

Media pluralism by default: The case of Moldova



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ABSTRACT: This article shows how Moldova's weak political state, anemic economy, and cultural fragmentation are interestingly key contributors to the country's media pluralism. Print and broadcast journalists from Moldovan-language and Russian-language media in Moldova represent a variety of views, ranging from independent coverage to advocacy journalism, according to several national and international monitoring groups. Yet the country has endured governmental, financial, and ethnic instability during the 17 years since its independence from the Soviet Union. This analysis shows how such instability can fuel media diversity, rather than quash it. The findings expand what is known about media pluralism by demonstrating how it can grow in seemingly inhospitable environments.

KEYWORDS: journalism, media pluralism, Moldova, pluralism by default, post-Soviet transformation



I think that if there will be a radical change in everything, in all spheres of life: in education, in economy, in farming, in the mentality of people, in consciousness, I believe I will see an independent newspaper in 25 years – in one generation. If God gives me 25 more years I will see it.

Moldovan journalist Vlad Pohila (personal interview, 1992)



INTRODUCTION

Pohila's desire for press independence matched the sentiments of many Moldovan journalists in the early years after the former Soviet republic became its own nation. Yet other journalists neither expected nor wanted independent media. Stefan Secareanu, who in the 1990s was a member of the center-right Popular Front political party and was editor of a newspaper funded by that party, was content to have his publication serve the political role of the "organ of the liberation movement" (personal interview, Secareanu, 1992). During the 17 years since Moldovan independence, one constant has been the diverse opinions regarding the preferred role of journalists. Moldova has a mixed media system that ranges from journalists who shun political allegiances and provide balanced coverage to journalists who are ac-

tive political party leaders. "Media pluralism is highly developed in Moldova," according to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (Haraszti, 2004, p. 2), and Moldovan media are the second most-trusted institution in the country, behind the church (Moldovan Media News, 2007). The focus of the present study is to provide an understanding of what factors contribute to Moldova's media pluralism.

On the surface, one would not expect to find thriving media diversity in Moldova. The country is governed by the Communist Party, has the worst gross domestic product rating among Central and Southeast European countries, and has endured internal conflict on its eastern border (Way, 2003; World Bank, 2007). Yet this seemingly inhospitable political, economic, and ethnic environment also provides room for different viewpoints in mass media. While the Communists technically are in charge, no leader, government agency, or political party has enough power to fully implement restrictions on private or even government-sponsored media outlets (Haraszti, 2004; March, 2006; Way, 2003). While a majority of residents say their country's economy needs much improving (Abbott, 2007), Moldova continues to move from a command to a market economy, and Moldova's business climate is freer from government interference than the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and most other countries in that region (Kane et al., 2007). As a result, enough capital and economic freedom exists to create and operate a wide variety of media outlets, albeit on a small scale. Even Moldova's ethnic and language differences have contributed to media pluralism. Such cultural fragmentation has spawned many specialized media outlets to express various ethnic viewpoints (King, 2000).

This study builds on the notion of "pluralism by default" (Way, 2002; 2003) by demonstrating how a country's weakness and instability can prevent authoritarian control of journalists, thereby allowing media pluralism (Mickiewicz, 2000). The concept of media pluralism, which is defined as genuine diversity of perspectives concerning how mass media cover issues, is important to understand because it is considered vital for any free society (Lintz, Stepan, 1996). The point of this study is not to argue that Moldova's situation is ideal, but instead to expand what is known about adequate environments for media pluralism by showing that strong democratic institutions and a robust economy are not prerequisites. In addition, findings are examined for how they can contribute to theory about journalism and post-Soviet transformation.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Fifteen Moldovans who have been involved with journalism were interviewed during 1992 and 2005, allowing for a longitudinal examination of what cultural, political, and economic factors influence journalists and how those factors might change over time (see Appendix). Participants included journalists for newspapers, radio, and television, and represented both Moldovan-language and Russian-language me-

dia. No compensation was provided for participation. Some interviews were conducted in person while others were done *via* e-mail. Some interviews were performed in English while others were translated from Russian or Moldovan, a form of Romanian. Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique in which initial interviews led to contacts with additional journalists. The snowball process included contacting The Independent Journalism Center, an independent non-governmental organization in Chisinau, Moldova, and the Center for Security and Science, an academic organization in Virginia, in the United States.

