara. The airing came only after the second meeting of the committee with the FRTV director, when "it was already a political scandal." The extent of the impact on television audiences of the original "interpretation" of the document could not be appraised.<sup>178</sup>

The most notable events of March were the inter-ethnic clashes that took place in Transylvania, the North-Western part of Romania, where approximately two million ethnic Hungarians live together with Romanians. In the clashes, eight people were killed and over three hundred were injured.<sup>179</sup>

---

177. *Romania Libera*, Mar. 13, 1990, p. 3.

178. "Dialogue...", 22, pp. 2, 3.

179. BBC World Service from Tirgu-Mures, March 22, 1990, 6:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.; AFP, March 23 and 24, 1990.

According to official releases, the sequence of events progressed as follows: On March 15, a national Hungarian holiday, several thousand residents from Hungary crossed the Romanian border to join their peers in Transylvania for the celebration of this event. Festivities were scheduled to be inter-ethnic, and bilingual performances of songs and poems took place.<sup>180</sup> However, some Hungarian celebrations were reported to be provocative.<sup>181</sup>

A role in the tragic events which ensued was played by Vatra Romaneasca (The Romanian Cradle), a group organized in January, 1990. The group's declared goal was to safeguard the rights of Romanians in Transylvania. Members of the group accused Hungarians of hostile activities against Romanians in Transylvanian towns during the celebrations.

Street clashes started in Tirgu Mures on March 16 and continued through March 22. Both Romanians and Hungarians were injured and died in the violence which reached gruesome cruelties on March 20. Offices of several organizations were devastated. Civilians were lynched in the streets. Army forces and police units put an end to the frenzy on March 21. On March 22, PCNU nominated a commission of

---

180. Radio Budapest, March 15, 1990, 11:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m., and March 16, noon; Radio Bucharest, March 15, 1990, 9:00 p.m., and March 16, 6:00 p.m.

181. Rompres (in English), March 21, 1990.

inquiry to investigate the events and submit a report. For the following two weeks, the situation in Tirgu Mures continued to be tense.<sup>182</sup>

The events in Transylvania were followed by public reactions from various political groups as well as from non-partisan groups and independent personalities. Students' representatives on both sides declared their support of ethnic minority rights. Romanian cultural personalities protested against the violence and came out in support of the demands of the ethnic Hungarians for schools in their native language. The National Liberal Party and the Hungarian Democratic Union signed a document in which they agreed on inter-ethnic principles that should be observed.<sup>183</sup> Rallies for national unity were organized in several cities. Vatra Romaneasca supporters continued to hold ethnic Hungarians responsible for the March events.

The attitude of the Romanian government wavered from accusing the Hungarians of "provoking" the mass violence,<sup>184</sup> to dissociating itself from the previous charge,<sup>185</sup> then

---

182. V. Socor, "Forces of Old Resurface in Romania: The Ethnic Clashes in Tirgu-Mures," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Apr. 13, 1990.

183. Radio Bucharest, March 22, 1990, 9:00 p.m.

184. *Rompres* (in English), Mar. 21, 1990.

185. *Rompres* (in English), March 23, 1990.

back to blaming Hungary and Hungarian separatists of nationalist-chauvinist mentalities.<sup>186</sup>

The population throughout the country was scarcely introduced to the ethnic struggles. The events were not covered by the electronic media. One eye-witness to the Tirgu Mures street fights noticed that "...while the street fights were taking place...FRTV was broadcasting a live soccer game."<sup>187</sup> The television administration invoked the lack of equipment and technical personnel excuse of not broadcasting from Transylvania. Later on, Theodorescu admitted that he deliberately chose not to send any crew to Tirgu Mures.<sup>188</sup> An Irish journalist offered a videotape of the events which was broadcast on the national channel. Instances of street fights were captured.<sup>189</sup>

If the television did not show any live coverage, its editors gave, however, guidelines for understanding the riots. In an editorial about a popular rally of the historical parties taking place in Cluj (a Transylvanian city), before the street fights erupted, they signaled the

---

186. Message sent by the Romanian Prime Minister to UN Secretary General, *Rompres*, March 23, 1990.

187. I. Tibor, "Alt Martor...", *Romania Libera*, Mar. 31, 1990, p. 3.

188. "Dialog..." in *22*.

189. Ghe. Ceausescu, "Din Nou despre Televiziune...", *22*, Apr. 6, 1990, p. 3.

presence of a former "dangerous Legion member," who brought Iron-League related publications from Canada and "distributed them to inhabitants of Transylvania." The ethnic clashes "looked to be a direct consequence of inflammatory propaganda spread among the population by elements coming from abroad."<sup>190</sup>

The printed media's reactions to the inter-ethnic tensions and clashes in Transylvania combined coverage of events with personal evaluations by media workers. While the inter-ethnic discord is still unresolved, I will present the positions that some newspapers took about who bore responsibility for the altercations at the time.

*Adevarul* correlated the ethnic clashes with the presence of the historical parties' representatives at a rally in Cluj, organized on the Sunday predating the ethnic events, the same rally attended by the former Iron Guardist signaled by FRTV. Novaceanu speculated that "we cannot be naive and not acknowledge that the presence of political parties' representatives like Ion Ratiu and Canadian citizen Doru Popescu in Transylvania during the past week destabilized the calm and beauty of this spring."<sup>191</sup>

---

190. S. Rosca Stanescu, "Diversiune la TV," *Romania Libera*, Mar. 22, 1990, p. 2.

191. D. Novaceanu, "Sub Echinocitiu...", *Adevarul*, Mar. 22, 1990, p. 1.



Later on, accusations against political parties as main artisans of the inter-ethnic tensions became intense. Their representatives were "prone to appearing on TV, denigrating the government, and manipulating public opinion" rather than "going to Tg. Mures and contribute to calming down the spirits."<sup>192</sup> The events in Tg. Mures were considered a "new knock-out that various political groups apply to the country ... in an attempt to weaken it, make Romanians poor ... compel them to start begging and sell their country to the most advantageous offer."<sup>193</sup>

FRTV was also found "guilty of shyness in presenting the tragic truth about the events in Tg. Mures," which led to disinformation by the government and created the impression that "only Hungarian citizens were responsible for the violence." This "confusing impression" led the government to make contradictory statements that became "new sources of confusions and distorted interpretations."<sup>194</sup>

*Romania Libera* also took a position against FRTV's lack of live coverage but from a different standpoint. The newspaper noted the televised remarks which tied together two distinct events as cause and effect, "the presence of a

---

192. D. Novaceanu, "Sa Ne Numaram Mortii," *Adevarul*, Mar. 24, 1990, p. 1.

193. D. Novaceanu, "Naivii si Tara," *Adevarul*, Mar. 27, 1990, p. 1.

194. D. Novaceanu, "Sa Ne Numaram Mortii."

former Iron League member at the rally in Cluj and the inter-ethnic tensions." The lack of live coverage from Tg. Mures, together with commentaries about "dangerous Iron-Guardists" speaking at rallies and spreading propaganda in Transylvania, created a "direct relationship between the two events which was...equal to the distance between a hypothetical truth and a huge diversion." The newspaper reproached the television administration with the "systematic tactics of detouring public attention from the real causes of social unrest," such as the inter-ethnic clashes, "with Iron-League wild cards," and renewed requests that FRTV "inform the public opinion directly...through live broadcasts," not through "verbal, manipulative accounts" of how events evolve.<sup>195</sup>

The newspaper also remarked that a group of Tirgu Mures citizens visited FRTV on March 20. The group had brought videotapes with recordings of the events in Transylvania. Television anchormen mentioned the visit, but not the tapes.<sup>196</sup>

22 also deplored the television station's activity and criticized it for its recurrent "scenario of lack of live coverage," even when incidents occurred "in front of their

---

195. S. Rosca Stanescu, "Diversiune la TV."

196. R. Iordache, "Manifestatie de Buna Vestire," *Romania Libera*, Mar. 27, 1990, p. 1.

own offices," and subsequent presentation of events so as to avoid unfavorable commentaries about government officials.<sup>197</sup>

#### Section 4: April - May

April's events were dominated by the electoral campaign. Three candidates announced their candidacy for presidency: Ion Iliescu, from the National Salvation Front, Ion Ratiu, from the National Peasants' Party, and Radu Cimpeanu from the National Liberal Party. The new FRTV director promised equal air time for each political group and independent candidate.<sup>198</sup> The government promised financial support from state assets for the campaigns of the political parties.<sup>199</sup>

However, the opposition argued that NSF was regularly allocated more than the three minute share of TV coverage at prime time, as compared to the rest of the parties, who were scheduled to appear at inconvenient hours with few viewers. They mentioned grimaces and mocking mimicry accompanying anchormen's introduction of representatives other than NSF's. They complained of electronically mediated

---

197. Ghe. Ceausescu, "Din Nou Despre Televiziune."

198. I. Parhon, "Spini si Trandafiri."

199. In parliamentary debates and included in the new electoral law.

manipulation of the public opinion against their political goals and found the government responsible for the mass media effort to channel sympathies in the NSF's direction.<sup>200</sup>

The opposition's campaign throughout the country was marked by violence by NSF supporters, especially against the NPP and NLP representatives and offices.<sup>201</sup> Violent attempts against Ion Ratiu and his wife took place.<sup>202</sup> Attacks against Cimpeanu were also reported.<sup>203</sup>

The printed media elaborated critical approaches to the political programs of the groups involved in campaigning, as well as to the personal profiles of some politicians. Opposition parties were recurrently presented as "driven by their own interests," which were "not the country's, but their personal greed," "ready to put the country on sale for...anybody in the West."<sup>204</sup> Analysts cautioned against "electoral promises that seem encouraging" like the "promise

---

200. C. Stefanescu, "Romanian Radio and Television Coverage of the Electoral Campaign," *Report on Eastern Europe*. Jun. 8, 1990, pp. 42-44.

201. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

202. On May 2, Ratiu's wife was attacked while visiting a Psychiatric Hospital in Bucharest. On April 24, Ratiu was attacked by NSF supporters in Buzau.

203. On May 5, in Braila, a hostile group attacked his car with clubs and stones. M. Boiangiu, "Ne Meritam Soarta?" *Adevarul*. May 8, 1990, p. 1.

204. Al. Gavrilesco, "Monotonia si Polifonia Minciunii," *Adevarul*, Apr. 1, 1990, p. 1.

of prosperity ... through a not well defined privatization,"<sup>205</sup> but which might be "misleading ... in order to get a vote."<sup>206</sup> The parties were described as "dishonest ... in the manner they manipulate the voters' reactions ... into making them believe that they would be scandalously rich if they voted for opposition groups."<sup>207</sup> They were found culpable for having "manipulated children to shout 'Down with Iliescu.'"<sup>208</sup> Electoral meetings were described as "full of urges to disorder, violence and hatred."<sup>209</sup> Correlations were made between the old emblem of the Iron League and NPP's electoral sign.<sup>210</sup> The parties were accused of "disinformation of public opinion" with respect to attendance to electoral rallies. NPP and NLP wanted to boost public appeal by declaring that their meetings were attended "by thousands, when in fact they are attended by hundreds."<sup>211</sup>

---

205. P. Dobrescu, "Promisiunea Prosperitatii," *Adevarul*, Apr. 12, 1990, p. 1.

206. C. Stoenescu, "Simple Nedumeriri," *Adevarul*, Apr. 3, 1990, p. 3.

207. Al. Gavrilescu, "Picatura Chinezeasca," *Adevarul*, Apr. 8, 1990, p. 1.

208. "Lasati Copii...", unsigned article, *Adevarul*, Apr. 12, 1990, p. 2.

209. D. Novaceanu, "Sa Ne Reintoarcem...", *Adevarul*, Apr. 28, 1990, p. 1.

210. "Miriie," unsigned art., *Adevarul*, Apr. 13, 1990, p. 1.

211. Letter from A. Ioan, "Aritmetica si Politica," *Adevarul*, May 3, 1990, p. 3.

*Adevarul* undertook an evaluation of NPP presidential candidate Ion Ratiu. An article entitled "Welcome, Comrade Ratiu," by using the well known communist greeting formula, drew an ideological correlation between the NPP presidential candidate and the headquarters space he chose to rent, in a district formerly inhabited by communist nomenklatura.<sup>212</sup> His electoral meetings got coverage of the following type:

[Electoral banners] read, 'Ion Ratiu, the Man You Can Trust.' 'Trust' like we were encouraged to trust Ceausescu...? Europe's gates. we are told, have only one key, which Mr. Ratiu possesses. Let us then vote for him ...but not unanimously, it would resemble too much to the previous experience we had...<sup>213</sup>

His political position was described as "extremist and totalitarian,"<sup>214</sup> while letters from the population denounced Ratiu's people for offering them money and clothes to sign for his candidacy.<sup>215</sup> His campaign was deemed a "make-believe democratic show...dressed up in a tuxedo [Ratiu's preferred outfit] for more credibility."<sup>216</sup>

---

212. Unsigned note, *Adevarul*, Apr. 4, 1990, p. 1.

213. F. Ciobanescu, "Timp Nefavorabil....," *Adevarul*, Apr. 13, 1990, p. 2.

214. D. Novaceanu, "Campania Electorală," *Adevarul*, Apr. 24, 1990, p. 1.

215. "Politica si Pulovere," unsigned art., *Adevarul*, Apr. 5, 1990, p. 1.

216. Al. Gavrilescu, "Picatura..."

Sometimes journalists mockingly called him "the stuffed shark."<sup>217</sup>

The newspaper published several articles concerning a document allegedly signed by Ratiu and a Hungarian representative in Germany, in November, 1989, and called it "a blatant selling of our country." The document was said (a photocopy was not provided) to contain an agreement between the two sides stipulating that Ratiu would dislocate Transylvania from Romania and integrate it into United Europe. The anonymous journalist who wrote the article highlighted that in a televised interview Ratiu "contested the authenticity of the document but not its content."

