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an der Universität zu Köln

Serhiy Kvit

Mass Communications of an Independent Ukraine,  
in the Context of Normative Theories and  
as an Evidence of Modernization Theory

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**Institut für Rundfunkökonomie**  
**an der Universität zu Köln**

Hohenstaufenring 57a

50674 Köln

Germany

Telefon: +49 (221) 23 35 36

Telefax: +49 (221) 24 11 34

## **Serhiy Kvit**

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*Key words: mass communications, Orange Revolution, modernization theory, normative theory, post-soviet area*



Serhiy Kvit

## **Mass Communications of an Independent Ukraine, in the Context of Normative Theories and as an Evidence of Modernization Theory<sup>\*</sup>**

### **1. Introduction**

At the former conference of the Institute for Broadcasting Economics, which was organized jointly with the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in Kyiv, I tried to discuss the history of the movement for establishing public broadcasting in Ukraine. Today, my intention is to describe day-to-day realities of mass communications in Ukraine, and the circumstances under which we want to implement this ambitious project. Investigation into charge of mass communications in post-soviet, post-totalitarian and post-colonial Ukraine provokes special interest, aimed at developing an adequate understanding of the modern global world's dynamics. On the one hand, practical importance of this investigation considerably differs from mass communication studies in emerging states of Africa, Asia and Latin America too. From there we got more than sufficient proof of the total failure of the modernization theory as a part of the strategy of western cultural, economic and media imperialism. On the other hand, we need to separate Ukrainian media studies from Russian or post-soviet investigations which disappoint researchers, media experts, politicians and journalists, and make them to reconsider existent normative theories, started by the well-known work by F. Siebert, T. Peterson, and W. Schramm "Four Theories of the Press" (1956).

For changes in Ukrainian media sphere, which are in progress since the end of 1980-s, an umbrella term exists: "media reforms". Unlike reforms in other fields,

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\* The author is the President of the National University of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy". He is a Professor at Kyiv-Mohyla School of Journalism. His research focuses on Mass Communications, University Management, and Philosophical Hermeneutics. He is also the President of Media Reform Center and is a member of the National Commission for the Development of Freedom of Speech. Serhiy Kvit is an author of 9 books and more than 100 articles. His last book "Mass Communications" (2008) shows contemporary Ukrainian Media through new achievements of Media Theories and Research.

The article is based on his speech hold at the conference "Public media: Ukrainian-German exchange of ideas", organized by the Institute for Broadcasting Economics at the University of Cologne and supported by the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, DAAD, and Auswärtiges Amt on October 20, 2010 in Cologne. It discusses day-to-day realities of mass communications in Ukraine before and after the Orange Revolution, contributing to a better understanding of the circumstances under which attempts to implement the project of Public broadcasting are being made.



such as economics, science, education and public health, they seem to be more systematic and consistent. The term of “media reforms” was implemented by the Media Reform Centre<sup>1</sup> under the School of Journalism<sup>2</sup> of the National University of “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy”<sup>3</sup> since 2002. The Media Reform Centre was the first that started theoretical generalisation of the processes in Ukrainian mass communications, and after the Orange Revolution the first systematic research in Ukrainian media reforms was pursued here under the title: “Are the Changes in Ukraine’s Mass Media Induced by the Orange Revolution Really Irreversible?”<sup>4</sup> In 2004, the journalists’ revolution was a part and the main achievement of the Orange Revolution. Ukrainian media reforms allow taking a fresh look at the logic of the development of the whole post-soviet area.

First we will discuss Ukrainian mass communications in the context of distinct aspects of the critical theory and the modernisation theory. After that we shall move to the necessity of development and adjustment of the normative theories, taking into account the specifics of development in the post-soviet area states. Finally, we will put the Ukrainian realities into the context of global regularities of development of mass media and national media systems.

## 2. About Modernisation Theory

Assuming the main theories of mass communications in the emerging states, A. Singhal and P. Sthapitanonda discuss three development paradigms: Dominant, Dependency and Alternative<sup>5</sup>. The first one reflects the classical idea of modernization, or westernization, according to which these countries need to join the world dominant trend of the economical development. Media here get a role of an agent of social changes. The Dependency Paradigm is an antithesis to the modernization perspective, and considers it as neo-colonialism. It is based on the traditions of the Frankfurt school, and encourages the countries resisting to the more developed “aggressors” to close the ranks. The Alternative paradigm also appears as antithesis to the Dominant Paradigm, but demonstrating another, “pluralistic” prospect. It emphasizes that every region, society or social group must find its own way of evolution. First of all, such ideological missions are being actualized, as asserting of civil rights and peace fight, ecological and feministic movements in industrial countries, liberal and national movements in communist and emerging states. The demands to mass communications are: diversity, deinstitutionalization, and locality.