The interviews were consistent with McCracken's (1988) interviewing procedure, which calls for "active listening," guarding against being too obtrusive, and asking open-ended questions to stimulate conversation. Some questions explored their journalism education and background, while other questions sought to understand the role of economics, politics, and culture in their work. Other questions asked them to talk about what they wanted Moldovan journalism to look like in the future.

The researcher analyzed all of the interview transcripts by using a grounded theory approach, which includes the constant comparative method (Glaser, Strauss, 1967). This approach involved developing categories from the data collected, and then comparing and integrating categories to reveal patterns and generate hypotheses to explain those patterns. The result produces hypotheses about Moldovan journalism that are grounded in the data collected.

MOLDOVA'S PLURALISTIC MEDIA SYSTEM

A greater theoretical understanding of media pluralism is needed if researchers are to make sense of media systems that include diverse perspectives yet exist in political and economic conditions traditionally viewed as stifling pluralism. At the heart of media pluralism is the idea of diversity, the necessity of having a wide range of news organizations, reporting styles, sources, and owners. Media pluralism is not synonymous with economic competition, though the diversity of media outlets in a pluralistic system – which can range from politically independent to political advocates – supports the competition of ideas (Arino, 2004; Mickiewicz, 2000; Woods, 2007).

Moldova's diversity occurs collectively across the country's media system. Moldova has more than 60 regularly published newspapers which are divided almost equally between Moldovan-language and Russian-language papers. There are 10 dailies; the rest are weekly or biweekly. Broadcast facilities are more plentiful, with more than 40 radio stations and 170 TV stations, some of which supply program content from Romania or Russia. Steady advertising revenue is difficult to find for many in the mass media (Media Sustainability Index: Moldova, 2006). As a result, many print and broadcast outlets receive subsidies of some kind from the government, political parties, or business interests in Moldova as well as Romania and

Russia. In addition, few publications have a circulation of more than 10,000. However, most major print and broadcast outlets have enough money to maintain a Web site for its organization and e-mail for its reporters (Corghencea, 2003).

The type of journalism practiced at these media organizations is diverse, and has been during the last 17 years. By the mid-1990s, publications emerged that did not take political subsidies. Today, 17 national and regional newspapers, and two press agencies, are part of the Association of Independent Press (API), a non-governmental organization designed to promote independent media in Moldova. Many Moldovan journalists strive to be politically and economically independent of external forces, such as the government or political parties. In the run-up to June 2007 local elections, for example, balanced coverage was provided by newspapers such as *Jurnal de Chisinau* and broadcast outlets including Pro TV Chisinau, according to the non-governmental organization Civic Coalition for a Free and Correct Election (2007). Journalists at these and other media outlets stress the need to be independent from the ideology and control of any political party, whether or not that party is in power. Dumitru Lazur (personal interview, 2005), a reporter for *Jurnal de Chisinau*, said his professional role is as a “provider of unbiased information ... using two or more sources of information.” Natalia Albot (personal interview, 2005), director of Radio Pro FM, believes that “a well-respected journalist, first of all, needs to have independent opinions.”

For other journalists, their definition of “independent” does not preclude them from practicing advocacy journalism when they feel that type of coverage benefits the country rather than any political organization. When asked to explain whether the role for a journalist should be as an advocate, a provider of unbiased information, or something else, Dmitrii Kalak (personal interview, 2005), deputy editor-in-chief of *Ekonomicheskoe Obozrenie*, answered: “This question is difficult to answer unambiguously.” While he said that journalists should continue to move toward “political and financial independence” and “pluralism and objectivity,” he added that journalists also have an obligation to further “the advancement of democratic values in the society, the introduction of the principles of the market economy and free competition.”