Editorial questions were offered for consideration:

Who guarantees that Mr. Ratiu did not deliberately choose a fake technical modality of composing the document, so that he could later disavow its authenticity? Who can prove that somebody else and not himself was the author of the document? How can he be a president over a country from which he sold a part?<sup>218</sup>

On the other hand, NSF's meetings were reported "well organized, civilized and calm," attended by hundreds of thousands of supporters. The atmosphere was always "enthusiastic and supportive of Iliescu." Banners read "We

---

217. S. Andon, "Rechinul Impanat," *Adevarul*, Apr. 24, 1990, p. 2.

218. "Un Fals Subtil...", unsigned article, *Adevarul*, Apr. 8, 1990, p. 1.

are United, not Paid!" and "Iliescu, We'd rather Die than Desert You!"<sup>219</sup>

Other central publications covered the same electoral events but in a different vein. The speakers at the meetings of the historical parties were said to have addressed economic as well as political issues of interest to the future of the country. Their programs and policies were discussed with and appreciated by their audiences. Ratiu and Cimpeanu were reported to be well received by supporters.<sup>220</sup> Members of their parties were "resolute to win public support through a positive campaign, without promises or invectives."<sup>221</sup> At their meetings, banners read "Down with Communism" and "Timisoara Proclamation, the Real Emanation of the Revolution."<sup>222</sup>

Interviews with people from rural areas were also published. Countrymen related that

people living outside cities were confused. Most of them think that NSF is the same as the NSF Council that gave them some rights and food in December. Almost the only contact we have with political life is through television, where we see mostly Iliescu and

---

219. A. Florescu, R. Simionescu, "Vrem Liniste," *Adevarul*, Apr. 28, 1990, p. 3. E. Roua, "200,000," *Adevarul*, May 4, 1990, p. 2. E. Roua, "Iata ca se Poate," *Adevarul*, May 8, 1990, p. 2.

220. S. Rosca Stanescu, "Mai Putine Flori...," *Romania Libera*, Apr. 24, 1990, p. 3. V. Lazar, "Un Miting Electoral...," *Romania Libera*, Apr. 24, 1990, p. 2.

221. V. Simion, "Aderente si Stiluri," *Romania Libera*, Apr. 7, 1990, p. 2.

222. "Nevoia de Schimbare," *Romania Libera*, Apr. 24, 1990, p. 2.



Roman. People want to know more about the other political groups.<sup>223</sup>

Pro-NSF supporters were reported to have ruined other parties' electoral meetings on a number of occasions. Police had been lax in their duties to protect these meetings.<sup>224</sup>

Iliescu's electoral campaign was covered as well. In some places Iliescu was received in an enthusiastic atmosphere. In other places, his electoral visits ended abruptly, due to unpopular response.

In Timisoara, at one such meeting, the electoral convoy had to leave briskly, after workers in one of the enterprises booed them. In the rush, a car from the convoy ran over an old woman who ended up in a hospital. The convoy did not stop to give first aid. In the evening, FRTV presented the meeting as a "success."<sup>225</sup> A "phony photograph" was printed to represent the same meeting in one of the central newspapers. Subtitled "Iliescu's warm welcome by Timisoara citizens," the photo proved to have been taken in another city, at a different meeting.<sup>226</sup> A similar instance of "TV

---

223. Interview with Dumitru Barb in "Aderente si Stiluri."

224. V. Simion, "Sibiu: Pactul de Comportare...", *Romania Libera*, Apr. 24, 1990, p. 2.

225. R. Iordache, "12 Ore...", *Romania Libera*, Apr. 7, 1990, p. 3.

226. Semnal RL, "Electoralala," *Romania Libera*, Apr. 18, 1990, p. 1.

coverage" was recorded in Cluj. FRTV only showed the "nice side of the meeting," leaving out moments when anti-communist demonstrators shouted anti-totalitarian slogans and expressed "sympathy with the Timisoara Proclamation."<sup>227</sup>

In Bucharest, every Sunday was marked by anti-NSF rallies. Protesters developed a routine of demonstrating through the central streets of the city, stopping at the places where people fought in December and ending their march either in front of the governmental building or at the television station. Their demands concerned the removal of the Securitate and of the communist nomenklatura from the provisional government, the enforcement of article no. 8 of the Timisoara Proclamation and the autonomy of the FRTV.

On April 22, after one of these street demonstrations, protesters remained in a commemorative vigil in University Square, central traffic intersection. Traffic was blocked and demonstrators stayed there all night. They carried banners which reminded citizens of the December anti-communist stances, protested against the continued presence of former nomenklatura in the post-revolutionary government, against Iliescu and against FRTV's non-coverage of anti-NSF rallies, theirs included. Starting the following day, more citizens joined the original group of demonstrators in a day

---

227. V. Lazar, "Fatada si Culisele..." *Romania Libera*, May 3, 1990, p. 3.

and night marathon demonstration which lasted for almost nine weeks. The protesters named the University Square "the first zone free of communism," and demanded talks with government representatives in front of live TV cameras.<sup>228</sup>

The same day, at the nightly news, FRTV anchormen announced that a group of anti-social individuals blocked the University Square and traffic could not get through.<sup>229</sup> They reported that the protesters acted like hooligans, stopping private cars, breaking windshields, dragging drivers out of their cars.<sup>230</sup> It was said that ambulances were not allowed to get to hospitals and sick people died before they could get the services of a doctor.<sup>231</sup> The anchormen accused the people who blocked the intersection of trying to disrupt the civil society.<sup>232</sup>

On April 24, around 5 a.m., armed police officers beat the demonstrators out of the square. Some of them were arrested, others beaten and taken away. At 7 a.m., the

---

228. C. Stefanescu, "Marathon Demonstration in Bucharest's University Square," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jun. 15, 1990.

229. P. M. Bacanu, "Intercontinental...", *Romania Libera*, Apr. 25, 1990, p. 3.

230. Ibid. Also, N. Dumitrescu, "Omisiuni Regretabile," *Libertatea*, Apr. 26, 1990, p. 3.

231. Ibid. Also, V. Crihala, "Golaniada," *Zig-Zag*, May 3-10, 1990, p. 4.

232. *Romania Libera*, Apr. 24, *Zig-Zag*, May, 3-10, *Libertatea*, Apr. 26, 1990.

place was occupied by police officers.<sup>233</sup> During the afternoon, students and civilians resumed positions. Later in the evening, at the televised PCNU meeting, Iliescu "condemned the hatred, calumny and violence propounded by anti-social elements who blocked the University Square" and showed that "police forces had to intervene and put an end to the situation." He denied any violent action against the protesters.<sup>234</sup> The Chief of Police also denied that protesters had been beaten or arrested. He accused the protesters of having attacked police officers, injuring some of them.<sup>235</sup> Informed of their demands (see above), Iliescu classified them as "hooligans" and refused to consider any dialogue.<sup>236</sup>

On April 25, around 1 a.m., FRTV broadcast images from University Square for the first time.<sup>237</sup> Video clips were recorded from the height of the Intercontinental Hotel nearby (approximately the highest building in Bucharest). The demonstrators were not visible or loud enough for the TV audience to understand why they had blocked the intersection

---

233. C. Sova, "Circulati, Va Rugam!" *Romania Libera*, Apr. 25, 1990, p. 1.

234. S. Rosca Stanescu, "Bezna unei Dimineti," *Romania Libera*, Apr. 25, 1990, p. 1.

235. G. Andreescu, "Fara Complexe," 22, May 25, 1990, p. 14.

236. *Dreptatea*, April 26, 1990.

237. S. Mugur Dumitrescu, "Starea de Veghe," *Romania Libera*, Apr. 26, 1990, p. 2.

and the anchormen did not specify their reasons either. The demonstrators were cast as "hooligans who have disrupted a major traffic area in Bucharest."<sup>238</sup>

The demonstration proceeded with the students of the Bucharest University opening the balcony that looked down on the Square. They invited any person who agreed with the protesters' demands to talk about the political climate in the country. They composed and sang songs against the NSF administration and posted incriminating pictures of Iliescu in Ceausescu's company.<sup>239</sup>

Individual citizens or representatives of various associations who endorsed the manifestation addressed the demonstrators from the balcony. Foreign personalities spoke from the balcony as well, supporting the demonstrators' anti-communist position.<sup>240</sup>

On May 1, at a televised round table with GSD representatives, a television editor stated that a group of opposition representatives offered him money to broadcast clips from the University Square demonstration at prime

---

238. P. Gheorghiu, "Televiziunea Romana...", *Romania Libera*, Apr. 25, 1990, p. 3.

239. C. Stefanescu, "Marathon Demonstration."

240. Jean-Claude Mignon and Jean-Michel Ferrand, representatives of the *Rassemblement pour la Republique*, in *Adevarul*, May 4, 1990.

time. He refused to identify the parties who sent messengers with the proposition.<sup>241</sup>

On May 7, at another round table, cultural personalities argued that the protesters' demands had not been well publicized while their requests for a postponement of the elections had been misconstrued. The speakers clarified that the demonstrators combined the demand for postponement of the elections with demands for correct information to the electorate about the candidates running for offices. They explained that these demands were a public reaction to the monopoly that NSF held over the central media, particularly over electronic networks. This monopoly had led to a favorable presentation of the NSF group and to a misconstruing of the goals of the opposition.<sup>242</sup>

The printed media covered the University Square demonstration in radically different ways. *Adevarul* combined coverage of the demonstration with considerations about its meanings. The newspaper mentioned that the demonstration started as a protest against Iliescu (which was considered a "denigration"), and against television non-coverage from FRTV (translated as "desire for publicity"), and concluded that the "couple of hundreds of 'neo-

---

241. "Sennal RL," *Romania Libera*, May 4, 1990, p. 1.

242. *Adevarul*, May 9, 1990.

revolutionaries' were probably "manipulated."<sup>243</sup> The newspaper analysts rejected the idea that "nomenklatura" was "a danger for our society," as the protesters and the Timisoara Proclamation advocated, and urged the protesters to find different modalities of opposing social dangers.<sup>244</sup>

Another accent of the coverage lay on individuals and their moral profiles. One of the leaders of the demonstration was described as "unemployed ... having left a wife and four children."<sup>245</sup> The atmosphere in University Square was reported "violent ... like a jungle," with people "being paid ... probably by Ratiu," with passers-by being "forced to sign for Ratiu's candidacy and shout against Iliescu."<sup>246</sup> A photo of an eight-year old boy who was said to have received money from the demonstrators to shout against Iliescu was published.<sup>247</sup> "Fanaticism and hysteria," were reported to reign in the Square.<sup>248</sup> Novaceanu considered that "political parties...foreshadowing a defeat in the May

---

243. C. Dragotescu, "Demonstratie pentru...", *Adevarul*, Apr. 24, 1990, p. 2.

244. C. T. Popescu, "Nu Asa," *Adevarul*, Apr. 26, 1990, p. 1.

245. A. Buzoianu, "Intre Patetism...", *Adevarul*, Apr. 27, 1990, p. 1.

246. C. Omescu, "Huocratie," *Adevarul*, Apr. 27, 1990, p. 1. M. Cuibus, "I Love You, Mr. Ratiu," *Adevarul*, May 3, 1990, p. 3.

247. D. Cristescu, "Daca Strigi...", *Adevarul*, Apr. 28, 1990, p. 3.

248. M. Cuibus, "I Love You, Mr. Ratiu."

elections...have chosen to give up a decent dialogue and are pushing their points of view on the population through the demonstration."<sup>249</sup> In other instances, the demonstration was perceived to be an "NLP campaign."<sup>250</sup>

*Libertatea* covered the University Square in a similar vein. Journalists rallied to call the protesters "hooligans," and emphasized that eye-witnesses testified about "these elements dragging drivers out of their cars and breaking windshields." Children, "apparently under drugs," were said to have blocked traffic and trolleys, and started ringing the bells of a nearby church "in a demonic rhythm."<sup>251</sup> The protests of the demonstrators against the scarce live coverage of their demonstration was regarded as "inappropriate, since a lot of people consider that the clips presented so far are too much anyway." A point of view, the analyst argued, "should be introduced with arguments, not with calumnious statements, violence, boos, disruptions of the life of a city..."<sup>252</sup> Two women declared that they were offered money to testify having seen

---

249. "Sa Ne Reintoarcem La Consens," *Adevarul*, Apr. 28, 1990, p. 1.

250. M. Boianiu, "Politica Apoliticilor," *Adevarul*, May 3, 1990, p. 1.

251. N. Dumitrescu, "Omissiuni Regretabile," *Libertatea*, Apr. 26, 1990, p. 3.

252. P. Calapodescu, "Dreptul de a Rastalmaci?" *Libertatea*, May 4, p. 2.



policemen beat the demonstrators on April 24.<sup>253</sup> The demonstrators were also reported to "have asked for the physical elimination of the present PCNU president."<sup>254</sup>

*Romania Libera* covered the beginning of the marathon demonstration, mentioning that the people who remained in vigil on the first night wanted "the television to broadcast their demonstration and their demands for an end to communist leadership in the country." The protesters were "upset with television's manner of ignoring them, as well as other similar anti-communist rallies," and decided to stay in the middle of the street until somebody "pays attention to them." Interviews with protesters pointed out that "while we were asking for abolition of decree 473 [which subordinated the television to the state president] and adoption of article no. 8 from the Timisoara Proclamation ... FRTV was reporting that a group of hooligans blocked traffic and sick people were dying in ambulances because they could not get through to the hospital."<sup>255</sup> Protesters were said to "demonstrate peacefully, singing revolutionary songs," and at night they cleared the intersection and

---

253. O. Andronic, "Cit Costa 0 Marturie?" *Libertatea*, May 8, 1990, p. 1.

254. "Violenta Ideologica?" unsigned article, *Libertatea*, May. 8, 1990, p. 2.

