MEDIATIZATION, RELIGION, AND HUMAN RIGHTS: A PERSPECTIVE THROUGH THE TELEVISION PROGRAM "THE RIGHT TO HAVE AN OPINION"

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Abstract: This article analyzes the impact of the television program "The right to have an opinion" on the strategies of the mediatization (Hepp, 2012, 2013; Couldry and Hepp, 2013) of the Human Rights good practices in the Romanian religious context. The study will cover the TV shows broadcasted between 2009-2015 and it intends to highlight the main orientations which could help in constructing a model of the mediatization of Human Rights values in the religious media institutions. The television program "The right to have an opinion" has been presented on the Romanian Hope Channel (Speranta TV). We will focus our analyze on the communication models of the mediatization of Human Rights values used within this TV program, on their evaluation, results, and

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feedback. The findings of this study could be relevant in the context of the management in different religious media institutions which should adopt programs and policies able to promote universal values with potential in building messages diplomacy oriented.

Keywords: mediatization, management, religion, religious liberty, diplomacy.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa o impacto do programa de televisão “O direito de ter uma opinião” na perspectiva das estratégias de mediatização (Hepp, 2012, 2013, Couldry e Hepp, 2013) das boas práticas dos Direitos Humanos no contexto religioso romeno. O estudo abordará os programas de TV transmitidos entre 2009-2015 e pretende destacar as principais orientações que poderiam ajudar na construção de um modelo de mediatização dos valores dos direitos humanos nas instituições de mídia religiosa. O programa de televisão “O direito de ter uma opinião” foi apresentado no Romanian Hope Channel (Speranta TV). Focalizaremos nossa análise nos modelos de comunicação da mediatização dos valores dos direitos humanos utilizados neste programa de TV, na avaliação, resultados e comentários. As conclusões deste estudo podem ser relevantes no contexto da gestão em diferentes instituições de mídia religiosa que devem adotar programas e políticas capazes de promover valores universais com potencial na construção de mensagens orientadas para a diplomacia.

Palavras-chave: mediatização, gestão, religião, liberdade religiosa, diplomacia.

1 Introduction

This article addresses the issue of the religion and media, starting from the time when Romanians couldn’t express their thoughts before Romanian revolution in December, 1990. During the communism time Romanians really needed to promote their opinions and religions in media, but they couldn’t do it because of the strict control of communist regime in

mass media. The communist regime decided not to liberate the mass media instead it had controlled in all the ways of media communications. There were almost two hours daily on the national television and during this time, Ceausescu appeared many times, limited the access of people to information just to the achievement of communist party. A detailed analysis of the media landscape during the communist period and especially of the Romanian religious media landscape is made by Tudor and Bratosin in a forthcoming study which I quote here some concluding fragments:

> Before the fall of communism, in 1989, there were only few religious publications, all of which were under the strict control of the totalitarian regime (a process which begins after the Second World War – in 1947-48 – and ends in December 1989[2]). We will cite here the case of two Romanian Christian denominations, which currently hold the highest number of religious print media in Romania: the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Seventh Day Adventist Church. The Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate edited several print media: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* (The Romanian Orthodox Church), *Buletinul Oficial al Patriarhiei Române* (the Official Bulletin of the Romanian Patriarchate), *Ortodoxia* (Orthodoxy), *Revista Patriarhiei* (Patriarchate Magazine) (each with a circulation of 10,000 copies and 4 to 6 issues per year). Each of the five Orthodox Metropolitanates edited its own magazine, with 4 to 6 issues per year: *Glasul Bisericii* (Voice of the Church – Metropolitanate of Wallachia, Metropolitanate of Moldova and Suceava, Metropolitanate of Transylvania, Metropolitanate of Banat. *Telegraful Român* (The Romanian Telegraph), the oldest Romanian orthodox pe-

2. See Valeriu Petrescu, Presa Adventista din Romania 1884-2002 (Bucharest: Viata si sanatate, 2003), 68-75 ; Nicolae Dascalu, Parabola facliei aprinse. Comunicarea religioasa in era informationala (Bucharest: Editura Basilica a Patriarhiei Romane, 2012), 287-290.