Still other journalists play an active part in politics, uniting with the government or a political party to seize the role of political leader in political and cultural debates. For more than a decade, Secareanu, now a member of parliament, and his party’s newspaper, *Tara*, served the role of opposition leader against the government and promoter of the Popular Front, later re-named the Christian Democratic Popular Party, or PPCD. In 2001, Secareanu charged that Communist Party parliament members were illegally using governments funds to build apartments for themselves; *Tara* then ran stories on this issue (Communist MP threatens to sue opposition paper, 2001). Several parties own or control newspapers. While the government officially made state newspapers autonomous in 2005, many continue to espouse the party line (Media Sustainability Index: Moldova, 2006).

Finally, other journalists work for media that are associated with the government but report stories in a way that they deem is in the best interest of their readers, regardless of the wishes of their financial benefactor (Corghencea, 2005; Socor, 1992). Radio Moldova, a station financed through state subsidies as well as ad revenue, has been known to have independent journalists in their ranks (Lange, 1997; personal interview, Zatushevski, 2005). In February 2002, after the governing party tried to impose more control over coverage, employees went on strike. They argued that their freedom of speech had been violated and that they would not become a government mouthpiece or engage in the “brain washing” of public opinion (Lupis, 2003).

The existence of such diverse views regarding how journalists should behave can be categorized as a pluralistic media system. While a strong civil society often provides the best context for media pluralism to thrive (Lintz, Stepan, 1996), an examination of Moldova’s unstable environment suggests that weakness can also benefit media diversity. Such a situation can be described as media pluralism by default. The pages that follow are an examination of the cultural, political, and economic conditions that contribute to media pluralism in Moldova.

CULTURAL AND ETHNIC CONTRIBUTORS TO MOLDOVA’S MEDIA PLURALISM

Moldova, which is somewhat divided along ethnic and language lines, is genuinely split in terms of its sense of national identity. King (2000, p. 5) notes that Moldovans have “continued to argue about the existence of the nation itself.” Such differences, which caused a portion of the country to split away and spawned a civil war, have also generally contributed to the many voices found in Moldovan media.

About one third of Moldova’s four million residents are ethnic minorities, which include Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, and Gagauz (King, 2000). The rest are ethnically “Moldovan,” though many members of this group trace their roots to Romania. Much of the territory known today as Moldova has been part of Romania at various times during the past several centuries. Romanians and Moldovans use the same language, although regional differences sometimes exist in accent and slang (King, 2000). During Soviet rule, leaders dismantled Moldova’s connection to Romania by forcing Moldovans to write their language using Russian Cyrillic script, and by transplanting thousands of Russians into key political and industrial jobs (Socor, 1992). The dispute over language was central to Moldova’s independence movement. Newspapers such as *Glusul Natiuntii* and *Literatura si Arta* helped fuel the movement to restore the Romanian language and have greater ties with Romania (King, 2000; personal interview, Zavadscki, 1992). Other journalists pushed for Moldova to join with Russia, and still others advocated to keep the country an independent state. These three types of journalists often wrote for party or government papers that espoused these views (Socor, 1992).

Russian-speaking, and often pro-Soviet, elites in the region of Transnistria later set up their own government, which led to a civil war in 1992 that killed or wounded more than 1,000 and displaced 130,000. Transnistria is a relatively small area of Moldova that sits on the east side of the Dnestr River. When fighting broke out, the Russian 14th Army claimed that portion of Moldova was historically and ethnically Russian and pledged to protect their Russian brothers (King, 2000). Fighting stopped in 1992, though Transnistria's status has never been resolved. The conflict and its aftermath still influence the region's journalism. Most Transnistrian media are published in Russian, and the Soviet-style government has the unity and discipline to routinely censor and harass independent media (Haraszti, 2004).