255. P. Gheorghiu, "'Intercontinental...,'" M. Mincu, "Piata Universitatii...," *Romania Libera*, Apr. 24, 1990, p. 3.

withdrew to a corner of the Square to continue their vigil.<sup>256</sup>

Details were given about the violent police intervention on April 24 early in the morning.<sup>257</sup> The journalist emphasized that while in the Radio newscast the Square was reported "blocked by demonstrators," the streets were full of policemen in the follow-up of their "brutal removal of the protesters."<sup>258</sup> Iliescu's refusal to engage in a dialogue with the protesters was deemed a sign that "the government listens only to those who acclaim them ... and remain deaf to criticisms."<sup>259</sup>

The newspaper also published a protest by the members of the Committee for a Free Television. The members protested "against the incorrect presentation of the University Square demonstration to millions of viewers...where the complexity of the demonstration has been minimized...viewers could not perceive the issues raised by demonstrators...and the number

---

256. Ibid. Also, S. M. Dumitrescu, "Starea de Veghe...", *Romania Libera*, Apr. 26, 1990, p. 2.

257. Ibid.

258. C. Sova, "Circulati, Va Rugam!"

259. P. Gheorghiu, "Televiziunea Romana..."

of people attending it was constantly underestimated by FRTV anchormen."<sup>260</sup>

Picking up on Iliescu's characterization of the protesters, as "hooligans...probably financed and manipulated by the political parties,"<sup>261</sup> the protesters composed songs and poems, praising their "freedom as 'hooligans,' freedom to speak against communism under any kind of name."<sup>262</sup>

On April 27, *Romania Libera* published the official declaration of the demonstrators. They objected to another totalitarian administration and considered that the country was still governed by a communist clique. They found Iliescu "responsible for the detour of the December Revolution into an anti-Ceausescu movement instead of what it originally was, an anti-communist revolt." They demanded the demotion of all former nomenklatura from top leadership positions, autonomy for FRTV, and the inclusion of article no. 8 of the Timisoara Proclamation in the electoral law.<sup>263</sup> A group of prominent personalities, known for their anti-communist stances (Gabriel Liiceanu, Ana Blandiana, Doina

---

260. *Romania Libera*, May 4, 1990, p. 3.

261. In PCNU meeting, Apr. 24, 1990, live broadcast by FRTV.

262. R. Iordache, "Libertate Te Iubim...", *Romania Libera*, Apr. 28, 1990, p. 1.

263. "Declaratia Manifestantilor de la Bucuresti," p. 1.

Cornea, Victor Rebengiuc, Petru Cretia, to name only a few) adhered to this declaration.

Every night, increasing numbers of personalities, citizens representative of different social layers or enterprises, or coming from other parts of the country, addressed the demonstrators from the balcony of the University.<sup>264</sup> They praised the demonstrators' action and expressed support for the Timisoara Proclamation. Representatives of several associations revealed that "the University Square demonstration was denigrated in their name on TV."<sup>265</sup> Among those who spoke from the balcony there was also a miner from Motru. He "acknowledged that his peers have been and still are manipulated by NSF."<sup>266</sup>

Some demonstrators started a hunger strike for the liberation of FRTV from government control and for the inclusion of article no. 8 in the electoral law.<sup>267</sup> Other demonstrators coming from distant parts of the country raised tents for the night and remained in vigil. Frequent cases of provocations against the demonstrators

---

264. R. Iordache, "Libertate Te Iubim..." F. Gabriel Marculescu, "Intre Piata Universitatii...", *Romania Libera*, Apr. 28, 1990, pp. 1, 5. P. Gheorghiu, "Bucuresti: Democrati...", *Romania Libera*, May 3, 1990, pp. 1, 3.

265. Reference to "Apoliticii - Destituiti...", *Adevarul*, May 6, 1990, p. 1.

266. R. Iordache, "Dor de Libertate," *Romania Libera*, May 3, 1990, p. 3.

267. Ibid.

were cited.<sup>268</sup> On May 1, a bulldozer tried to scare them away.<sup>269</sup>

Students from the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Sorbonne and Harvard sent letters of congratulations to the demonstrators and asked permission to call themselves "hooligans" in sign of solidarity with the Romanian students.<sup>270</sup> Representatives of democratic associations from Belgium, France, and Italy also encouraged the demonstrators from the balcony.<sup>271</sup>

22 was another publication which took an attitude against the television's overall handling of political information in general, and of the students' protest in particular. Its analysts considered that the "Romanian voters [are] probably the most misinformed in Europe." They accused FRTV of "having brought to life all the cliches of the communist propaganda starting in January and continuing through May, ... cliches which have alienated and confused the population."<sup>272</sup> Analysts and reputed writers charged the institution with allegiance to the authorities in power

---

268. L. Stoicescu, "Noaptea...", *Romania Libera*, May 6, 1990, pp. 1, 4.

269. "Buldozerul," *Romania Libera*, May 5, 1990, p. 1.

270. A note by Al. Stanescu, *Romania Libera*, May 3, 1990, p. 1.

271. P. Gheorghiu, "Democrati, Fiti..."

272. A. Mungiu, "Recviem...", 22, May 25, 1990, p. 4.

instead of having an educational role for the population, "presenting the audiences with details about the history of modern Romania [preceding and following the communist take-over] so that citizens are no longer confused about political stances...about who is to blame for past wrongs...and about the role of political parties in the history of the country. The "systematic absence of FRTV cameramen" from events that have had an "impact" on the population, "like the February 18 break-in, or the Tg. Mures clashes," left room for interpretations in the international networks which were "detrimental to the country." Instances when "pressures were put on FRTV to broadcast clips from popular rallies," were specified. 22 accused the television of a general pattern of news exchange, "the systematic lack of live coverage and subsequent presentation of events in lights that harm the power the least."<sup>273</sup>

On May 8, as a consequence of the violent nature of the electoral campaign, the three historical parties issued a common communique warning that they were considering a boycott of the elections.<sup>274</sup> On May 9, Radu Cimpeanu offered to withdraw from the presidential race, if the other candidates withdrew with him, in order to ensure a more

---

273. Ghe. Ceausescu, "Din Nou despre Televiziune...", 22, Apr. 6, 1990, p. 3.

274. AFP Bucharest, May 9, 1990.

peaceful social climate.<sup>275</sup> Later, Ion Ratiu joined him. Both Cimpeanu and Ratiu advocated the appointment of an interim President until a new constitution was drafted, and elections be held only afterwards. Ion Iliescu did not agree with their position and remained in the race. He answered accusations that the NSF supporters were inflaming the social and political atmosphere by accusing the historical parties of undemocratic electoral practices which incited the electorate to violence.<sup>276</sup> On May 11, in response to the growing wave of terror against the historical parties' representatives, the three NPP representatives in the PCNU withdrew from debates.<sup>277</sup>

On May 11, the PCNU announced the abrogation of Decree 473, which subordinated FRTV to the president of the country. FRTV was now to be subordinated to the Executive Bureau (chaired by Ion Iliescu).<sup>278</sup>

On May 14, the leaders of the three historical parties announced that they would present candidates, although the harassment to which their parties had been exposed seriously impeded their campaign. They declared that they did not

---

275. RFE/RL Correspondent's Report (Bucharest), May 9, 1990.

276. Radio Bucharest, May 12, 1990, 9:00 p.m.

277. AP and AFP (Bucharest), May 11, 1990.

278. Radio Bucharest, May 11, 1990.

want to deprive the Romanian people of "any political choice."<sup>279</sup>

On May 20, the first free national elections after fifty years of communist regime took place, with 82 parties running for House and Senate seats. In the parliamentary elections the NSF won about 75% of the seats. In the presidential race, Ion Iliescu won over 85% of the votes.

---

279. Radio Bucharest, May 14, 1990, 9:00 p.m.



## Chapter IV: The Politics of Information in Post-Revolutionary Romania

### 1. The Specificity of the Romanian Case

The previous chapter tried to simultaneously introduce the political and media discourses that shaped the core of public life preceding free elections. As it could be seen, the social, political and media dimensions of this interval worked interrelatedly, conditioning one another, each developing, as much as containing, political meanings and social symbols designated to support one political platform only, the NSF's, and to reach one target, the public eye.

Let us now consider the Romanian situation from the perspective of the initial research questions and look at both its surface and confined aspects. Problematizing this period from two angles - the ideal situation stipulated in December in the NSF program, and its actual implementation - will enable me to make theoretical assessments that capture the most essential characteristics of the birth of post-communist Romania. It will also allow me to look at the activity of the media in the "context of political forces that control[led] them, using them to reinforce their power or to defuse resistance while they enlarge[d] their

domination over ... the mass population,"<sup>1</sup> and make a case for mass mediated politics by the dominant NSF authorities. These assessments inscribe the situation in the larger theoretical frame of power, dominant imagery, thought conditioning, creation of consent and defusion of resistance that has been introduced in previous chapters. They also provide a background for understanding political evolutions following the May elections and how these evolutions fit into larger power patterns.

#### *A. Formal Commitments*

The first research question referred to the manner in which the political environment changed so as to meet post-revolutionary public demands. At face value, it changed in a radical manner. As popularly demanded in December, the one-party rule was abolished and pluralism was stipulated as foundation for the new political system. After years of monolithic ideology and administration, the country witnessed the emergence of political groups, parties, movements, as well as the creation of non-partisan groups with a wide range of goals.<sup>2</sup>

---

1. Timothy Luke, *Screens of Power. Ideology, Domination, and Resistance in Informational Society*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1989, p. 12.

2. V. Socor, "Political Parties Emerging," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Feb. 1990.

Provisions for a democratic environment resembling Western societies were made. Powers would be separated in the state, thus marking the end of decades where executive, legislative and judicial branches were subordinated to the party in power. Free elections were scheduled. Economic measures were stipulated so as to void the economy of its political dimension: highly centralized control by the state over all economic initiatives. Other measures aimed at alleviating the population's material needs. Freedom of speech exploded through a variety of new publications, party periodicals, old publications with new names, radio and television.

The previous chapter, however, captured instances when the implementation of democratic measures and principles swayed from original commitments. Despite their pledges, the authorities' position on the "kind" of democracy to be implemented in Romania, as well as the bureaucratic limitations of the program itself, pointed towards an authoritarian political option. Although conceptual or executory ambiguities may have arisen from the haste in which the program was drafted, there are strong indications that at least some double-faced stances and regulations concealed a deliberate totalitarian choice. Without accusing the NSF authorities of intellectual dishonesty, let us examine the evidence.

## B. Actual Implementation

### 1) The Ideological Direction

For starters, the concept of pluralism was redefined in a number of instances, highlighted in Chapter III, Section 1. Ion Iliescu and Petre Roman presented it as an "innovation" in content, explicitly defecting from the conventional definition of pluralism (i.e. more than one party), while implicitly favoring a restrictive concept. Their accent on "maintaining the national consensus" as a form of political governance recalled former patterns of everybody agreeing with everybody, where only one opinion passed as viable: the government's. Roman's use of limiting language such as "we would *allow* any constructive political tendency"<sup>3</sup> (italics mine), suggested that authorities considered pluralism a status they conceded to other groups as long as political developments coincided with their view of "constructive." As analysts remarked,

Roman seems to be defining pluralism as a condition granted from above - by the government - rather than a right exercised by society from below. Besides equating pluralism with consensus, he also seems to reserve for the government the prerogative of defining the terms of consensus, according to the government's own criteria.<sup>4</sup>

---

3. *Adevarul*, Dec. 31, 1989.

4. V. Socor, "Political Parties Emerging," p. 33.

The impression that the authorities' understanding of democracy was founded on preserving for themselves the lion's share in regulating the terms of the political discourse was confirmed in at least two other instances. Their decision to become a political organization and run candidates in elections was publicly justified as a consequence of "pressures" laid on NSF by groups of workers.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, going back on their promise (which could have been interpreted as abuse of power<sup>6</sup>) was justified as not necessarily their political choice, but as a popular option imposed on them from "below." This manner of introducing their decision retained the democratic element of "popular consent" and automatically legitimized the step they took.

By virtue of this maneuver, the authorities preserved a comfortable dominant position in politics, as original representatives of the national consensus through which the NSF was first formed, maintaining "their image of 'organism of the Revolution,' and of 'deliverers' of the population,"<sup>7</sup> to culminate with the symbolism of "representatives of large

---

5. A. Perva, "Frontul, in Competitia Electorala," *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 25, 1990, p. 1.

6. See for example A. Blandiana, "Oroarea de Politica," where she questions the authorities' original honesty. *Romania Libera*, Jan. 25, 1990.

7. I. Popescu, "Nevoia de Opozitie," *Romania Libera*, Jan. 9, 1990.

segments of working people."<sup>8</sup> Analysts called this situation "a serious imbalance of political forces," which placed other groups at a clear disadvantage. "We might as well get used to the idea that we will vote for the Front," some said in early January. This imbalance pointed to NSF as the recipient of public sympathy, whereas the existence of other political groups without much clout and in "embryonic" administrative stages, artificially endorsed the image of a "pluralist" environment.<sup>9</sup>

While there is little doubt that at the time of these occurrences, the Front seemed a good governance to many workers, some of which requested NSF's participation in elections, there is evidence that workers were not unanimous in the belief that NSF represented them. Section 4 of Chapter III illustrated instances when workers from enterprises in Timisoara and Cluj manifested their disapproval of the totalitarian orientation of NSF candidates. Similar attitudes were signaled on other occasions.<sup>10</sup>

The absence of publicity concerning these rejections and the electronic or printed remodeling of Iliescu's encounters

---

8. A. Perva, "Frontul..."

9. I. Popescu, "Nevoia de Opozitie."

10. On a visit to 1 Mai enterprise in Ploiesti; *Romania Libera*, Mar. 2, 1990.

with these workers suggest that neither the authorities, nor the media who chose to ignore anti-NSF manifestations, intended to publicly acknowledge or address rebuffs. Instances of lack of coverage of events that could have hurt the authorities' political image were periodically highlighted in the previous chapter. A systematic lack of coverage of anti-NSF events by central media outlets prompted analysts to surname these outlets "NSF-controlled media," an issue to which we shall return in the following sections.<sup>11</sup> In the absence of an official acknowledgement of workers' anti-NSF feelings, I can only speculate on the reasons why the authorities avoided addressing working class opinions which did not conform to their inclusive claim of representation, while the issue of lack of publicity will be addressed in more detail later in the chapter.

Technically, the decision to become a political group turned the NSF into an organism similar to the former communist party, holding the levers of both executive and legislative powers. This was a status specifically not supported by their program. In order to account for their inconsistency, the authorities justified it as a result of popular demand. Acknowledging that the population was not unanimous in their

---

11. See V. Socor, "National Salvation Front Produces Electoral Landslide," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jul. 6, 1990.

"pressures" would have automatically weakened the NSF's posture. Since the workers' consent was the only factor which kept NSF's maneuver from being abusive and their status illegal, they needed to preserve an image of "representatives of the working class."

