

Can We Talk About A Successful Transition Of The Media From The Communist Model To What We See Today?

Saturday, November 22, 2014, 9.15–10.45, New York University Prague

Moderator: Jeremy Druker

Panelists: Tudor Vlad, Kaarle Nordenstreng, Jan Urban

Moderator and Executive Director of Transitions, **Jeremy Druker** opened by commenting on the current state of media in the Czech Republic. He expressed that, while certain recent developments like the increased presence of media oligarchs are detrimental, the public broadcasting system is quite well developed and the media scene remains generally free. He noted that the kind of innovative media already prevalent in the US will likely develop in the Czech Republic after an initial lag.

Panelist and Associate Director of the James M. Cox Jr. Center for International Mass Communication Training and Research at the University of Georgia in the United States, **Tudor Vlad**, presented the results of his institution's research comparing three indices for freedom of the media: Freedom House, Reporters without Borders, and IREX. *"The idea is that there is some value in [these] measures,"* he said. *"But of course there are limitations."* The results of his research contradict the traditional media model wherein higher competition is expected to correlate with higher quality; instead, the findings indicate that moderate competition correlates with higher quality content, whereas both very low and very high competition correspond with lower quality journalism.

Kaarle Nordenstreng, Professor Emeritus of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Tampere, Finland, began by remembering both the Prague Spring and the Velvet Revolution. He traced the development of the International Organization of Journalists in the Czech Republic, where he served as President until 1990.

Speaking about the media environment in the post-communist period, Mr. Nordenstreng said that *"the public space that has obviously emerged out of these changes was very promising... [but] the potential has not been fulfilled."* He further noted that *"the mainstream media...tend to yield toward instant, superficial, stereotype, infotainment content."*

Journalist and Professor at New York University, **Jan Urban**, described the post-communist transformation as *"a form of identity crisis."*

"It is uniquely naive to believe that a prisoner, after decades of imprisonment, can come out of prison and live the full life of a free man. We were in the same situation [after the fall of communism]. It is especially difficult to explain to a Westerner that freedom is just a prerequisite for starting the change, and not the change itself," he said.

Mr. Urban remarked that a global transformation of media coincided with the post-communist transition. Such complex, drastic change precluded an adequate learning period for media. The journalists who shaped the media culture in the Czech Republic post-revolution were young and inexperienced; they also perpetuated a political agenda. *"Instead of being journalists, we tried to help the revolution, and, in fact, we damaged it,"* he explained.

Mr. Urban lamented the quality of modern journalistic content: *"For me, the truth was always the highest value in the media,"* he said. *"I was saddened when I realized the...gossip is much more marketable than my hard-won truth."* He noted the increased number of Internet media perpetuating "vicious" Moscow propaganda in the past one to two years, and said that the Czech media lacked the capacity to cope with the issue: *"As usual, when they meet with a problem, they don't look at it."*