However, Moldovans outside of Transnistria have been far more inclusive in terms of journalism, ethnicity, language, and culture. Newspapers that support Transnistrian separatists are freely distributed there (Haraszti, 2004). The vast majority of ethnic Moldovans consider themselves to be more than just Romanian, which for now has ended serious talk of reunification with Bucharest. There has also been a significant amount of intermarrying among ethnic groups (King, 2000). Because there is a high rate of Russian-speakers, either as a first or second language, print media include about as many Moldovan-language editions as Russian-language ones. In terms of local TV and radio stations, all are required by state licensing to broadcast at least 65% of its programs in the official language of "Moldovan," though viewers are free to watch stations based in Russia and other countries that have no such limitations (Council of Europe/ERICarts, 2007; King, 2000). Finally, ethnic minorities such as the Gagauz in southern Moldova have created radio and television programs to revive their folk traditions (King, 2000).

POLITICAL INFLUENCES ON MOLDOVA'S MEDIA PLURALISM

Journalists were often given wide latitude by authorities in the early 1990s because they were seen as influential political leaders who were to be respected, and to some degree feared, due to their prominent role in spearheading Moldova's independence movement in the late 1980s (Solonar, 1999; Socor, 1992). In addition, *Tara* in particular was considered powerful in the early 1990s because it was run by the Popular Front, later called the PPCD, which was one of the most well known political activist groups in the country.

The country has experienced weak leaders and competitive politics in the 17 years after independence, which has prevented authoritarian control over various aspects of society, including mass media. No party has been able to dominate for long. One example is the Agrarian Party which had the most seats in parliament in the mid-1990s, but had less than 5% of the seats by 1998 (Way, 2003). Between 1991 and 2001, Moldova's two presidents, Mircea Snegur and then Petru Lucinschi, had trouble asserting their authority. Both men had been elites during Moldova's Soviet period, though their presidential policies between 1991 and 2001 often drift-

ed between market reforms and maintaining the old order, and between securing greater ties with Romania and Russia (Way, 2003, pp. 472, 481). While Snegur appointed people to key state-owned media that he thought were loyal to him, some, including the head of state television, supported the president's opponent in the 1996 elections. When Petru Lucinschi tried to increase his powers relative to parliament's, parliament reacted by creating a parliamentary republic and doing away with the direct election of presidents. Way (2003, p. 455) categorizes Moldova's political climate not as an unconsolidated democracy but rather a failed authoritarian regime in which pluralism exists by default, not design: "In cases of pluralism by default, politics remains competitive because government is too polarized and the state too weak to monopolize political control in an international environment dominated by democratic powers."

Weak governments and media diversity

Without tight controls, government-subsidized media have been able to cover various sides of an issue, even when doing so hurts the government. When a group of armed anti-government protestors demonstrated in the capital city in the early 1990s, reporters from state-funded print, radio, and television covered the event and interviewed the protest leaders (Socor, 1992). Nicolae Misail, editor of the government-subsidized newspaper *Sfatul Tarii*, simply said that journalists had an obligation to serve their audience rather than their benefactor. "Journalists today must destroy the old mentality" that the press is in the government's pocket, he said. "Nobody cuts, and the authorities don't always like what we write" (personal interview, Misail, 1992). In the 2001 parliamentary elections, the European Institute for the Media found that Moldova's state radio gave balanced coverage (Moldova: Press Overview, 2002).

The government has permitted potentially libelous coverage, even with tough laws at its disposal to prosecute (Way, 2003). For example, many media outlets were highly critical of the Moldovan president's handling of negotiations in 1992 to end Moldova's fight with the Russian Army over disputed territory in Moldova's Transnistrian region. *Tara* (1992) even accused the Moldovan president of being responsible for a Russian ambush that killed a number of young Moldovan soldiers in the conflict. No solid proof was offered.