The task of preserving that political image was undertaken by the pro-NSF media which laid accent on "workers' demands on the NSF to evade their initial commitments for the public good,"<sup>12</sup> while, in what can be called "a second dimension of media," preventing anti-Front stances from becoming public or political issues. Paraphrasing Schattschneider, these outlets decided what the media game was about and who could take part in it. Their pattern of news coverage was guided by the imperative of preservation of political dominance by the NSF through a packaging of political information and actors so as to dissimulate NSF's totalitarian orientation, create popular consent and reaffirm the legitimacy of the dominant imagery.

Another instance when the authorities' ideological orientation indicated authoritarianism was spelled out in April. At a press conference in Calarasi, Iliescu declared that "democracy can exist even in a totalitarian regime, if

---

12. A. Perva, "Frontul...,"



the despot is a wise man."<sup>13</sup> Whether he tried to suggest that he was the wise leader or not is less relevant than the accent laid on "totalitarian regime," in contrast to a democratic environment.

This statement can be interpreted in various ways. It can mean that democracy was the basic foundation for the Romanian society that Iliescu had in mind, to which a totalitarian government could be accommodated provided that there was a wise leader, one of Plato's philosophers, to rule it democratically. It could mean that he considered totalitarianism as the intrinsic condition of a society, to which a wise ruler could apply democracy. What seems to be clear is that he departed from the traditional terminology of democratic theory. What is not clear though, is why he should superpose two antinomic terms such as "totalitarian" and "democratic" and make them look like they could coexist. One possible answer is that he favored a conceptualization of democracy in the form of a hybrid between "totalitarian" and "democratic." His January statements about the "obsolescence" of the pluriparty system as representative of democratic environments,<sup>14</sup> and the "national consensus"

---

13. Mentioned by Gabriela Adamesteanu in 22, May 11, 1990, p. 10.

14. Radio Moscow (in Romanian), Jan. 23, 1990, 6:00 p. m.

theory<sup>15</sup> indicate a rejection of the potential for disagreement brought about by the diversity of opinions of a multi-party regime. Instead, he seemed to endorse a democratic totalitarian or totalitarian democratic system in which the national consensus would be guided by wise supervisors of the public good who would discourage any "non-constructive" work.

Apart from the strong resemblance that this kind of reasoning shared with that of the former administration, the condition of the wise ruler, as he described it, was implicitly similar to Ceausescu's claim to know what was best for his people. Moreover, the responsibility and accountability which form the core of political representation (even if theoretical, as Bennett would argue), were non-existent in his conceptualization. This was, again, another similarity with the previous regime, where Ceausescu's non-accountability led to the country's isolation and economic decline. It seemed that once again, the conditions of democracy and freedom were not rights of the population, but gifts bestowed on the citizens by a strong leader, which basically meant a return to a totalitarian administration with a more human treatment of the citizens.

---

15. *Adevarul*, Dec. 31, 1989.

Mueller would probably argue that the process of socialization into "accepting the definitions offered by dominant political figures" should be considered the driving motors of the popular consent that the NSF authorities ultimately enjoyed. Lukes would also stress the thought conditioning at work through media (or other) channels so as to create political meanings that contained the same essence as the one of the overthrown administration. With such possible interpretations in mind, the contentions of opposers of the Iliescu regime that the revolution had been "hijacked by the neo-Communists"<sup>16</sup> do not seem far-fetched. On the contrary, the definitions of political realities and necessities as formulated by the authorities indicate a packaging of their totalitarian orientation into an imagery which legitimized their position and achieved dominance over other groups.

The question that first comes to mind is why citizens did not notice these stances, or consider them dangerous enough to avoid voting for people who advocated such views. Again, there is no easy answer to this, especially because the condition of the Romanian electorate needs to be viewed from different perspectives and historical dimensions. The issue of socialization gives at least a partial explanation to our

---

16. M. Shafir, "Promises and Reality," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jan. 4, 1991, p. 35.

question, in that for over 45 years, this electorate had come to accept, if only by paying lip service, the dominant imagery of the administration in power. The prevailing stance of the Iliescu administration had come to share common points with a position they already knew, which feeds into Bennett's argument that "audiences tend to accept official versions of reality because they fall into familiar standardized patterns." The argument can also go the other direction: The familiar pattern was that of a totalitarian stance which fostered popular obedience, even when it led to the political isolation of the country and its economic decline.

However, Iliescu did not discourage rumors of being "a reformed communist." This image, coupled with the symbolism of food in stores and freedom to travel, may have had a positive effect on audiences. As critics speculated, "...[Romanians] are being accustomed at best to a 'father of the nation' leader ... [and] regard the slight improvement in living standards since Ceausescu's overthrow as having been given to them by Iliescu personally."<sup>17</sup> Therefore the behavior of the electorate needs to be viewed in the larger context of past socialization, present fears of the future,

---

17. M. Shafir, "The Leadership Yet to Prove its Credibility," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jul. 13, 1990, p. 32.

reluctance to try something new, reliance on familiar patterns and packaging procedures which made the authorities look reliable. More considerations about this question will be addressed in a final section of the chapter, after we look into other circumstances of the post-revolutionary environment.

## 2) The Separation of Powers

Detours from the implementation of democratic seeds by the NSF authorities went beyond conceptual levels. They pertained to legislation regulating administrative, economic and political structures. The dividing line between the executive and the legislative branches, for instance, was blurred from the outset. In December, the NSF Council declared itself "the supreme body of state power," and the only legislative organism, separate from the executive branch, which they identified as "the government." However, government officials, even though not members of the Council, were nominated by the legislature.

As already shown in Chapter III, Section 1, some of these nominations resulted in social unrest and requests for a discontinuation of dominance by communist administrative and political structures. Students considered that the

legislature was nominating executive officials in an attempt to hire people perceived to be loyal to the NSF.<sup>18</sup>

Only after more popular pressures, such as the memorable January 28 rally, did the NSF Council apparently give up its monopoly over both branches and agreed to create a coalition legislature. The original agreement for the constitution of PCNU stipulated that the Council would be replaced by a 180-member body, half of which would represent the political parties, the other half to be nominated by the Council.

At face value, this arrangement placed the NSF on the same footing with the rest of the parties, but that was not to happen. The Council maintained influence through a host of small, new parties which had their share of seats in the parties' half and which were suspected to be "inventions of the NSF."<sup>19</sup> These parties had declared their "adherence to and support of the Front," and were mockingly surnamed "Front organizations" or "satellite parties," because they were "born with the phrase 'We are with the Front!' on their lips."<sup>20</sup> Also, representatives of 42 counties which were

---

18. C. Pompey, "Students and the Revolution," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Mar. 2, 1990, p. 30.

19. M. Shafir, "The Provisional Council of National Unity: Is History Repeating Itself?" *Report on Eastern Europe*, Mar. 2, 1990, p. 19.

20. Alfred Neagu in an open letter to the NSF, in *Romania Libera*, Feb. 1, 1990. Cited by M. Shafir, "The Provisional Council of National Unity..." p. 19.

nominated by the Council were assumed to be Front supporters, since the NSF "has control of most of the county committees set up in the wake of the Revolution." 48 other members were nominated by the Council and merely approved by the rest of the PCNU. Ion Iliescu was elected president of the interim organism, "'by consensus' - presumably without a vote," while three of the five Vice Presidents were identified with the Front.<sup>21</sup> On the face of it, the NSF agreed to give up monopoly over state powers. This concession preserved the appearance of commitment to traditional democratic practices, while it contained bureaucratic "catch-22's" which ensured them a comfortable dominance over the legislature.

Occasional disclosures indicated that NSF interference was exercised at the level of the judiciary as well.<sup>22</sup> Prosecutor General Gheorghe Robu was often times "summoned to the [National Salvation] Front," which determined many analysts to doubt that the promised separation of powers was actually implemented.<sup>23</sup>

---

21. Ibid., p. 20.

22. D. Ionescu, "Old Practices Persist in Romanian Justice," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Mar. 9, 1990. Mihai Sturdza, "The Miners' Crackdown on the Opposition: A Review of the Evidence," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jan. 11, 1991, p. 31.

23. D. Ionescu, "Old Practices....," p. 46.

### 3) Political Organizations

Another regulatory measure selectively observed referred to the organization and functioning of political parties. The decree overseeing political activities passed on December 31, 1989, specifically barred employees of the Courts of Justice, the Police, Army and the media from joining political organizations. This measure aimed to secure the impartiality of these institutions and protect them from political influences. Since, however, the NSF insisted that its fundamental status of "emanation of the Revolution" was non-partisan, members of the above institutions could join the Front. In fact, the NSF had committees in the media organizations, as well as in work places at all levels. Similarly, military personnel belonged to the Front.<sup>24</sup> The Front therefore created rules which applied to all the other political organizations, while its formal preservation of a non-partisan status exempted it from following its own regulations. After it became a political group, it was never made clear whether the representatives of institutions such as the media, the army or the police were still members of the NSF.

---

24. M. Shafir, "The Provisional Council of National Unity...", p. 19.



#### 4) The Economy

The original calls for decentralization of the economy and moves towards privatization sounded promising. In practice, few and shy attempts to foster private initiative were made. The creation of NSF councils in enterprises encouraged old bureaucratic structures to change names and remain in charge. Little was done to inspire institutional revitalization so as to facilitate the flourishing of private entrepreneurs. Moreover, the economy during the pre-electoral period witnessed a decline in productivity due to the government's policy of giving in to demands for increases in wages.<sup>25</sup> These measures won them public sympathy and support, while the economic output diminished.

#### 5) Free Elections

The authorities' pledge to secure the free and equal development of political activities in preparation for elections was respected one-sidedly as well. The pre-electoral period was marked by financial difficulties for the opposition, as well as by physical violence against their party members and offices by NSF supporters. Foreign visitors to the opposition headquarters declared early in this interval that at the offices "there was great

---

25. M. Shafir, "Promises and Reality," p. 33.

enthusiasm and a total lack of resources."<sup>26</sup> The photocopy of a governmental order signed by Roman, in which one copy-machine was assigned to "political parties" and three to NSF was published in an anti-Front newspaper.<sup>27</sup> Offices of organizations that were perceived to be inimical to the Front were ransacked after January 28 and February 18, as Sections 1 and 2 of Chapter III have shown. These organizations were also prevented from setting up local offices by bands of alleged NSF supporters.<sup>28</sup>

In contrast, the NSF enjoyed access to "both state assets and those of the defunct communist party."<sup>29</sup> Their offices were never attacked by opposition supporters and their activities developed at a normal pace.

The electoral campaign was fraught with legal evasions by the NSF group. The law passed by the PCNU specifically stipulated that campaigning should not be done during the work day, nor in work places, and that campaign material should be posted only in places specially designated for that purpose. While these restrictions applied to all the

---

26. V. Socor, "Political Parties Emerging," p. 33.

27. *Romania Libera*, Feb. 17, 1990.

28. D. Ionescu, "Violence and Calumny in the Election Campaign," *Report on Eastern Europe*, May 25, 1990.

29. V. Socor, "Political Parties Emerging," p. 33.

parties, NSF flyers could be seen in places singled out by the law as unacceptable. Iliescu, Roman, and other NSF representatives made frequent visits into enterprises, to meet workers and talk about economic issues.<sup>30</sup> Television crews and *Rompres* editors were present at most NSF meetings, covering them in detail, while the rest of the parties did not enjoy the same attention.<sup>31</sup>

For opposition political forces (and maybe to a lesser degree the 'satellite' parties), the campaign was a constant struggle to overcome financial difficulties, intemperance by NSF supporters, attempts at intimidation and sometimes murder. Their meetings were often boycotted by groups of alleged NSF supporters. The police were often times unprotective of these meetings, or of party headquarters. The NSF was accused by opposition parties of resorting to a campaign which recalled the practices of intimidation used by communists in 1946 in order to win the elections.<sup>32</sup> The acts of violence were noted by the U.S. State Department as well. On May 7, they issued a statement condemning the violence in the electoral campaign and reaffirmed that good relations could be established between the two countries

---

30. *Romania Libera*, Apr. 24, 1990.

31. Petre Mihai Bacanu in interview with 22, May 17, 1990, p. 15.

32. D. Ionescu, "Violence and Calumny in the Election Campaign."

only when the democratization process was a reality in Romania.<sup>33</sup>

#### 6) The Mass Media

The passing of the mass media from the "control of one despotic family into the hands of the people"<sup>34</sup> was a concept packaged in appealing popular apparel without much essence. The authorities did not clarify whose "hands" they meant, nor did they pass legislation which discontinued state control over media networks. The decree 473, which had placed the television under the state President's control was formally abrogated only on May 11, 1990, after prolonged popular pressure. The television station was afterwards subordinated to an Executive Bureau which was chaired by none other than Ion Iliescu. The old press law of the Ceausescu era (1974) was formally abrogated in 1992. Moreover, even if new publications were spawned in a very short period of time, the authorities refused to allow a private television station to compete with the (nominally independent) state television station on the grounds that

---

33. *Ibid*, pp. 38-39.

34. *Scinteia Poporului*, Dec. 23, 1989; *Libertatea*, Dec. 23, 1989.

"to allow one person to own a channel would be undemocratic."<sup>35</sup>

The authorities' claim of non-interference in the information transfer was grounded mainly on their visible stipulation that the media were "free." However, in practice they preserved monopoly over publishing houses, printing materials, and distribution, widely having the opportunity to regulate what was publicized and what was not, in what journalist Alina Mungiu called "technical censorship."<sup>36</sup> The authorities also hindered the distribution of opposition publications in the country, cut supplies of newsprint and limited the circulation of newspapers unfavorable to the NSF.<sup>37</sup> These measures, although neither visible, nor well publicized, helped them preserve exclusive influence over the quality and quantity of political information to be circulated in the country.

Bennett would remind us that "power and influence in any political system depend on the control and strategic use of information." From this perspective, it would be

---

35. Ion Iliescu made this statement in reply to Ratiu's offer to finance a private station. Cited by K. Devlin, "Postrevolutionary Ferment in the East European Media," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jul. 13, 1990, p. 48.

36. Information Services Department, Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty Research Institute, "The East European Media: The Struggle for and with Freedom," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Dec. 7, 1990, p. 35.