Needless to remind that all three paradigms in some measure complement each other, and, at the same time, utopianism is their common disadvantage,

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<sup>1</sup> The Media Reform Centre: <http://www.mediareform.com.ua/>

<sup>2</sup> Kyiv-Mohyla School of Journalism: <http://en.j-school.kiev.ua/about/>

<sup>3</sup> The National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy: [http://www.ukma.kiev.ua/eng\\_site/index.php](http://www.ukma.kiev.ua/eng_site/index.php)

<sup>4</sup> PAVLENKO / KLYMENKO 2006

<sup>5</sup> SINGHAL / STHAPITANONDA 1996



as long as - according to A. Singhal and P. Sthapitanonda - there is no established definition for the term of “development”, and proper allowance for human and cultural factors was not made. So, there is no standard model, acceptable for everyone. Particularly, a globalisation phenomenon should be taken into account. Let’s notice, that the mention of human and cultural factors not only disaffirm, but, from the other side, confirm the modernisation theory. Since we can suppose that there are post-colonial countries for which modernisation, or westernisation, would be advantageous. In this context, it is worth to pay attention to J. Curran’s notice: “Nations have different languages, political systems, power structures, cultural traditions, economies, international links and histories. These find continuing expressions in the media of different nation states”.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of the fact that in the epoch of globalisation the age of national states seems to be becoming history, we cannot claim that a universal media system is arising. Conversely, specifics of national media systems keep depending directly on needs and requirements of the societies in which that systems work.

The critical theory and its variations have a long tradition of denying the modernisation theory. On account of that, formulating the theory of cultural materialism, M. Mousseau writes that she proceeds from the assumption that social life is a reply on real-world problems of existence. “Cultural materialism highlights three layers in all social systems: the infrastructure, the structure, and the superstructure. The infrastructure is the base layer: the material conditions of human existence. How do people relate to their environment? How do humans produce and consume? The structure refers to a society’s social and political institutions. What sort of familiar and non-familiar associations, organisations, and institutions are found in the society? The final layer, the superstructure, is a society’s ideologies, paradigms, and values”<sup>7</sup>. So, the theory of cultural materialism disaffirms the modernisation theory.

If the modernisation theory postulates that political development and globalisation are results of the expansion of the Western culture and education, the theory of cultural materialism insists that the cause of the mentioned effects is infrastructure, but not superstructure. M. Mousseau emphasizes on the principal difference between national and political culture: “... if we start with the superstructure, then it is difficult to determine what aspects of the “model” culture a developing country should import. The shaving of the beard, the wearing of the Western hat, and, as missionaries have thought, “the singing of Western hymns” will not change political culture”<sup>8</sup>. That is why specifics of political, not national culture should be considered first of all. “The market civilisation of the present age originated in Western Europe by chance; it might just as easily have originated in twelfth-century Mali. But because it began in Europe, most

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<sup>6</sup> CURRAN 2002, p. 183

<sup>7</sup> MOUSSEAU 2002, p. 101

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 119



everyone today confuses liberal political culture with “Western” indigenous culture”<sup>9</sup>. But these statements are not really obvious, and we can question them.

### 3. Freedom of Speech in the Post-Colonial Ukraine

For that purpose we need to go to Ukrainian experience. As we have already mentioned, Ukraine is a post-colonial and post-totalitarian country with hundreds-of-years experience of struggle for independence. Only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century independence of Ukraine was proclaimed, in the period of sanguinary battles, four times: in 1917 – in Kyiv, in 1939 – in Khust, in 1941 – in Lviv, and in 1991 – in Kyiv. Let us also keep in mind tens of millions of Ukrainian victims of two world wars, soviet terror and Holodomor (famine genocide). However, upraise of independent Ukrainian state on the shambles of Soviet Union (as well as preceding formation of new states on the African continent) the whole world took for a great surprise, not just a news. On the other hand, because of the European basis of Ukrainian culture, the educational level of Ukrainian citizens and their political culture, Ukraine cannot be relegated to the developing states. I omit purely economic indexes, as long as the modernisation theory appeals first of all to cultural, social and political standards.