Impact of the communists' return

In 2001, Moldova's Communist Party was elected into power. While President Vladimir Voronin, a member of the party, has been accused of encouraging bias in state media, private print and broadcast outlets have been able to provide differing points of view (Corghencea, 2004; Haraszti, 2004). Also, there are no legal constraints on information from the Internet or foreign stations (Media Sustainability

Index: Moldova, 2006). However, the Communists have continued the policy of past governments of inserting “their” people into state media, replacing the directors of state radio and television (Way, 2003, p. 456). The new government also tried to silence voices of dissent, with mixed results. In 2002, the Communist-dominated parliament suspended longtime *Tara* editor Secareanu from his seat in parliament on the charge that he and several other PPCD officials had organized anti-government demonstrations. However, Secareanu eventually regained his seat, and he and his paper continued to speak out against the government and promote his party (Benea, 2005; Moldovan Opposition MPs Suspended, 2002).

Then in 2005, the Communist Party was forced to seek an alliance with the PPCD in order to have the votes to re-elect Veronin as president. This coalition between left-wing and right-wing political factions has had several effects on mass media. State-connected media have had less of a pro-Communist slant, and the government pledged to initiate 10 opposition-sponsored reforms, several of which are media-related (Media Sustainability Index: Moldova, 2006; personal interview, Spanu, 2005; Ultra right..., 2006). In March 2005, the new parliament issued a statement promising to work to enhance “the democratic guarantees for a free development of mass media” by making the broadcast licensing body apolitical, converting state television into a national public broadcaster, and ending state-owned press (Media Sustainability Index: Moldova, 2006; New Parliament’s..., 2005).

While progress on the reforms has been slow, Moldova’s government has been less authoritarian in its treatment of mass media than governments in other countries in the region, such as Russia. Becker (2004, p. 151), who describes Russia as a “neo-authoritarian media system,” notes that President Vladimir Putin’s regime has “tight reigns placed on television,” harassing and closing even private stations. Only in Moldova’s breakaway Transnistria region, which is not controlled by the Moldovan government, have authorities created an “atmosphere of repression” for local media (Haraszti, 2004, p. 9).

Obstacles to independent coverage

Still, journalists at media outlets that are not connected to the government argue that they face several political obstacles in doing their job. Private publications can be considered anti-government by sources and, therefore, not provide the reporter with information. Svetlana Salberova (personal interview, 2005), a reporter at *Moldavskie Vedomosti*, said that because her newspaper has written a number of investigative articles showing corruption by government officials, the publication is considered an “oppositional newspaper.” As a result, she said many sources who have connections with the government “prefer to hush” when she requests interviews because they fear reprisals. Journalists say they also suffer from a lack of access to official sources and data. Lazur (personal interview, 2005) said the law regarding access to public information does not work because “authorities simply ignore our questions.”

Still, no political party, including the ruling Community Party, or government agency has had the size, cohesion, or the discipline to genuinely repress media pluralism in the country. OSCE found that “politicians of all ranks are regularly criticized in the media [and] independent TV and radio stations are very outspoken in their comments on the authorities” (Haraszti, 2004, p. 2).

ECONOMIC INFLUENCES ON MOLDOVA’S MEDIA PLURALISM

Moldova’s weak and transitioning economy, while far from ideal, has nonetheless encouraged media diversity. The economy has the strength to sustain a limited number of private and independent media outlets, though political parties are still needed to subsidize other media organizations. Private media outlets often receive funding from sponsors and investors, many of whom finance media to influence society more than to make profits (Carauș, 2004, pp. 322–336). Their direct influence on media content is hard to gauge, especially because media companies are not required to publicly disclose the names of their sponsors, though there are restrictions on foreign investment. Yet private sponsorship and party funding promote pluralism, at least collectively, because these contributors can add to the number of voices in Moldova’s media.

Media diversity in a soft economy

Like many former Soviet republics, Moldova’s transition to a market-based economy has proved difficult. The country’s gross domestic product averaged around minus 10% during the 1990s. Causes include an over-dependence on Russia as a trading partner, poorly managed fiscal policy, and hyperinflation, which has soared as high as 100% (Schroeder, 1997; Smith, 1999). However, since 2000, positive GDP growth has average around 6%, and inflation has been as low as 4%. Also, despite Communist Party rule, the government has instituted pro-market privatization. Still, Moldova remains one of the poorest counties in the region (Second privatization..., 2006; World Bank, 2007).