37. K. Devlin, "Postrevolutionary Ferment...", pp. 48, 51.

interesting to speculate on the authorities' reasons for monopolizing and strategically using the political information. Various questions can be addressed: Was there a deliberate, behind-the-door use of media outlets, or did opposition groups that foresaw a defeat in the elections charge NSF with media manipulation so as to account for their defeat in an honorable manner? If governmental interference existed, what prompted it (since the NSF authorities enjoyed nationwide sympathy anyway) and why did media workers comply? Were the speculations of the foreign media about a possible coup against Ceausescu by some of those who assumed provisional power under the name of National Salvation Front accurate, in which case the central media had no choice but to comply? If so, since Ceausescu was so unpopular both among Romanians and abroad, why didn't the group recognize their anti-Ceausescu activity which probably would have won them public sympathy? Why did they need to use the channels of the central media in order to make themselves popular?

In the event that an anti-Ceausescu coup was being organized, one way to approach these complex questions is to recognize that between appearing in the light of former "conspirators" against the Ceausescu regime, and molding an image of "emanation of a popular anti-Ceausescu revolt," the latter version looked more legitimate. A coup under

peaceful, quiet conditions would have probably worked. Conspirators, communists themselves, could have invoked the economic disaster brought about by twenty years of Ceausescu administration as a good enough reason for replacing an unpopular dictator with a milder, more "human" type of communist rule. The previous discussion on the NSF's ideological orientation supports such a hypothetical possibility.

This scenario may have succeeded were it not for the people who died demanding an "end to communism," "civil rights," "freedom," and "end of censorship." From this perspective, the nucleus of people who assumed provisional political responsibilities needed public recognition and sympathy in order to maintain political supremacy. They needed popular consent in order to pass legislation that would have secured them a considerable control over the development of the economy, even if it was not clearly decentralizing or liberalizing. They needed people to feel secure with their economic measures, and insecure with economic measures such as the privatization advocated by other political groups. Privatization would have amounted to a fragmentation of centralized control over the society, and the orientation that NSF favored pointed towards retention of its control and supervisory role.

In the event that a coup had not been premeditated, and those who became the National Salvation Front "happened" to meet at the governmental central offices on the night of December 22, they too needed public recognition as an "emanation of the Revolution." A group of people who assume political representation of a country under the conditions of a popular anti-communist revolt, when they themselves had been members of the communist party, had to reflect the freedoms that the revolutionaries were asking for, if they wanted to be their legitimate representatives. Moreover, they needed to convince the population that, although brought up in communist beliefs, they would not reiterate the abusive and dictatorial practices of the past regime.

In either case, shaping a positive image of "deliverers of the population" could have been the solution for solidification of power on NSF's behalf. Surrounding their personalities with an aura of "saviors" of the Romanian people, as Ion Iliescu was originally introduced to television audiences on December 22,<sup>38</sup> was a way of legitimizing themselves in front of large audiences. At least formally, they had to make a commitment to "freedom," "democracy," and "political pluralism" as long as these were demanded by a mass of people facing anti-revolutionary

---

38. The GSD tape captures some of these moments.



bullets in the streets of Bucharest and Timisoara. Passing legislation forbidding further exports of food products and sending the products to the internal market also had a connotation of "saving" the population from the prospect of another winter without food. Abolishing anti-popular Ceausescu legislation added another semantic layer of "people opposed to abuses and supporting human rights" to their political image. Allowing the formal liberalization of the mass media was yet another way of winning public trust and international credibility in their political intentions. Concealing their influence over media outlets was equally essential for preserving the needed public trustworthiness in their commitment to democracy. With such political imperatives, the use of the media to mold that political image for them was indispensable.

## 2. Post-Revolutionary Media

At this stage in our discussion, it is time to question the specific role that the mass media had in post-revolutionary Romania, and how they adjusted to popular demands for informing the population "promptly and correctly" about political activities and the implementation of democratic goals,<sup>39</sup> since

...the extent to which a country has moved - or failed to move - toward sociopolitical pluralism as expressed

---

39. V. Salagean, "O Delegatie a Tinerilor..." *Adevarul*, Dec. 26, 1989, pp. 1, 3.

in freedom of the press (which nowadays includes the broadcast media) remains a criterion by which the transition from one-party rule to constitutional democracy can be assessed.<sup>40</sup>

As previously suggested, the post-revolutionary media environment was originally regarded with public sympathy by both the national and international public opinion. The special role that the electronic networks assumed in organizing operations of rescue and support during the days of the Revolution boosted public trust in redeemed television and radio institutions. The public apologies that media workers addressed to the population for the lies they had to tell during the previous administration were perceived as a national reconciliation and signs of a new time to come. Media workers' pledges to be "in the service of the people" created the perception that state censorship was over. The variety of shows, news programs, critical attitudes originally hosted by both printed and electronic networks buttressed the impression that the media were no longer under the influence of government powers.

However, somewhere along the line, this perception gradually changed, just as the gradual awareness of NSF's political intentions caused a shift from trust to suspicion. The apparent marching in lockstep of some media outlets with the

---

40. Kevin Devlin, "Postrevolutionary Ferment . . .," p. 47.

NSF authorities caused these suspicions to amount to open criticisms of some networks as partisan to the NSF, which were surnamed "pro-NSF" or "NSF-controlled."<sup>41</sup> The criticisms came from various sources, starting from citizens who witnessed street events which were re-created in the television's visual display, to continue with organized groups of students and intellectuals who provided details about inconsistencies between what "happened" at street rallies and "what viewers were made to believe to have happened" in the electronic or printed transfer of information. Some printed matter also emphasized the discontinuity between "real life" and "television-made" information, thus winning for themselves the attribute of "anti-NSF" publications.

These epithets might look artificial and unfair in the absence of evidence of partisanship for NSF officials. This is why the following section outlines the administrative structures of the media outlets whose coverage of socio-political events constituted the bulk of Chapter III. Their organizational procedures (to the extent that information is available) throws some light on possible relationships between media workers and the provisional authorities, going beyond the former's personal preferences.

---

41. "The East European Media: The Struggle for and with Freedom."

### A. Administrative Structures

*Adevarul*, formerly the communist party daily *Scinteia*, underwent a metamorphosis from *Scinteia* (The Spark), to *Scinteia Poporului* (The People's Spark),<sup>42</sup> to *Adevarul* (The Truth).<sup>43</sup> In the first issues, the newspaper called itself a "political periodical." Starting with the January 6 issue, it became an "independent political periodical." Later, its new director, Darie Novaceanu, asserted that their newspaper was "the only independent publication in the country."<sup>44</sup> He did not give any legal or other type of proof for his claim.

In spite of its self-proclaimed independence, several factors indicated a direct connection between the newspaper and the NSF authorities. In a note published in the December 26 issue, the newspaper declared its allegiance to the NSF platform. Its charter stipulated that *Adevarul* would activate under the name "The Free Press."<sup>45</sup> The publishing house The Free Press was founded as an "autonomous institution" through an NSF decree. All the

---

42. Issues of Dec. 23, 24, 1989.

43. First issue on Dec. 25, 1989.

44. *Adevarul*, Apr. 26, 1990.

45. Dec. 27, 1989.

funds and assets of the former *Scinteia* were passed on to The Free Press.<sup>46</sup>

At the press conference that General Dumitru Bitlan, commander in chief of the Bucharest Police, organized after Doru Braia's deportation,<sup>47</sup> he answered a question by referring to a letter which had been published in "our daily newspaper *Adevarul*, I mean the independent daily newspaper *Adevarul*."<sup>48</sup> According to eye-witnesses, photos of Braia at popular rallies had been passed on to the newspaper by the police or Securitate officers who searched Braia at his expulsion. The photos had been confiscated at the airport, to be reproduced within days on the front page of *Adevarul*.<sup>49</sup>

The Romanian Television underwent a significant change after the December Revolution. As mentioned in Chapter I, the role of the television station during the days of the Revolution had been an important catalyst. In those days,

---

46. *Romania Libera*, Jan. 17, 1990.

47. A controversial person, Doru Braia came back from exile in Germany after the Revolution. At one of the April rallies against NSF, he made a critical statement about the Prime Minister, which was broadcast by FRTV. The following day he was accused of encouraging the population to destabilize the country and was expelled by force. Details about his story appeared in issues of *Adevarul* and *Romania Libera* of the first half of April, 1990.

48. *Romania Libera*, Apr. 7, 1990, p. 3.

49. Note from the photographer who took the pictures and who kept the negatives, in *Romania Libera*, Apr. 7, 1990, p. 1.

the station changed its name to Free Romanian Television, a sign of their liberation from the state and party control and of their pledge to be a television for "the people," not for the authorities. Given the programs they offered thereafter, full of entertainment and news that had been censored and prohibited by the former regime, the credibility in the TV's "free" status soared among large masses of population.<sup>50</sup>

The NSF Council nominated Aurel Dragos Munteanu as director of FRTV. At the same time, however, Munteanu held another public office which was mutually exclusive with being the head of a media institution supposedly neutral: He was NSF's spokesperson. NSF's original unclear status, as a body of transition and not a political group, made Munteanu's nomination look acceptable. When, by the end of December, NSF representatives started mentioning their intention to run in elections, his double functions appeared abusive. Protesters at the January 28 rally underlined the fact that FRTV could not be impartial as long as Munteanu was its director and complained that the television broadcast almost entirely for the benefit of the NSF. They stated that staff changes at the television station had been

---

50. C. Stefanescu, "Free Romanian Television' Losing Its Credibility," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Mar. 23, 1990.

minimal, with few top bureaucrats demoted from their positions, and with editors and anchormen who had been loyal to the old regime re-emerging on the pretense of being purged and reform-minded through the Revolution.<sup>51</sup>

In order to avoid the perception that FRTV was subordinated to the NSF, Munteanu resigned his position as NSF spokesperson on January 29. Following the increasing number of popular rallies demanding his resignation and the TV trade union's petition for his demotion, Munteanu resigned on February 9. The director who followed him was nominated by Ion Iliescu.

*Libertatea* (Freedom), formerly the governmental daily *Informatia Bucurestiului* (Bucharest's Information), gave details about the birth of their newspaper. Their first issue in "liberty" was published at the initiative of the media workers, on December 22, when Bucharest was still under the terror of the anti-revolutionary forces. At a press conference they emphasized that their publication was not under the tutelage of any political authority, and reinforced their commitment to correctly inform the public about political and social events in a nonpartisan manner.<sup>52</sup>

---

51. D. Ionescu, "Romania," *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 1, no. 39, Oct. 2, 1992.

52. *Libertatea*, Feb. 22, 23, 1990.

*Tineretul Liber* (Free Young People) called itself "an independent publication for all the young people in Romania," and published their first issue within hours of Ceausescu's overthrow.<sup>53</sup> They emphasized their free and nonpartisan status as well.

*Romania Muncitoare* called itself an "independent periodical of the free trade unions" and pledged to support NSF's political platform.<sup>54</sup>

*Romania Libera* (Free Romania) had been a government daily under Ceausescu. After the Revolution it preserved its name but changed its leading team and became the first private enterprise in post-revolutionary Romania. Its directors were Octavian Paler, well known essayist whose publications had been prohibited by the Ceausescu administration, and Petre Mihai Bacanu, a dissident journalist who had been thrown in jail for anti-governmental activities. They exploited a decree which allowed businesses with fewer than twenty employees to become private firms. The 120 journalists working for the newspaper divided themselves into six "companies" of twenty employees each and

---

53. *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 6, Mar. 4, 1990.

54. Dec. 25, 1990.



incorporated themselves.<sup>55</sup> The newspaper pledged to be a daily independent of political opinions and information.

22 was a post-revolutionary publication issued by the Group for Social Dialogue. The group was mainly made up of outstanding intellectuals in the country, such as Gabriel Liiceanu, Ana Blandiana, Stelian Tanase, and Gabriela Adamesteanu. Some of them had openly opposed the censorship by Ceausescu's administration and had taken a public stand to defend freedom of speech, which cost them the right of publication, or their jobs. From the outset, the publication hosted opinions about the social, political and economic climate in the country, past and present.

As the evidence available suggests, the administrative structures of at least two media outlets were directly subordinated to the NSF authorities, the newspaper *Adevarul* and the television station respectively.<sup>56</sup> Of the other printed matter, *Romania Libera* was the only publication that could prove financial independence from the government. Even if 22 did not specify their financial sources, their administrative team was made up of personalities unlikely to condone state censorship or control. Beyond visible

---

55. Kevin Devlin, "Postrevolutionary Ferment in the East European Media." Also P. M. Bacanu in an interview in 22, May 17, 1990.

56. The directors of these two institutions were later nominated ambassadors in Washington, D.C. (Aurel Dragos Munteanu), and in Spain (Darie Novaceanu).

stipulations about their functioning, nothing in particular supports the contention that government influence was extended over the rest of the newspapers.

However, *Libertatea*, *Tineretul Liber* and *Romania Muncitoare*, as well as other printed matter that has not been included in this study, were also suspected of NSF partisanship on account of their indiscriminate praise of the NSF activities and constant bashing of any other political alternatives. Absence of evidence establishing a direct line between the government and these media outlets can mean that such connections did not exist to begin with, or that the evidence was well concealed in order to endorse the official version that the media were free. In either case, we need to remember that during the pre-electoral period legal provisions for the functioning of institutions were scarce. It is therefore understandable why no other visible regulations that established the institutional status of the outlets involved in the analysis could be found.

Even if the argument about the lack of outright signs of government interference can be made both ways, the opposition's contention about NSF manipulation of the media came probably less from the awareness of the media institutions' administrative structures and legal status, and more from the perception that some outlets were constantly presenting the NSF in the best possible light,

while delegitimizing the opposition. This perception was formed over time, starting in January 1990, and continued through the pre-electoral period. Understanding its roots and development will be the task of the following section.

### *B. Analysis of News Release Patterns*

As the discussion of Chapter II suggested, what audiences know about events is not the product of an eye-witness experience, since not everybody can be present at all the significant events that take place. Instead, their knowledge about the world comes from stories mediated for them by media workers in the information transfer. Romanian audiences can be equally assumed to have heard about political events through the central media, the most important and by far the most influential being the single television station. Under the circumstances it is only fair to follow how the central media presented the socio-political environment to their audiences and elaborate on the role that they had in forging political meanings, creating (de)legitimizing images and influencing popular perceptions in the conditions of a transitory period in which the "people" were to elect a future governance that supposedly represented their best interests.