> riodical, which has enjoyed uninterrupted publication since 1853, is edited bimonthly in Sibiu[3]. In 1949, the Romanian Seventh Day Adventist Church Union had the right to publish *Curierul Adventist* (The Adventist Messenger), which had 24 pages. Between 1951 and 1955 it was gradually reduced, to reach 4 pages in 1955, the most difficult year of this monthly publication with a circulation of 2000-2500 copies[4]. The general principle applicable to all recognized religions was to restrict print media to an official bulletin for more effective control of the religious press considered as a « disease that had to be destroyed » (with the exception of the Orthodox Church, the dominant religion, with some central publications and an oficial bulletin for each Orthodox Metropolitanate)[5] (Tudor and Bratosin, forthcoming study, 2017, pag 2-35)

After that period of media limitation, Romanians received back their freedom to express their opinions and religion. Romania could be considered very explosive after 1989 in the area of communication, because after this year appeared hundreds of radio stations and local, national, and international televisions, and trough this way we could be seen the desire of Romanians to communicate on television and radio:

> The Romanian TV market has a very large offer and is dominated by the generalist TV channels (Top 3 TV stations ranking in 2015: ProTV, Antena 1 and Kanal D[i]). A smaller share is allocated to niche channels, especially religious one. Despite this fact, the religious TV channels

3. Cf. V.b Biserica Ortodoxă Română în perioada dintre 1944 și 1989, http://patriarhia.ro/v-b-biserica-ortodoxa-romana-in-perioada-dintre--1944-si-1989-151.html (accessed on August 3, 2016), and Nicolae Dascalu, *op. cit.*, 287.
4. Valeriu Petrescu, *op.cit.*, 70-71, and personal interviews with the members of the former editorial teams.
5. Cf. document prepared by the censure in the 1949 years (CC al PCR Fund, Department of Propaganda and Agitation, File 103/1949).

manage to gain loyal audience groups. The main competitors are Trinitas TV and Speranta TV, the TV channels of the Orthodox Church and of the Romanian Seventh Day Adventist Church. Both televisions are available live online and they broadcast 24/24. They are included on the must-carry TVs list[ii] of National Audiovisual Council (NAC).[iii]

Trinitas TV, the television of the Basilica Press Center of the Romanian Patriarchate, was born in 2007, and it broadcasts by satellite and cable. Its mission statement is to preserve Orthodoxy as a mark of the Romanian cultural identity, to present church life, its material heritage (especially the icons and monasteries) and its major events by making them available through liturgical cults[iv].

Hope Channel Romania – Speranta TV is part of the international network of neo-Protestant Adventist Hope Channel televisions, born in 2003. Speranta TV was set up in 2007. The TV programs of the Romanian channel include productions in Romanian and Hungarian (90%) and productions created by other channels belonging to other countries and subtitled in Romanian (10%). The grid includes programs on spiritual, social and cultural themes, focused on issues of culture, education and health, family and well-being[v]. One aspect to underline is that initially the channel began with a program and a studio in a secular television, Realitatea TV, in 2002, and five years later it became an independant television and a real competitor on the niche television market, precisely through its mission of uninhibited confessional TV station (highly oriented to current society issues). This makes it assume now, through the flagship production of this season, the interreligious TV program *Special Edition*, a mission that should be assumed by the Romanian public televison: the representation of the diversity of religious

> expressions (Tudor and Bratosin, forthcoming study, 2017, p.2-35).
>
> A large traditional and online radio presence punctuates the Romanian religious media landscape, the strongest presence in the audio sector being the Seventh Day Adventist Church, with 45 local stations, 24/24[vi]. The Radio Trinitas of the Orthodox Church, the radio Vocea Evangheliei of the Alliance of the Evangelical Churches in Romania, the online radio Filadelfia, radio Maria of the Catholic Church and the Muslim radio Radio Radio Islam complete the panorama[vii] (Tudor and Bratosin, forthcoming study, 2017, p. 2-35).

2 Religion and Media

As could be very well known Romania has a variety of religion presence although it is a majoritarian Orthodox religion country. “86.5% of Romanians declaring themselves Orthodox Christians, whereas 4.6% of the population is Roman-Catholic, 3.2% Reformed, 1.9% Pentecostal, 0.8% Greek Catholic, 0.6% Baptist, and 0.5%, Seventh Day Adventist in accordance with the results communicated by the Romanian National Statistics Institute, INS, following the last census campaign that took place in 2011 - INS, July 2013” (Tudor, 2015). Immediately after the Romanian revolution, religious people and all the denominations have been involved in the media communication. This happened because of their desire to be heard their voice of freedom and to fulfill their mission promoting their values through the mass media. In the first years after 1989, the interest of denominations for radio and television had been seen in the programs launched on the public television. The managerial involvement of religious people had been just trough be invited, as guests, in the television programs already decided by the national television. After four years the religious organizations started to look to the promotion both the message and identity. Since