The slowly growing market economy provides just enough capital to attempt, if only on a small scale, the journalism of balanced coverage. The Council of Europe estimates that 20% of weeklies, daily newspapers, magazines, and broadcastings are independent (Council of Europe/ERICarts, 2007). Several of these outlets include the biweekly newspapers *Jurnal de Chisinau*, with a circulation of 15,000; and *Ekonomicheskoe Obozrenie*, circulation 10,000. Biweeklies are popular in Moldova’s low-circulation environment because they are less expensive to operate than dailies. Independent broadcast outlets include Pro TV Chisinau and Radio Pro FM, which broadcast to the nation’s capital (Carauș, 2004; personal interview, Albot, 2005).

Journalists at private media are able to provide various sides to stories, though the anemic economic condition means that they do not always have all the tools to

do their job. Reporter Viorica Vladica (personal interview, 2005) found that her station, Pro TV Chisinau, lacked enough cameras and other equipment to cover many stories. Nicolae Negru (personal interview, 2005), a columnist for *Jurnal de Chisinau*, said economic factors were more important than political and cultural factors in predicting the sustainability of independent media. "It depends on general economic situation in the Republic of Moldova. If economy will improve, journalism will also improve."

Many media theorists have tried to understand how economic factors can have such diverse effects on media in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Some argue that journalists in Central and Eastern Europe entered into an economy-driven transitional period after the fall of the Soviet empire (Garrison, 2000; Johnson, 1995; Ognianova, 1997). This transitional period, which is exemplified by the switch from a "controlled planned economy to a free market," has created a transitional press system, which has encouraged media diversity, according to Ognianova (1997, pp. 10–11).

At the heart of the transitional press concept is the idea that an unstable and transitioning economy produces an atmosphere in which newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and TV stations are forced to explore various ways to survive economically. Some media find success by being financially and politically independent from political entities, while other outlets willingly, or unwillingly, serve as a propagandist for the government or a political party in order to have the funds to survive. Still other news organizations take government subsidies but resist attempts by the government to become a mouthpiece for the state. By contrast, non-transitional media systems do not include newspapers or TV stations that are owned and operated by political parties (Ognianova, 1997). Moldova's current media environment, which ranges from independent journalism to party press, seems to fit the diverse journalistic climate outlined in the transitional press concept. Ognianova (1997, p. 34) argues that a media system "will remain transitional until the economy stabilizes and becomes a true free market, if that is indeed the transition's outcome." Such a process could take a few years or several generations.

Effects of privatization

The efforts of several Moldovan presidents to privatize state industries have also influenced mass media, though real progress has been slow (Way, 2003). Most recently, Voronin's government has begun to make state-owned broadcast and print outlets autonomous. These reforms came about because of recommendations from the Council of Europe designed to ensure media freedom and because the alliance between the Communist Party and PPCD calls for the liquidation of state media (Kennedy, 2007). Government newspapers were officially converted to independent publications in mid-2005 and state broadcasters such as Teleradio Moldova, Euro TV, and Antena C were made public service stations or privatized. However, the

true “independence” of converted state media is in question. International monitoring groups have found that former state publications still contain the same editorial opinions, and Teleradio Moldova has been criticized for censoring and tilting coverage to benefit the government (Haraszti, 2004).

The sale of Antena C and Euro TV demonstrates how privatization can have a mixed impact on media pluralism. Before being sold, Antena C was “regarded as independent in its coverage” by the international Committee to Protect Journalists (2007). After the station was auctioned off in January 2007, Antena C, which is now owned by someone with no known ties to the government or any political party, reorganized the departments and programs. Afterward, Antena C’s coverage favored the ruling party and ignored opposition parties (Independent Journalism Center, 2007; Kennedy, 2007). Euro TV, which was also sold in January 2007, took a different path. The station, which is now owned by a former press officer at the Moldovan Interior Ministry, did provide pluralistic coverage in the months before the June 2007 local elections (Independent Journalism Center, 2007).