I argue that the tandem of power representatives and media workers tried to frame the informational transfer in a

pluralist manner, visibly proclaiming media's independence and neutrality, while practically managing political information in the second and third dimensions of power, as well as through what Foucault calls "strategies that underlie and permeate discourses,"<sup>57</sup> in a complex, not always easy to categorize manner. These strategies do not necessarily fall into recognizable or accepted theoretical constructs. They constitute themselves as "discourses" and pervade everyday life through "phenomena of diffusion, anchorage, and fixation" of political meanings, social symbols, regulatory or disciplinary rhetorics, amounting to a subtle oppression and submission of the mind.<sup>58</sup>

My contention relies on the noticeable patterns of news release that the central media followed, which resemble what Bennett identified as "personalized, dramatized and fragmented news," and in the heavy packaging procedures that neutralized the opposition before they had a fair chance to make a difference on the political arena. The pro-NSF media became the organizers of public perceptions, influencing how events, public stances and attitudes should be decoded. They taught, suggested, implied, developed, transformed and

---

57. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction*, transl. from French by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., New York, 1990, p. 27.

58. Ibid, p. 151.

transmitted images in a dynamic whose internal movement was dictated by the criteria of newsworthiness of the moment, defending the NSF against any negative symbolism and deterring their political adversaries respectively. By so doing, they achieved political goals incompatible with their claim of neutrality such as justifying NSF's political decisions, forging meanings and creating symbolics of legitimacy which ultimately led to large public approval of the NSF and violent reactions against the opposition parties.

Concretely, how were these goals achieved and what is the evidence for such charges? How was the information transfer performed and what relationship can be established between news releases and popular participation?

The most notorious pattern of news release was comprehensively summarized by the publication 22 in the months of April and May. Analysts contended that the television was guilty of a paradigm of "lack of live coverage and subsequent presentation of events in lights that harm the power the least,"<sup>59</sup> while using the cliches of communist propaganda in order to confuse the population.<sup>60</sup>

---

59. Ghe. Ceausescu, "Din Nou Despre Televiziune...", 22, Apr. 6, 1990, p. 3.

60. A. Mungiu, "Recviem...", 22, May 25, 1990, p. 4.

Among the instances when such a pattern can be identified were the presentations of the first student meeting on January 7, the NSF Council's decision, on January 23, to become a political group and run in elections, the January 28 rally, the rallies for an independent television during the first half of February, the February 18 break-in of the governmental building, the Timisoara Proclamation, the April anti-governmental rallies, and finally the University Square marathon demonstration.

On January 7, the television and the newspaper *Adevarul* avoided presenting evidence of the student meeting in which the dogmas of the NSF authorities were criticized.<sup>61</sup> On January 23, FRTV did not show clips of the criticisms that some members of the Council had against NSF top representatives' unilateral decision to run in elections.<sup>62</sup> By this omission, the perception that the decision was uncontested and salutary was forged. Meanwhile printed matter such as *Adevarul*, *Libertatea* and *Tineretul Liber* elaborated on the theme of "NSF and the workers' will," endorsing the official position, activating the feeling that

---

61. L. Stoicescu and D. Verdes, "Cum A Aratat Primul Miting...la Televiziune," *Romania Libera*, Jan. 11, 1990, p. 2. R. Banu, "Primul Miting Liber," *Adevarul*, Jan. 9, 1990, p. 1.

62. M. Mincu, "Democratie Nu Inseamna Intoleranta," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 1, 1990, pp. 1, 2. M. Mincu, "A Existat Consiliul FSN?" *Romania Libera*, Feb. 6, 1990, p. 3. Ana Blandiana, "Oroarea de Politica," *Romania Libera*, Jan. 25, 1990.

the NSF was the only viable solution for the country and that opposition parties were the cause of all evils, present, past or future.<sup>63</sup> A positive symbolism was emerging with respect to the NSF while the premises for negative connotations associated with the opposition were set.

On January 28, the electronic networks did not give any live coverage of the rally and claimed it was a coup attempted by the historical parties to overthrow the NSF and the revolutionary achievements.<sup>64</sup> In this process, they built on images about the NSF already constructed in the public eye and launched a clear Hydra-type of symbolism with respect to the opposition parties. The NSF, with its original claim of "emanation of the Revolution," became the Revolution, the democratization of the country, the defender of the workers' interests, threatened by a greedy opposition, made up of people coming from abroad only to sell the country to Western monopolies.<sup>65</sup> *Adevarul*,

---

63. A. Perva, "Frontul, in Competitia Electorala," *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 25, 1990, p. 1. I. Olteanu, "Opiniile...", *Libertatea*, Jan. 23, 1990, pp. 1, 2. D. Novaceanu, "Analfabetismul Politic," *Adevarul*, Jan. 26, 1990, pp. 1, 3. M. Coman, "Puterea si Destinul...", *Adevarul*, Jan. 27, 1990, p. 1.

64. M. Mincu, "Democratie Nu Inseamna Intoleranta." F. Iaru, "Parlambadarii," *Romania Libera*, Mar. 29, 1990, p. 2.

65. M. Shafir, "The Provisional Council for National Unity," p. 20. M. Mincu, "Democratie nu Inseamna Intoleranta."

*Libertatea*, and *Tineretul Liber* added more shades of meaning to these polarizing packages, ranging from claims that the people who wanted to overthrow the NSF had been bribed by the opposition with national and foreign currency, to accusing the opposition of wanting to confiscate the achievements of the Revolution.<sup>66</sup> The implicit message sent to the public was that the enemies of the NSF authorities could not be honest people, protesting out of concern for the country, but were mere money-driven social outcasts, on which the power of the opposition rested. None of the pro-NSF publications seemed willing to give credit to the historical parties for what they contended to have been the real goals of their rally,<sup>67</sup> as opposed to what the electronic networks, in particular the television, made the public believe.

During the first half of February, the television anchormen barely mentioned protester meetings taking place in front of their institution, and were not specific about the demonstrators' demands for a television station devoid of governmental influence. The reaction was largely caused by

---

66. E. Ionescu, "Scrisoare Deschisa...", *Adevarul*, Feb. 1, 1990, p. 1. I. Stefan, C. Varvara, Gh. Ionita, A. Papadiuc, "Doua Zile...", *Adevarul*, Jan. 30, 1990, p. 2. G. Nastase, "Nevoia de Claritate," *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 31, 1990, p. 1. V. Mihai, "Democratia Televiziunii," *Libertatea*, Mar. 10, 1990, p. 3.

67. F. Iaru, "Box Populi," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 8, 1990, p. 1. G. Inoan, "Martor...", *Tineretul Liber*, Jan. 30, 1990, p. 2.



the television coverage of the January 28 rally. The pro-NSF printed matter condemned the rallies, as well as the FRTV trade union's motion for an independent institution. They recast the latter's demands in the light of personal aspirations for power of individuals such as Dumitru Iuga, blurring the issues addressed by the television technicians and transforming them in non-issues.<sup>68</sup> Iuga's initiative was highly personalized, while the perception that anybody criticizing governmental institutions had to be "paid" by the opposition to do so was reinforced. These meanings and symbols of "Westerners ready to buy the country for the lowest price," or "capitalists eager to confiscate the revolutionary achievements," were part of a long-standing anti-West communist propaganda. Ironically, few publications recognized these patterns, while endorsing the dominant packages of "Iuga and the West," "Iuga paid in dollars," and "the television belongs to the whole country." In this interplay of delegitimizing images of the trade union's attempt to signal irregularities in their institution and packaging of the union's message in a negative rhetoric, perceptions were solidified, sympathies and antipathies were channeled, and meanings acquired mythic

---

68. D. Novaceanu, "Democratie in Transhumanta," *Adevarul*, Feb. 6, 1990, p. 1; and "Cumpar Tun...", *Adevarul*, Feb. 20, 1990, p. 1. I. Parhon, "Razboi la Televiziune," *Romania Muncitoare*, Feb. 7, 1990, p. 3. Letter from P. Aniculesei, *Libertatea*, Mar. 3, 1990, p. 4.

force. The enemies of the authorities could only be individuals with a dishonest intention, or, as Bennett argues, individuals are shown to be responsible for social problems, not the system itself or its representatives.

On February 18, although TV cameras were ready to broadcast the rally at the governmental building early in the day, when the demonstrators were protesting against the Iliescu regime and the continuity of communist dominance through bureaucratic structures, the television did not broadcast live. When the rally turned into a show of force provoked by groups unknown to this day, the television presented the rally as being entirely the work of obscure forces inimical to the country. The only live images they showed, long after the break-in actually took place, reinforced the perception that those who broke in were people without clear goals or political claims. The people interviewed were actually curious passers-by, high-school students, and unemployed citizens who took the opportunity to see what a governmental building looks like on the inside, since the doors were open anyway.<sup>69</sup>

The pro-NSF printed network merely played with the symbols already launched, adding to the opposition's repertoire the

---

69. N. Manolescu, "Pe Micul Ecran si la Fata Locului," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 20, 1990, pp. 1, 2.

role of "destabilizing Iron-Guardists," picking up on Iliescu's own description of the "coup" that had been attempted "by forces apparently financed from abroad."<sup>70</sup> They barely mentioned that the demonstration had been peaceful during the day, and implied that those who "bribed" the protesters to demonstrate at the governmental building probably also coached them "to be peaceful in the beginning and to end in destruction." The sense of the protest against the Securitate, the communist structures leading the country, and the abuses of the authorities in power, was lost, buried in the power of a destructive imagery.

The Timisoara Proclamation was selectively presented on television at prime time, with anchormen suggesting that the Timisoara citizens wanted to secede from the mother-country, a claim which was later proved to be a gross misinterpretation of the Proclamation's content. The demonstrators' demands for a discontinuity of communist dominance, and a ban against former communist bureaucrats running in elections (which would have ruined Iliescu's chances to gain an official position), were not presented

---

70. FBIS-EEU-90-034 20 Feb. S. Motiu, V. Voiculescu, "Filmul Rusinoasei Demonstratii...", *Libertatea*, Feb. 20, 1990, pp. 1, 2. P. Popa, "Ce Aflam de la Politie," *Adevarul*, Feb. 20, 1990, p. 5.

for another nine days.<sup>71</sup> A complicated symbiosis of personalization of the document and fragmentation of its content created a false public perception about the intentions of the city that first started the Revolution.

This perception was necessary to maintain, given the claims that the Timisoara citizens were making with respect to their December intentions. They invoked the death-toll that their city suffered before any other city followed their example to revolt against the administration, and reminded the authorities that without Timisoara's sacrifices, the NSF would probably not be at the leadership of the country. Such a message could not have made the NSF look good, therefore it was re-shaped. The anchorman read parts of the document, combining passages to indicate that the only troubling message of the Timisoara citizens was their desire to secede. Interesting enough, although the FRTV director later admitted that the message of the document had been misconstrued, he refused to disavow the anchorman responsible.<sup>72</sup>

---

71. I. Stoica, "Cine are Interesul?" *Romania Libera*, Mar. 14, p. 1. F. Gabriel Marculescu, "Dialog cu Conducerea Radioteleviziunii," *Romania Libera*, Mar. 17, p. 3. Dialogue between the Committee for an Independent Television and FRTV director R. Theodorescu, 22, Apr. 13, 1990, pp. 2, 3.

72. Ibid.

The pro-NSF publications did not pay any attention to the real content of the document either, and mocked the "heroes of December" for their secessionist intentions. An article in *Adevarul* written in this vein came after the misconception was already public knowledge, a sign of the newspaper's unwillingness to admit the real criticisms by the Timisoara citizens.<sup>73</sup>

The April anti-governmental rallies were rarely presented by the television, and were aired without audio tape and with commentaries that did not capture the sense and direction of the protesters' demands.<sup>74</sup> The electoral rallies of the NSF were presented systematically, and sometimes re-manufactured, as Section 1 already highlighted.

The University Square demonstration was broadcast live on few occasions, and then only after midnight, unannounced, or filmed from the top of the highest building nearby. The protesters' demands for talks with NSF representatives in front of live TV cameras were steeped exactly in the fear that unless the meeting was covered live, TV audiences would not be informed properly about their requests. Their fears and suspicions were confirmed in the television's

---

73. M. Cuius, "Timisoara, la Sfirsit de Martie," *Adevarul*, Mar. 27, 1990, p. 1. Also, S. Andon, "Porto-Franco pe Bega?" *Adevarul*, Mar. 13, 1990, p. 1.

74. Ghe. Ceausescu, "Din Nou despre Televiziune..."

presentation of the demonstration, a presentation which had little to do with their demands for a ban on former bureaucrats to run in elections for three terms, and for a free television station.<sup>75</sup>

The GSD videotape captures moments when the students and other public figures were voicing their concern about the administration, the goals of their vigil, and the demands they addressed to the government. It also shows instances when television cameramen were present recording the demonstration, but whose footage was not put on the air in its complexity. Ana Blandiana's speech, for instance, was recorded integrally, but broadcast selectively, to make it sound as if she was dividing the Romanian population into "smart" and "not so smart" people. New apprehensions against "intellectuals" were thus subtly reinforced.

The pro-NSF newspapers, consistent in following the patterns of the electronic network, selectively presented "outrageous" happenings in the University Square, rallying to cast the students' protest in a light of promiscuity, baseness, hatred, anti-revolutionary behavior, fanaticism

---

75. C. Stefanescu, "Marathon Demonstration in Bucharest's University Square," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jun. 15, 1990.

and violence.<sup>76</sup> The conglomerate of anxiety and fear produced by such "anti-social elements" was encouraged by the printed and electronic pro-NSF outlets, which warned about possible destabilization of the country under the constant assaults of "forces inimical to the cause of democracy in Romania." The need to return to "normal" was emphasized, a normality which did not question the system, the leadership, the rules or their enforcement, a normality which was necessary to legitimize the authorities' point of view and stifle resistance, a normality that had been acquired during the previous regime at the expense of the population's civil freedoms.

