

Guest Editor's introduction



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In 2014, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the largest and most significant enlargement in the history of the European Union. In 2004, altogether 10 new countries entered the EU, among them a significant number of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries of the former “Eastern Bloc,” i.e. Eastern European countries and former allies of the Soviet Union in the Warsaw Pact until 1991, as well as the former Soviet republics and now independent Baltic States Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Three years later, with Bulgaria and Romania, two more CEE countries followed. One question that arises with this anniversary is how, besides the political or economic unification process, the academic integration of those new member states proceeded since 2004?

Following this question, in October 2013, the IIC International and Intercultural Communication Section of the German Communication Association (DGPK) organized an international conference under the title: “Transnational and Transcultural Communication Research in Central and Eastern Europe: Trends, Developments, Debates.” On the one hand, the conference presented a “geographical bridging”: it was hosted by the Austrian Institute for Comparative Media and Communication Studies (Austrian Academy of Sciences/Alpen-Adria-University of Klagenfurt) in cooperation with the Slovak Department of German, Dutch and Scandinavian Studies (Comenius University Bratislava), financed by the Austrian Foreign Ministry, and held in Vienna and Bratislava. On the other hand, the conference also strived for an “academic bridging,” by gaining an overview of the state of research on intercultural and international communication in CEE countries. One contribution to this conference is among the range of eclectic papers that have been selected for publication in this Spring 2015 issue of the *Central European Journal of Communication*. This issue altogether mirrors the impression that the organizers of the IIC conference had gained from the submitted abstracts and presentations: namely that the CEE region has become an integral part of European communication research.

First and foremost, the transitional context of the CEE region since the early 1990s has provoked comparative research into factors and indicators that help to model and measure national transformation processes of media systems, and that analyse the effects of those transformations on journalistic cultures and the transition and con-

solidation processes in the new democracies. One central focus hereby today lies on Russia (see Klyueva & Tsetsura), even though those aspects are not only analysed in single country case studies, but are increasingly approached from a comparative perspective between different CEE countries (see the paper by Bajomi-Lázár in this issue).

However, CEE-related communication research has also broadened its thematic spectrum. Here, one focus of analysis lies on the changing nature of the relationships between states, the media and the public (see Sarlós; Loveless), while other studies observe agenda-setting models from broader geographical angles (see Hanzal et al.). Another area of intercultural and international comparisons addresses the relevance and function of images and identities. Those studies observe international relations as patterns of action that shape and are shaped by how states (or supranational entities) see themselves in relation to other entities, or what effects those perceptions have for international news coverage and public opinion (see Grimm; Zięba). One topic that could present a future thematic area is an additional focus on how EU policies and communication strategies affect public perception of and participation in EU-related decision-making processes in countries of the CEE region. Our conference revealed that, compared to older EU member states, communication research in CEE countries still only rarely observes the form and content of EU-distant and EU-critical public opinion, and still lacks more profound analyses of a developing EU citizenship and EU identification among the populations of those countries (see D'Ambrosi).

Secondly, the papers of both this issue and the conference reflect a wide spectrum of methodological and theoretical variety — ranging from statistical survey analysis, experimental designs to analyse the effects of media structure on media use, or experimental designs to trace the effects of historic media content on value orientation and national identity, to quantitative and qualitative content analyses of national print media or Parliamentary debates. Thirdly, CEE countries are integrated in EU-wide comparative studies, a number of which have been carried out by multi-national academic research teams. This indicates a broader spectrum of academic approaches in the EU region, with differing theoretical traditions and methodological techniques meeting and competing in international collaborations or comparative designs.

Thus, altogether CEE countries have developed from an object of investigation (from a Western European perspective) to equally acknowledged investigators, collaboration partners, or even leading research teams in European comparative research designs. In media policy terms, “during the last 25 years it was more about imitating Western rules, which in the new democracies were translated into national languages and placed in a legal framework and political statements,” as Andrei Richter argues in his interview in this issue. Compared to that, in research terms, we can claim that since 2004 and almost 25 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, CEE countries form a central pillar of the European (comparative) research agenda in the field of international and intercultural communication, not just as objects of research but as equal academic partners.