These two examples highlight how privatization does not always promote media pluralism in a “pluralism by default” political environment such as Moldova. As was discussed in the previous section on political influences on Moldova’s media, government-affiliated media have often covered issues with a balance that undercuts the government’s political objectives. Such was the case with Antena C. The president of the Union of Journalists in Moldova, Valeriu Saharneanu, noted that during the time that Antena C was connection to the state, “The ruling party was afraid of the station’s independence and popularity” (quoted in Committee to Protect Journalists, 2007). In this case, privatizing the station had the effect of decreasing diversity of coverage, and government leaders were helped by selling the station rather than by funding it.

CONCLUSION

The present study adds to what is known about what cultural, political, and economic factors can contribute to media diversity. The analysis, which uses Moldova’s media system as one example, indicates that in a country that has a weak state, fragmented culture, and a soft economy that is partly state-controlled and partly privatizing, there is room for many types of journalists. Moldova’s privatizing economy and lack of overt government censorship of private media means there exists the capital and the freedom to attempt the journalism of independent opinions. The weakness of the economy, however, means that many other journalists who might wish journalistic autonomy can practice their profession only at state- or party-subsidized outlets, which (at least collectively) present a wide range of opinion. Also, the competitive political climate inspires still other journalists to willingly unite with political parties or the government in order to complete what they see as the reforms that began with Moldovan independence. Finally, ethnic and language

differences, combined with relative cultural tolerance from the Republic of Moldova's government, have increased the types of media outlets – and diversity of views – in the media market. It should be stressed, however, that the study's purpose is not to show that the political, economic, and cultural conditions described are the best for media pluralism or that these conditions come with no threats to journalistic diversity. Instead, findings expand what is known about media pluralism by demonstrating how press diversity can grow in even seemingly inhospitable environments.

There are political, economic, and cultural paradoxes that need to be considered regarding the concept of media pluralism by default. While strong governmental institutions are often ideal for sustaining pluralism, efforts to build up a weak state such as Moldova's may ultimately undermine political pluralism (Lintz, Stepan, 1996; Way, 2003). Similarly, media pluralism is potentially at risk if a politically polarized state becomes more cohesive and disciplined because authorities might use their new power to impose authoritarian control on voices of dissent, including media. Censorship and harassment of media by Transnistria's unified Soviet-style government provides one example of what can go wrong. In economic terms, while a robust economy could greatly help independent media grow, the same condition might spur the kind of intense private media competition and media mergers that have decreased diversity of coverage in many countries (Bagdikian, 2000; Park, 2005). Finally, ethnic and cultural divisions, which have had devastating consequences in many countries, can also be the inspiration behind many culture- and language-based media. An ethnically homogenous Moldova, for example, would likely have fewer of these media outlets.

While "scholarly opinion is divided on the question of the most pertinent theoretical framework to apply to post-Communist transformation" regarding mass media (Jakubowicz, 2004, p. 55), findings add to the discussion conceptually. The media pluralism by default concept can be used to examine press diversity in many countries other than Moldova that have experienced a transitional period. Most of the political and economic contributors to Moldova's media diversity stem from the instability that is part of that country's transition from communism to democracy, and from a state-controlled to a free market economy. Because political, economic, and cultural instability can be present in any transitional regime, media pluralism by default may be present in many countries inside and outside of Eastern Europe. This conclusion helps explain why Moldova's pluralistic media system is similar to what Ognianova (1997) found regarding Bulgaria: that a transitional environment led to a diverse array of independent, party- and government-connected media. Findings also show differences between Moldova's media pluralism by default and Russia's neo-authoritarian media system, in which the state has the power to control and harass public and private television (Becker, 2004). While the neo-authoritarian model provides a compelling portrait of Russian media, political weakness and shifting alliances in Moldova prevent a similar system from taking root.

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