Other strategies of news releases resemble Bennett's framework but do not fully coincide with it. They inscribe themselves more in the orbit of "discourses" that Foucault elaborated. In his attempt to capture instances when power's defining characteristics of permanence, inertia, repetitiousness and self-reproduction mark a complex situation, Foucault developed the argument that power

---

76. C. Dragotescu, "Demonstratie pentru...", *Adevarul*, Apr. 24, 1990, p. 2. C. T. Popescu, "Nu Asa," *Adevarul*, Apr. 26, 1990, p. 1. A. Buzoianu, "Intre Patetism...", *Adevarul*, Apr. 27, 1990, p. 1. C. Omescu, "Huocratie," *Adevarul*, Apr. 27, 1990, p. 1. D. Cristescu, "Daca Strigi...", *Adevarul*, Apr. 28, 1990, p. 3. M. Boianu, "Politica Apoliticilor," *Adevarul*, May 3, 1990, p. 1. N. Dumitrescu, "Omisiuni Regretabile," *Libertatea*, Apr. 26, 1990, p. 3. P. Calapodescu, "Dreptul de a Rastalmaci," *Libertatea*, May 4, 1990, p. 2. O. Andronic, "Cit Costa o Marturie?" *Libertatea*, May 8, 1990, p. 1. "Violenta Ideologica," unsigned art., *Libertatea*, May 8, 1990, p. 2.

emerges from all corners of reality and develops itself through numberless discourses and "power capillaries" which support it, reinforce it, and reproduce it.<sup>77</sup> I argue that, in a similar self-reproducing way, discourses of the mass media were developed in order to achieve a dominance by the NSF over the mass population and the rest of the political forces.

These repetitious strategies go beyond Bennett's conceptualization due to their insidious and delusive nature. As Foucault argues, their effectiveness rests on a paradox. "[Power] is incapable of doing anything, except to render what it dominates incapable of doing anything either, except for what this power allows it to do."<sup>78</sup> Through complicated discursive strategies, power develops a whole line of reasoning and anchors it in "truth," when the actual aim is "not to state the truth but to prevent its very emergence."<sup>79</sup> However, the power of the dominant imagery coupled with the mythic force of "truth" can create inextricable symbols and meanings. In and from them, the NSF administration generated its strength and power.

---

77. M. Foucault, p. 84, 93.

78. Ibid., p. 85.

79. Ibid., p. 55.



Some instances when strategies of anchoring discourses vis-a-vis the opposition or the opponents of the administration in a "truth" that prevented "the very emergence of truth" took place at the January 28 rally, with the ethnic clashes in March, with Doru Braia's deportation, as well as with a host of anti-governmental rallies. On January 28, a Rompres release announced that the historical parties demanded NSF's resignation. The statement was a fraud,<sup>80</sup> but the timing of its publicity was perfect. It was opportunely read on television, against a background of increased calls for the population to rescue the NSF from the coup of the historical parties. Under the circumstances, the Rompres release matched the official version about the goal of the rally and reinforced a "true" image of saboteurs of democracy about the historical parties. The citizens who chose to leave their homes and daily activities in order to go to Victoria Square and "defend democracy and the Front," responded to what they thought to be a danger for the political future of the country. They became a force working on NSF's behalf, agents of "a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them."<sup>81</sup> When the real statement of the historical parties was read, the moral damage had already

---

80. F. Iaru, "Box Populi," and "Parlambadarii."

81. M. Foucault, p. 136.

been done and the setting right of the record had little, if any, effect on the masses of angry NSF supporters. The authorities' "truth" had become overwhelming.

In March, when ethnic Hungarians, among others, revolted against the authorities' postponement to grant them schools in their native language, the official version about the violent events wavered, as Part III of Chapter III already recorded. The report of the PCNU commission nominated to analyze the facts was not made public until May, 1990, and was delayed from publication for another two years. The "truth" about the events, according to NSF publications and electronic networks, was that Iron-Guardists and historical parties representatives incited the population to riots, in another attempt to destabilize the country.<sup>82</sup> The recurrent "pattern" of destabilization that political parties tried, according to official versions, merely reinforced the dominant imagery and generated resentment against the opposition among categories of citizens.

The "truth" about Doru Braia's deportation was explained in terms of "dangerous elements coming from abroad to destabilize the country." He was said to have "bribed

---

82. S. Rosca Stanescu, "Diversiune la TV," *Romania Libera*, Mar. 22, 1990, p. 2. D. Novaceanu, "Sub Echinocitiu..." *Adevarul*, Mar. 22, 1990, p. 1; also, "Sa Ne Numaram Mortii," *Adevarul*, Mar. 24, 1990, p. 1, and "Naivii si Tara," *Adevarul*, Mar. 27, 1990, p. 1.

people to go to rallies," to have "molested a woman who refused to follow him," and to be "an element dangerous to the Romanian democracy."<sup>83</sup> When, in a dispute between the Committee for a Free Television Station and the FRTV's director Radu Theodorescu, Ana Blandiana highlighted the ridiculousness of the accusation that Braia bribed the "thousands of people" who were marching through the streets of Bucharest, the director backed away from further arguments.<sup>84</sup> *Adevarul*, however, played the tune of the official version and in the first part of April came up with more "evidence" of Braia's membership in "dubious neo-fascist groups from the West." The official statements never gave the name of the organization with which Braia was associated, despite pressures that the Group for Social Dialogue and other political groups put on Police representatives. The only important thing at the time was to destroy the possible negative statements that Braia made on TV vis-a-vis the Iliescu administration. The "truth" about critics of the administration was that they were mere destabilizers, whose credibility and moral profile were questionable.

---

83. *Romania Libera*, Apr. 7, 1990, p. 3.

84. "Dialog..." 22, Apr. 13, 1990, pp. 2, 3.

From this conglomerate of "truth," "myth," "reality," and "imagery," the authorities in power rendered most of their critics inert, reduced to an impotence which singled out the NSF by default. Public figures who raised their voices against the authorities' abuses were subtly discredited. Doina Cornea, who resigned from the NSF as soon as the organization decided to run candidates in elections, was subject to a campaign of defamation, insults and death threats.<sup>85</sup> Intellectuals such as Victor Rebenigiuc, Octavian Paler, Gabriel Liiceanu, Ana Blandiana, were the target of irony and insults in pro-Front publications such as *Fapta*, *Azi*, *Frontul*, *Adevarul*, *Dimineata* and *Libertatea*.<sup>86</sup> Their public stances were recast, amounting to a resuscitation of negative feelings against intellectuals, a practice performed by communists for over four decades.

Another instance when the administration had been seriously challenged by a group of army officers from Timisoara (Chapter III, Part II, the CDA appeal) was passed by in silence. The officers' appeal explicitly problematized the

---

85. One calumnious rumor spread by the pro-NSF media was that Cornea had been a former wife of Ratiu's, which explained her opposition to the NSF administration as partisanship for the NPP and their presidential candidate. In another attempt to discredit her, another weekly claimed that Cornea's daughter had publicly declared that her mother was "psychologically unbalanced." Cornea and her daughter sued the publication for libel. See, D. Ionescu, "Violence and Calumny in the Election Campaign."

86. M. Shafir, "The Provisional Council for National Unity: Is History repeating Itself?"

role of the army in the December revolt, while implicitly questioning the administration's reasons for not making public the development of events. As it became apparent from the short clip shown on television, the CDA members were primarily concerned with the removal from the army of officers who, they claimed, had had a pernicious role in December. At the top of their list were the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Internal Affairs, both nominated by Ion Iliescu.

Despite the CDA's request that their demands be correctly publicized, the Prime Minister denied access of the press to their official meeting. What happened behind closed doors may never be known. The GSD tape shows officers accusing one of the two contested ministers of being a Moscow-guided spy and offering documentation of their charge. Whether the meeting speculated on how the Revolution proceeded, or on the degree of Moscow's involvement in the December events, details were kept away from public knowledge. Instead, images of people with dollars and butcher knives were printed in *Adevarul*.<sup>87</sup> The Minister of Defense was released from his position quietly, without fuss, and given his retirement pay. He was not tried for any involvement in the repressions of December, nor were the generals and officers

---

87. A. Florescu, "Putea fi Totul Pasnic," *Adevarul*, Feb. 16, 1990, p. 3.

who were released by the end of March. Whether the administration tried to avoid a public scandal by not setting high officials on trial, or whether those officials were part of the speculated coup planned by the NSF against the Ceausescu administration, we have to leave to further developments. So far, no leak in that direction has occurred.

Finally, the electronic networks presented political life from the perspective of the NSF authorities, with media workers physically involved in summoning civilian population to the rescue of the government in at least two clear instances: January 28 and February 18. In one of these instances, Ion Iliescu was actively involved. On January 28, he told the TV editors that the rally should not be broadcast.<sup>88</sup> On February 18, he launched the slogan of "Iron-Guardists rallied with foreigners" to explain the "coup" that had taken place and justify the call for help addressed "to all democratic forces." The miners, one more time, came to Bucharest "to clean the place" of reactionary forces. In both instances, the population at large was exposed to combined techniques of media distortion, fragmentation, misconstruction and manipulation against the opposition parties, which turned viewers into active

---

88. T. Serbanescu, "Clarificare," *Romania Libera*, Feb. 25, 1990, p. 1.

participants in the defense of "democracy" in Romania, becoming a force generated, propelled and ordered from the shadow by the Iliescu administration.

### 3. Conclusions

The post-revolutionary environment as discussed so far indicates a selective implementation of political objectives by the authorities, to the extent that their own position remained unchallenged. It could be argued that in any social system politicians tend to foster their own goals in the first place, which would not make the NSF authorities any different.

This is when we need to recall that the specificity of the Romanian situation involves an almost moral paradox: The Revolution of December, 1989, had been essentially anti-totalitarian, with human casualties made by forces who opposed an overthrow of the regime, people still unknown to this day. The NSF originally constituted itself as "emanation of the Revolution," a provisional organism made up of people who were considered symbols of anti-totalitarian beliefs. By May, 1990, all those who had been enlisted in the NSF on account of their dissent against the previous administration had resigned in protest to the detour of the Revolution imposed by the nucleus of former nomenklatura within the NSF Council. These "reformed"

communists advocated a political direction which differed in terms, not in essence, from the former administration. They forced a major change in NSF's original commitments in a moment when they already enjoyed nationwide sympathy given the economic measures taken for an improvement in the living standards of the population and their image of deliverers of the country. With such moral capital, it is not hard to understand why some social groups indiscriminately accepted NSF's political dominance, former communists or not. The moral paradox of having communists running a country following a popular anti-communist revolt remained. During the timeframe of this study several public figures and social groups tried to address it in the form of a question that was never answered by the authorities: Did the people who died in December sacrifice themselves so that a totalitarian administration could be replaced with another?

In view of the evidence discussed so far, we can assess that the NSF's "dominant imagery" monopolized the private and public politics-consumption in the post-revolutionary environment and monitored the content of politics-expectations so as to provide a would-be democratic facade to post-Ceausescu Romania. The NSF essentially maintained and enforced a totalitarian stance no different than the one fostered by the previous administration. Their administrative regulations, ideological positions, and



behavioral tendencies indicate that, even though they were provisionally regulating the terms of the political discourse and economic developments, they did not view themselves as equal to other political groups. Nor did they honestly encourage or facilitate alternative political directions to be absorbed by the public, critically considered, and rejected or accepted in an open, participatory political dynamic. Instead, by monopolizing the political arena, monitoring and packaging the ideological content of their political orientation, forging meanings and social needs, they attained a significant degree of social regulation and control before elections legitimized their status as popular representatives, while their position at the leadership of the country was merely provisory.

This political goal was largely facilitated by central pro-NSF media outlets, particularly by the electronic networks, who marched side by side with the authorities. The intertwined workings of power and media institutions achieved a socialization of large audiences into accepting political definitions, images and constructs whose short term consequences materialized in popular support for the NSF in the May elections.

The setting of a paradigmatic pace of image and meaning making processes started early in the period discussed. The

paradigm involved creating a foundation of trust in NSF and its personalities, a sense of reliability and confidence mirrored by their legislation of measures meant to "deliver" the population from further lack of supplies. It continued by developing meanings about "democracy" that matched NSF's ideological orientation. The social groups who tend "to accept the definitions about political reality as offered by dominant groups," probably considered NSF's outlook legitimate enough, especially since the element of comparison was lacking. The forging of political connotations amounted to superimposing political figures on political meanings, a merging which created symbolics of names and the Revolution, names and political aspirations, names and democracy. Any visible flaws in the NSF's ruling manner, the kind of flaws that pluralists would consider relevant, were converted into negative connotations assigned to their adversaries by a shifting of responsibility from the NSF's backyard into the political parties.' The symbolics woven around NSF were constantly positive, legitimate and fair. Their decisions had therefore to be fair, positive and legitimate. At one semantic level, their political line was justified and glorified by translating it as the aspiration of a majority of people, the workers respectively. At another level, the ideological choice of a majority of people was associated with the type of democracy

that NSF propounded.

Once this plural meaning was assembled, the packages developed in the information transfer "...no longer play a constitutive role; they will function only as many interpretive variations upon the theme of a previously acquired unity," as Foucault would argue.<sup>89</sup> Images were developed in concentric, superimposed, uni-directional movements, going only from producers of information to consumers, to create mythic, inextricable symbols and legitimize the official imagery.

Techniques of fragmentation, dramatization, personalization and other power capillaries provided useful strategies for surrounding the subject matter with simulations that matched profiles previously developed. In January, anyone who was against NSF was "one of theirs," a "historical." After the television broadcast clips from an opposition rally showing barefoot gypsies, s/he was "one of those gypsy historical." Each attempt of the opposition to treat economic or political issues was used to reinforce their overall negative image with fresh annotations of "sellers of country," "capitalists," "Iron-Guardists," "hooligans," "former convicts, psychopaths," so that at the end of the

---

89. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization, A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Vintage Books, A division of Random House, New York, Nov. 1988, p. 134.

game each assigned image directly designated the homogeneous category and the category itself contained a plurality of concentric and indissolubly connected negative images.

The NSF was constructed as a political category whose defining symbolism of "deliverers of the nation" from the Ceausescu clan, was enriched with new meanings. The Front's decision to run candidates in elections was associated with and contained by "the workers' will." In that, the NSF category was constructed to represent the workers, which automatically legitimized their actions. Later on, multiperspectival packages of NSF as 1. the ideal government for Romania; 2. the defenders of the workers' interest; 3. trustworthy, honest, reliable, pleasant, altruistic; 4. deliverers of the country; and 5. the embodiment of democracy and freedom, were set against the elaborate octopus-like image of political parties as 1. the worst political option for Romania; 2. self-interest driven; 3. Iron-Guardists and fascists; 4. sellers of the country to the West; 5. the embodiment of political interests other than the country's. Within each team, other images-symbol were set in motion, where people opposing "the ideal situation," were in fact opposing the liberation brought about by the Revolution. These images were monitored in circles, as if several mirrors reflected various sides of

one and the same idea: the NSF was the only possible political governance.