The Orange Revolution in 2004 also witnessed Euro centrism in the development of Ukrainian mass communications. It became obvious, that Ukrainians have organic need in the freedom of speech. In the same time, journalists cannot be estimated as the most progressive and rushing to changes part of the Ukrainian society. Journalists’ revolution was not a forerunner, but a consequence of the Orange Revolution, as long as freedom of speech was one of the main demands and needs of the Ukrainian people. “One of the most remarkable and momentous results of the Orange Revolution was the journalist revolution, when journalists of leading TV channels and print media refused en mass to carry out the recommendations of *temnyki*, distort information, and manipulate public consciousness – practices that were extensively applied during the 2004 presidential campaign. Practically within one day the image of the main TV channels, radio programs and print media underwent change”<sup>10</sup>, – the aforementioned research of the Media Reform Center says.

I would like to emphasize that the progress of mass communications, including first of all the principle of the freedom of speech and the concept of public interest, depends directly on the societies’ needs. If a nation wants to have democratic state and freedom of speech, it will have them. But if things like that do not belong to the nation’s list of priorities, it is impossible to explain their benefits from outside. Or, in case someone tries to do that, the discussion gets the tone of “you don’t know what you really need”, and hence it does not make sense because of own obtrusiveness, and can be criticised as a kind of imperialism.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 120

<sup>10</sup> PAVLENKO / KLYMENKO 2006, p. 81



Most disappointments of western politics and media specialists about the possibility of democratisation of modern national media are connected with Russia and China. We know about the conflict of the Google Company and the Chinese government because of political censorship. Censorship in China has general support and cannot be impugned from inside. As for Russia, the freedom of speech became the main cause of freezing relations with Ukraine after the Orange Revolution. V. Putin uses a special term – “ukrainisation” – as the most dangerous thing for his country, meaning first of all democratisation and freedom of speech. He is convinced that it would inevitably cause destruction of power in Russia.<sup>11</sup> Writing about the Orange Revolution, T.G. Ash and T. Snyder also noticed that it constitutes a menace to modern Russia. The authors mentioned a joke which was popular in Russia at the end of 2004: “Leonid Kuchma wrote a book called *Ukraine is not Russia*. Now Putin is writing a book called *Russia is not Ukraine*”.<sup>12</sup>

In response to V. Putin’s ludicrous statements that the West will never bring Russia to knees (in the sense of the modernisation theory realisation, and implementing standards of western democracy) the Czech journalist M. Putna published an article “Russia, down on your marrowbones!”. He writes that Russia itself must drop to knees, for all the wrongs it did to different peoples in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Russia must apologize to Ukrainians for Holodomor which took 10 million lives, to Poles – for occupation and Katyn slaughter, to Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians – for mass deportations, to Hungarians – for invasion in 1956, to Czechs and Slovaks – for intervention in 1968, to Afghans – for invasion in 1980, to Chechens – for the wars started in 1090-s. M. Putna also invokes Russian authority to drop to knees in front of its citizens for all the wrongs done after the Bolsheviks’ putsch in 1917, including corruption and disrespect for person, and for its disability to provide worthy and free life to Russian people.<sup>13</sup>

But we cannot prune down the situation, incriminating evil intent against people to the Russian authority. It can be stated that V. Putin’s and D. Medvedev’s political success (their levels of confidence normally go beyond 60 %) is directly connected to their efforts aimed at the centralisation of the state governance, and curtailment of political liberties, the liberty of speech first of all. For the large majority of Russian people, there are, unfortunately, more important things – strong state and empire greatness. Since, the political course of Putin-Medvedev should be considered not only as a complex of manipulations with mass consciousness of the Russian society, but also as a realisation of their electorate’s wish to restore the empire, no matter how it will be called – Russian or Soviet. Under such circumstances the freedom of speech is being considered as an evil, threatening the realisation of the empire myth. According to Russian chauvinistic mythology the restoration is impossible without Ukraine, as long as

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<sup>11</sup> WITHOUT AUTHOR 2010

<sup>12</sup> ASH / SNYDER 2005

<sup>13</sup> PUTNA 2007



Kyiv, “the mother of Russian cities”, is situated on the Ukrainian territory. That is why the main vector of Russian political, propaganda and information aggression is directed to Ukraine.