1993 there have been a deeply interest of many denominations to promote the religious values, religious freedom and many other particularly point of view. There have been Voice of Hope Radio[6], *Maria* Radio[7], Voice of Gospel Radio[8], Trinitas Radio[9] and so on. Since 2005 started some religious televisions as Credo TV, Hope TV, Alfa and Omega TV, Trinitas TV and so on. Some if these television programs are 24-hour program and cover almost all Europe. It has been remarkable the development of the interest in religious values promotion though media. Trough this was religious institutions become more visible to different public or their values could be easier recognized by people. Trinitas TV[10] is one very focused in promoting the identity, and other as Hope TV, Alfa and Omega TV, Credo TV[11] are more focused on the values which are interested to promote to different public. One of the arguments of focusing on identity or values, or booth could be considered the number of members of the religious identity[12] which support the radio and television programs.

We could start thinking about the necessity and the importance of the faith promoted on media, trough different communication ways and to understand the real impact of the

6. The Romanian Voice Hope Radio is owned by Seventh Day Adventists Church since 1993 and there are about 45 local radio stations conform www.rvs.ro

7. Maria Radio is owned by Catholic Church conform www.radiomaria.ro

8. The Romanian Voice of the Gospel is owned by Romanian Evangelical Alliance formed from three different denominations as Romanian Pentecostal Church, Romanian Baptist Church, Romanian Brethren Church conform www.rvesv.ro

9. The Trinitas Radio is owned by Romanian Orthodox Church conform www.radiotrinitas.ro

10. The slogan of Trinitas TV is clear: This is the radio/Television of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchy. More than this Trinitas TV is interested on the promotion of their values.

11. All these three television stations are not revealed directly their identity; instead they are focused on their values.

12. This could be considered important in a transition country, as Romania is, where many times the population could take in consideration the differences between religious entities trough the number of adepts of each entities.

media on people belief. In many cases, the connections between media and religion could be perceived in different ways both positively and negatively. In their book *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, Lawrence A. Babb and Susan S. Wadley considered "the most important general lesson is probably that modern media have had multiple and, in some respects, contradictory effects on religious belief and practice in South Asia" (Babb and Wadley, 1995, p. 16). This idea is considered significant by the authors in the context "that some of the newer media have brought new forms of religious expression into being, forms that actually add to the diversity of the South Asian religious scene" (Babb and Wadley, 1995, p. 5). This could be considered in different contexts depends on of the cultural, social and religious connections. The impact of religion promoted on the media has been in Romania a good way to increase people understanding on spiritual subjects and to adapt their mentality to the understanding of different values promoted.

3 The religion and media seen through the television program: *The right to have an opinion*

Since December 2003, I was involved in religious media as a manager[13], first for 6 years and after as the television presenter and producer of *The Rights to have an opinion*, a weekly television program[14] broadcast on Romanian Hope Television. In almost 6 years I produce and realized more then 200 television programs. The programs had been focused on different matters of religion as religious freedom, humanitarian issues, management of religious institutions, religion and media, education and religion, globalization and religion, the idea of freedom in the relation with God and fellows, security

13. Since December 2003 to May 2009 I was general manager of Romanian Adventist Media Center, this included Romanian Voice of Hope Radio and Romanian Hope Channel.

14. The right to have an opinion had been transmitted on Romanian Hope Channel since 2009 to 2015.

and freedom and so on. The diversity of the topics which have been included in this television program was based on the following perspective: how religion could relate with many topics which could be promoted by mass-media. *The right to have an opinion* had great personalities as guests from diverse area as theology, political science, sociology, communication, religion and so on. All these brought together a wide understanding of current religious issues in national and international areas.

4 The influence of media and religion to the public

Between 2013-2014 I made a survey of about 5000 people who have been from the fans of *The Rights to have an opinion* television program (Burcea, 2016). The goal of the survey was to check the impact of the TV program on the public which follows the program.

The first question was: Do you consider important religion and media to work together? Should religion leave the church walls and goes out to the market? Nearly 65% of the respondents considered the religion should go out in the marketplace and be relevant outside of the church, in the middle of the society. About 26% of the respondents considered that the religion should stay in the sacred place and be separated by the large public. About 9% of the respondents answered that the religion and media are not compatible, so they should not be defiled each other.