The ideological differences were in fact vaguely contoured. While NSF committed themselves to "democracy and pluralism," so did all the other groups. The conflict was less ideological and more symbolic. A war of images was led through the media, with the Front and media assigning negative emotional values to the opposition as a whole, and their opponents trying to free themselves from the suggestion that "privatization" equals "the selling of the country," or "pluralism" equals "fascist and Iron Guardist future."

The ideology of the opposition was at times still vague itself, not well developed, weak in many aspects. The war of symbols achieved an atomization of the issues raised by the opposition, a splintering and separation of political questions. There was an annulment of their (weak) value by overwhelming the population with pictures of impoverished Romanians, enriched opposition, and foreign monopolies trampling all over the country. The economic issues addressed by the opposition were never destroyed as such by NSF and the media; they were ignored and overpowered in the interplay of power institutions. Wherever historical parties were, trouble was signaled too. They caused anxiety with their attitude and stood for reforms unrepresentative

for the country. Once this direction acquired mythic force, nothing could change the premises in such a short time.

The significance attached to the historical parties was soon extended to other opposition groups. By polarizing them around the black hole of the traditional parties they were sucked into the absorbing power of images associated with the three historical groups. Above and beyond them, only the NSF was left.

On the other hand, the Front should be given credit for the strength and courage they proved in the hard moments of December. They provided a model to follow for the frightened population with their determination, reassurance, trustworthiness and reliability. As one critic of the NSF was signaling in January, NSF's wide popularity derived from the hard moments of December when they adopted "the first normal legislation since twenty years of Ceausescu administration."<sup>90</sup> Their wavering in decisions and delays in addressing key issues that have been discussed so far may have been a result of pressures coming from various directions. Workers demanded higher salaries, students asked for autonomy, Hungarians wanted schools in their own language, miners demanded better living and working conditions, all at the same time, all at the NSF's door.

---

90. T. Serbanescu, "Criza de Incredere," *Romania Libera*, Jan. 27, 1990, pp. 1, 2.

Attempting to give the population some respite after long years of deprivations may have been overwhelming. Contradictions and inaccurate decisions may have resulted from this aggregate.

It is very likely that in these complicated dynamics, economic as well as political considerations played an important role in the population's choice of governance. If we were to look at the result of the May elections only from the pluralists' point of view, we would see what the NSF administration said all along: people voted for them in a clear majority, therefore they were the legitimate chosen representatives in democratic vote. On the surface, these are the facts. However, as we have seen, problems did exist and people voiced concerns that contradicted the NSF's claims, but these concerns were constantly stifled or ignored.

What are the solutions for this situation, then? Is Romania doomed to a political system that manipulates information and stifles the emergence of democratic practices, or is there some other way? And very importantly, is the population ready for democracy, or even ready to be exposed to the give-and-take of a democratic environment? Many critics would argue that, given the previous years of economic deprivations, the Romanian people do not care much for anything but having better living conditions and enough

money to spend a decent summer break with the family. This argument may be valid for a segment of the population, but it is unlikely to work for the whole country. The attempts at some resistance from various social groups, including working class representatives, suggest that the population was discontent with the governance but probably did not know how to overcome the situation.

If we look at the political developments that predated the May elections, the long term consequences of the monopoly acquired by one political group over power and media institutions become intertwined with the capability to resist or protest following elections which legitimized the dominant group. In the post-election period, further attempts by the same non-parliamentary groups to change the status of media institutions from subordination to the authorities did not achieve significant changes. In December, 1990, Iuga went on a hunger strike to protest against the reintroduction of censorship in the television programs. His strike was not announced for a week. When members of the FRTV trade union tried to publicize his protest on television, the screen went blank and shouts could be heard for a brief moment.<sup>91</sup> The anchormen

---

91. Radio Bucharest, Dec. 6, 1990, 9:00 p.m. Reuter, Dec. 6, 1990. Cited by C. Stefanescu, "Disputes over Control of Romanian Television," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Feb. 22, 1991, pp. 28, 29.



reappeared with apologies for the interruption and the TV program continued as if nothing happened. The Police report issued the following day denounced the disruption at the television station as "detrimental to the normal operations of an institution [that exists] for the national interest," and announced that an investigation and sanctions would follow. The government, steady in its line of denial of any criticisms brought against it, labelled the incident as "an act of anarchy, an open provocation to the country," and closed the subject.<sup>92</sup>

The shaping of meanings about power and media institutions by the dominant authorities continued following the May elections. In September, 1990, Prime Minister Petre Roman, while allowing for the possibility of "commercial television stations" to function independently from the government, implied that they would not be allowed to broadcast political programs. He claimed that "As for television stations of a political nature, they do not exist anywhere."<sup>93</sup> Ion Iliescu stressed that the notion of "independence" of the television is "relative." He even claimed that "Switzerland has one television channel and no

---

92. *Rompres*, Dec. 7, 1990. Cited by Stefanescu, "Disputes over Control...", p. 29.

93. *Rompres*, Sept. 20, 1990. Cited by C. Stefanescu, "Demands for an Independent Television," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Nov. 16, 1990, p. 24.

one thinks it undemocratic," when, in fact, Switzerland has one private and three public channels.<sup>94</sup> Such statements may have buttressed the impression that the government was right in its choice to monitor the television and radio stations for "the benefit of the country." The population at large may have been coached into submission to the government's point of view, since "even Switzerland has only one television channel," and "television stations of a political nature do not exist anywhere." Long term compliance can be detected in such processes of averting conflict through a staging of expectations, needs and necessities, as Lukes would argue.

The question of how resistance can be achieved under such conditions still remains. It seems to be complicated by the authorities' constant refusal to acknowledge that responsibility is part of the democratic process and that they are not infallible. When an official communique stated that freedom for the television did not imply making "irreverent assessments of the government,"<sup>95</sup> and when a draft law of the press forwarded to the newly elected House by the Prime Minister made provisions for terms in prison

---

94. *Rompres*, Jul. 19, 1991. Cited by C. Stefanescu, "Moves Toward an Independent Television Service," *Report on Eastern Europe*, Dec. 6, 1991, p. 15.

95. AP (Bucharest), Oct. 21, 1990. Cited by C. Stefanescu, "Demands for an Independent Television," p. 24.

for those who slander the president, the cabinet, or other officials,<sup>96</sup> the impression that Ceausescu's attitude was being reiterated by the NSF administration was reinforced. Is there anything to do then?

At face value, the answer seems to be negative. All the instances discussed suggest that the Iliescu administration is not willing to give up its monopoly over power, nor is it willing to allow democracy to emerge in any other form than the one already discussed in Section 1. Slowly, however, shyly, and in an inexperienced way, groups of civilians, intellectuals, students, workers, have understood the necessity to engage in a long-term enterprise of making the population aware of the values of democracy and of the destructive consequences of delimitations across gender, race, class and political lines. Most such people came together and created the Civic Alliance, "a structure for the cooperation of all social forces that support the values of faith, humanism, and democracy."<sup>97</sup> The initiative belonged to the Group for Social Dialogue and many other extra-parliamentary groups and individual citizens joined. Their meetings with groups of workers, miners, students, and

---

96. D. Ionescu, "Romania," *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, no. 39, Oct. 2, 1992, p. 54.

97. M. Shafir, "Oppositional Regrouping: The Democratic Antitotalitarian Forum and the Civic Alliance," *Report of Eastern Europe*, Dec. 14, 1990, p. 16.

other categories, are beginning to bear fruit. Anxieties against intellectuals or those who stayed in the West in exile are being appeased. Some form of reconciliation across class differentiation is slowly prepared, but the consequences of the destructive imagery vis-a-vis any opposition groups are still at work. The country may need another decade before the seeds of democracy can take root, a decade of being educated in the spirit of confidence, tolerance and constructive criticism.

R E F E R E N C E S

- Bennett, W. L. 1988. *News, The Politics of Illusion*. Second Edition, Longman Inc., New York & London.
- Dahl, R. A. 1961. *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Devlin, K. 1990. Postrevolutionary Ferment in the East European Media. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jul. 13:47-53.
- Edelman, M. 1964. *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana.
- Fishman, M. 1980. *Manufacturing the News*. University of Texas Press, Austin.
- Foreign Broadcast Information Service-Eastern Europe*. 1990a. 230:Jan. 29.
- . 1990b. 034:Feb. 20.
- . 1990c. 035:Feb. 21.
- Foucault, M. 1988. *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Translated from French by Richard Howard. Vintage Books Edition, A Division of Random House, New York.
- . 1990. *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1: An Introduction. Translated from French by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books Edition, A Division of Random House, Inc., New York.
- Gaventa, J. 1980. *Power and Powerlessness. Quiescence and Rebellion in An Appalachian Valley*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana.
- Information Services Department, Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty Research Institute. 1990. The East European Media: The Struggle for and with Freedom. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Dec. 7:33-36.
- Ionescu, D. 1990a. The National Salvation Front Starts to Implement Its Program. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Feb. 2:26-29.

- . 1990b. Old Practices Persist in Romanian Justice. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Mar. 9:45-48.
- . 1990c. Violence and Calumny in the Election Campaign. *Report on Eastern Europe*, May 25:31-37.
- . 1992. Romania. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*, vol 1, no. 39:53-57.
- Linden, R. 1990a. Reaction to The Revolution, Part I: The Demonstrations in Timisoara and Bucharest. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Feb. 2:33-35.
- . 1990b. Reaction to The Revolution, Part II: The Ceausescus' Overthrow and Execution. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Feb. 2:36-40.
- Luke, T. 1989. *Screens of Power. Ideology, Domination, and Resistance in Informational Society*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago.
- Lukes, S. 1974. *Power: A Radical View*. MacMillan, London.
- Manheim, J. B. 1991. *All of the People, All of the Time: Strategic Communication and American Politics*. M.E. Sharpe, Inc., Armonk, New York.
- Nelson, D. 1992. *Romania After Tyranny*. Westview Press, Inc., Boulder, Col.
- Nimmo, D. and Combs, J. E. 1983. *Mediated Political Realities*. Longman Inc., New York & London.
- Polsby, N. W. 1963. *Community Power and Political Theory*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Pompey, C. 1990. Students and the Revolution. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Mar. 2:25-31.
- Ratesh, N. 1991. *Romania: The Entangled Revolution*. The Washington Papers/152. Published with the Center for Strategic and International Studies Washington, D.C., New York.
- Shafir, M. 1990a. The New Romanian Government. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jan. 12:35-38.

- , 1990b. The Revolution: An Initial Assessment. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jan 29:34-42.
- , 1990c. The Provisional Council of National Unity: Is History Repeating Itself? *Report on Eastern Europe*, Mar. 2:18-24.
- , 1990d. The Leadership Yet to Prove Its Credibility. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jul. 13:32-37.
- , 1990e. Oppositional Regrouping: The Democratic Antitotalitarian Forum and the Civic Alliance. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Dec. 14:13-22.
- , 1991. Promises and Reality. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jan. 4:32-37.
- Socor, V. 1990a. Political Parties Emerging. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Feb. 16:28-35.
- , 1990b. Forces of Old Resurface in Romania: The Ethnic Clashes in Tirgu Mures. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Apr. 13:36-43.
- , 1990c. National Salvation Front Produces Electoral Landslide. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jul. 6:24-32.
- Stefanescu, C. 1990a. "Free Romanian Television" Losing Its Credibility. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Mar. 23:24-28.
- , 1990b. Romanian Radio and Television Coverage of the Election Campaign. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jun. 8:42-45.
- , 1990c. Marathon Demonstration in Bucharest's University Square. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jun. 15:41-45.
- , 1990d. Demands for an Independent Television. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Nov. 16:22-25.
- , 1991a. Disputes over Control of Romanian Television. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Feb. 22:28-33.
- , 1991b. Moves Toward an Independent Television Service. *Report on Eastern Europe*,

Dec. 6:13-16.

Sturdza, M. 1990. How Dead Is Ceausescu's Secret Police Force? *Report on Eastern Europe*, Apr. 13:28-36.

----- . 1991. The Miners' Crackdown on the Opposition: A Review of the Evidence. *Report on Eastern Europe*, Jan. 11:25-33.



A P P E N D I X

*Adevarul* (Bucharest, Romania). 1989. Dec. 26, 28-31.

1990. Jan. 5, 6, 9-20, 23, 24, 26-31.  
Feb. 1-10, 13-28.  
Mar. 1-2, 27-31.  
Apr. 1-28.  
May 3-20.

*Libertatea* (Bucharest, Romania). 1990. Jan. 3-9, 18, 23, 27.

Feb. 3, 7-16, 19-28.  
Mar. 1-15.  
Apr. 26, May 3, 4, 7-14, 16, 18, 21.

*Romania Libera* (Bucharest, Romania). 1989. Dec. 29-31.

1990. Jan. 9 - Apr. 28.  
May 3-6, 18, 20.

*Romania Muncitoare* (Bucharest, Romania). 1990. Jan. 17.

Feb. 1, 7, 10, 20, 21, 24.  
Mar. 2, 15, 22, 23, 28.  
Apr. 1, 10, 12, 18, 20, 26, 28.  
May 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19.

*Tineretul Liber* (Bucharest, Romania). 1989. Dec. 26, 31.

1990. Jan. 6-10. Jan. 19, 21-31.  
Feb. 1-4, 8-17, 20, 22.  
Mar. 2-16, May 11.

*Zig-Zag* (Bucharest, Romania). 1990. 3-10 May.

*22* (Bucharest, Romania). 1990. Apr. 6, 13.

May 11, 17, 25. Jun. 1.

## VITA

Georgeta Barbulescu graduated from the University of Timisoara in 1980, with a Bachelor of Arts in English and French Literature and Language. After the collapse of the Ceausescu regime, she joined the Green Party and run in the May, 1990, elections for a seat in the House of Representatives. She was elected depute and served in the Parliament until August, 1990, when she came to the United States as a visiting scholar. In 1991, she enrolled in the Masters Program in Political Science at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, where she was awarded the degree of Master of Arts in December, 1993. At present, she teaches at Suffolk County Community College, Long Island, NY.

*Georgeta Barbulescu*