#### 4. Development of the Normative Theories of the Press

We have approached now the concluding issue, namely reconsidering or developing the normative theories of the press. F. Siebert, T. Peterson, and W. Schramm in their canonic work “Four Theories of the Press” consider authoritarian, libertarian, totalitarian and social responsibility models. There are some more attempts to explore the list, taking into account the new world realities. For example, D. McQuail added some new models, like a professional model and an alternative media model.<sup>14</sup> The authors of the first book mentioned that “any theory of relationship of the mass media communication to the organised society of which it is a part is determined by certain basic philosophical assumptions (or conclusions, if you wish) about man and the state. For our purposes these areas of assumption can be identified as follows: (1) the nature of man, (2) the nature of society and of the state, (3) the relation of man to the state, and (4) the basic philosophical problem, the nature of knowledge and truth”.<sup>15</sup> Today, the new methodologies and new models are emerging.

For example, J. Ostini and A. Fung, pointing out idealism and overestimation of the role of political economy in the “Four Theories of the Press”, propose: “Use the model incorporating journalistic values and state systems (...). This new model incorporates the dimensions of individual journalistic autonomy and the structures of state policy. It thus increases understanding of press systems and the societies in which these systems exist”.<sup>16</sup> The authors consider interaction of the authoritarian and democratic state systems with liberal or conservative (individual professionalisation or collective professionalisation) models of individual journalists’ values (practices, common for a concrete state). They conclude that the media system of China can be defined as conservative-authoritarian, of Japan as conservative-liberal, of the USA as liberal-democratic, of Hong Kong as liberal-authoritarian.

How then can we estimate the mass communications of modern Russia? In his research “Lessons from Russia. A Neo-Authoritarian Media System”, J. Beker writes: “In the Putin era, the Russian state has increasingly interfered with media autonomy”,<sup>17</sup> so “the Russian press under Putin can best be understood as a neo-authoritarian media system (...). Perhaps the bear example of neo-authoritarianism is in Zimbabwe”.<sup>18</sup> The new Russian realities, indeed, indicate the return of the state to traditional authoritarian features: “Contemporary Rus-

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<sup>14</sup> MCQUAIL 2010, p. 184

<sup>15</sup> SIEBERT / PETERSON / SCHRAMM 1956, p. 10

<sup>16</sup> OSTINI / FUNG 2002, pp. 54-55

<sup>17</sup> BECKER 2004, p. 147

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pp. 149-150

sia shares much with authoritarian regimes past and present”<sup>19</sup> Since, “the state remains the most important threat to the emergence of democratic media systems”<sup>20</sup> We encounter an example when neither state nor society is interested in democratisation of the public sphere. The freedom of speech is not being considered as a value or as a technological tool for improving life standards. Corruption, which belongs to the list of the main typological characteristics of developing countries and post-soviet countries, seems to be more attractive. Just because that is an administrative tool people have already got used to.

The treat of corruption is in the first place in the modern world. After the Berlin Wall fell down, and owing to globalisation, we see an approach and interpenetration of practices of the Western World with its romantic set of liberal values, and of the states that want to improve their social and economical standards (mainly that is about political elites seeking for personal enrichment). Competition for attractive markets of China, India, Russia and Brazil inevitably causes corrupting of the Western business. When in Rome, do as the Romans do. The values of public sphere also are getting more and more relative, situational, and step by step turn into anachronism. When researching globalisation, we must also remember about globalisation of corruption. Because the freedom of speech does not belong to the Western tools being borrowed by post-soviet and developing countries.

Thereafter, the normative theories must cover the new realities and include to their typology not only criteria from the political economy field, but also more profound consideration of cultural priorities, which with necessity returns us to the modernisation theory. However, now it is seen not as a tool of neo-colonialism, but from the position of importance of superstructure for media systems typing. And it should be typing not through consideration of the dominating ideology, propagated by ruling elites, but through the in-depth study of value priorities working in certain cultures. In other words, the tool of freedom cannot be given from the outside. It can work only where people have inherent need in free media.

But the freedom of speech can be threatened by external factors. For all the post-soviet area, Russia is a negative centre of gravity for the development of all the civil liberties. Conceptually, it is being presented in such way: the Russian “sovereign democracy” defends, allegedly, the values of the “Russian Civilisation”. It should be noted, that the sovereign democracy is consonant to strengthening authoritarianism with deviation to totalitarianism, suppression of oppositional movements and restoration de facto of the position of tsar (president). The concept of the “Russian world” beyond Russia, from the Kremlin ideologists’ point of view corresponds to two main criteria: presence of Russian-speaking population and “natural” lack of will among this population to have the freedom of speech.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 159

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 158



This concept is xenophobia-based, which can be illustrated with an article by I. Andreev "Russian Language as Shield and Sword". The author points at Kyiv-Mohyla academy (KMA) as a danger to extension of the Russian civilisation to include Ukraine. The danger is that "teaching in the university is provided in Ukrainian and English. High-quality education in English enables to omit referring to Russian cultural found, which draws the development of all the progressive disciplines out of the stream of post-soviet science, and shifts it to the development of contemporary intellectual trends of the West. (...) KMA faculty members openly declare their "democratic" orientation, which means, in Ukrainian circumstances, looking up to anti-Russian political forces".<sup>21</sup> By the way, the new political reality formed after V. Yanukovych's election win, predetermined the establishing of a journalists' movement "Stop the Censorship" that started at KMA this year, on May 21.

## 5. Conclusions

The new post-orange political situation is difficult. On April 29, 2010, OSCE expressed its concern over the state of the freedom of speech in Ukraine in a special "Statement on mass media in Ukraine". Here, in particular, violence and oppressions of journalists were mentioned. A polish journalist, A. Eliaz, in "Gazeta Wyborcha" writes about "The Doomsday of the Freedom of Speech in Ukraine", pointing out the attempts to close a number of television companies. The author makes a dismal prognosis: "The freedom of speech on the banks of Dnipro will be limited to Internet, a few radio stations and newspapers. Ukraine is on the drift to Belarus and Russia with their authoritarian rules".<sup>22</sup> That is why cheery declaration of the Ukrainian authority about readiness to establish public broadcasting immediately are received with incredulity by the professional media sphere, all the more so taking into account that it is proposed to clarify the concept of public broadcasting first. The entire necessary conceptual and normative basis has been already developed. This work lasted since the middle of 1990-s.

So, we can come to the following conclusions. First, the post-colonial, post-totalitarian and post-soviet status of Ukraine is of a special kind, and Ukraine cannot be compared to developing countries. The main typological feature of Ukraine is the principal possibility to apply the modernisation theory. That accords with the statements that Ukrainian society needs freedom of speech and free press, as values and tools for the public sphere development.

Second, the globalization process, dissolving successively the after-effects of the cold war and the terms of the bipolar world, induces reconsideration of the existent normative concepts of the press. The new reality makes us to keep in mind not only consistent patterns of political economics and the nature of person and society, not only the structure of the state politics and common journal-

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<sup>21</sup> АНДРЕЕВ 2006

<sup>22</sup> ELIASZ 2010



ists' practices, but also priorities and values that are common for some societies. These priorities and values are connected with elements of both political and national culture. The detailed study of them is important not only for the developing countries and countries with transition economies, but also for rich developed countries, as long as globalisation defuses typical for the period of cold war West's resentment over some practices of the "Soviet block". What is proceeding now is not just proselytising of new members to the club of the Western World (meaning by that professional standards and democratic values), but a complex transfusion of cultures, causing some system changes in the West towards the compliance with dominating corruption practices of the countries for whose markets the Western countries compete. And there is a danger that the process will also permeate into the field of media and the freedom of speech.

Third, the post-soviet studies should be divided into studies of different countries in which societies have different needs: in democratic freedoms or authoritarianism. Or, under other criteria, those becoming integrated into the world community, or not becoming integrated, on principle. Since, Russia requires a separate consideration of its striving to find a "special" way of development for "Russian civilisation" and "sovereign democracy". And the fact that these euphemisms varnish plain aggressiveness, xenophobia and corruption should not be ignored. The question is in what measure the situation is caused by needs of the Russian society, and in what measure it is a result of manipulations of the political authority.

Finally, forth, there must be no talk of something like "Russian sphere of interests in the post-soviet area", as long as that would mean total abnegating of democracy and restoration of the Russian Empire, where the most part of population is proud of the crimes committed by tsarist and soviet regimes, instead of repenting them. Under such circumstances, Ukraine, trying to develop a civilised public sphere, independent media and public broadcasting, meets a potent countering from the Russian "sovereign democracy", which shows a strong dislike for the freedom of speech and the free market of ideas, because they threaten its authoritarian existence. The strengthening of Ukrainian independence depends on realisation of the above mentioned ambitious projects, and on consolidation of the society round the "discourse of freedom".



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