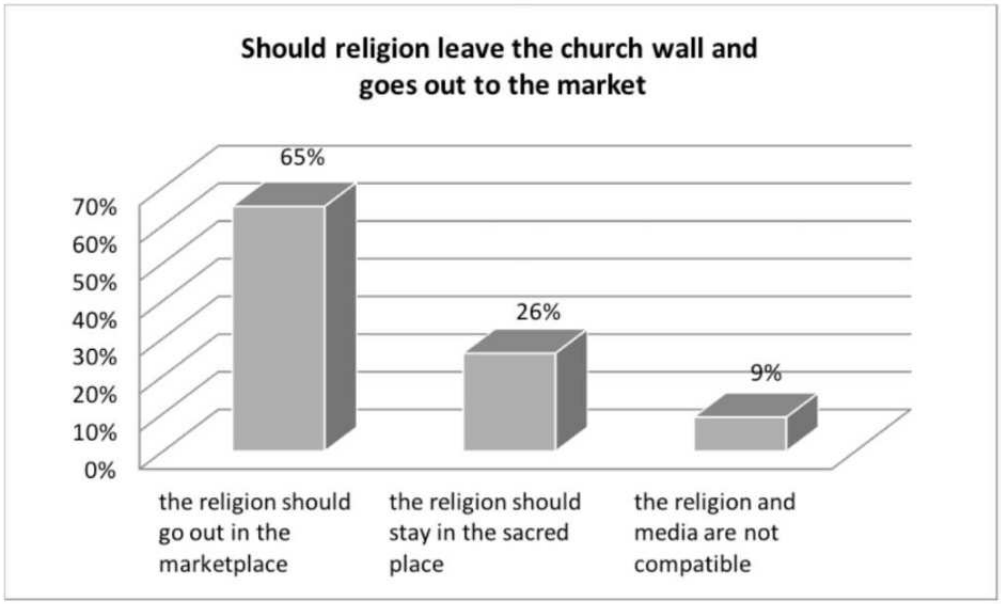

Figure 1[15]

The second question was: How much do you think that this TV program has been the positive influence in your life? Almost 61% of the respondents considered that their life was improved because the television program and they started to develop their opinion looking to The right to have an opinion TV program. About 29% of the respondents considered that this TV program is important but they couldn't consider it to modified their opinion. And the final group about 10% answered that the program wasn't relevant for them.

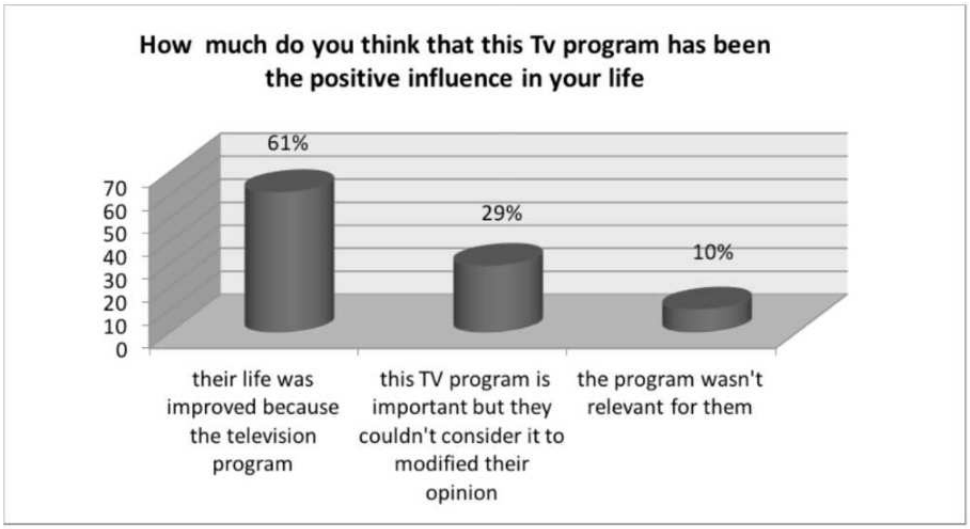

Figure 2[16]

15. Burcea, N., *Communication, Management, Human, Rights*, Cambridge, MA, Scientific Press, 2016, p. 45

16. Burcea, N., *Communication, Management, Human, Rights*, Cambridge, MA, Scientific Press, 2016, p. 46

The third question was: Which subject do you consider to be the most important topic for your personal needs? The respondents' answers were very diverse depending on their interest, personal study level, and cultural background. Basically, their answers could be grouped into three different categories. First, 36% of the respondents considered that religious liberty, security and peace could be considered the most important topics which could be presented at The right to have an opinion TV program. Second, 25% of the respondents thought that some important topics are theological issues and other deeply approach of bible topics. 39% of the respondents considered the scientific approach of different scientific fields as management, communication, human rights and so on, related to religion could be the most important topics which are to this TV program.

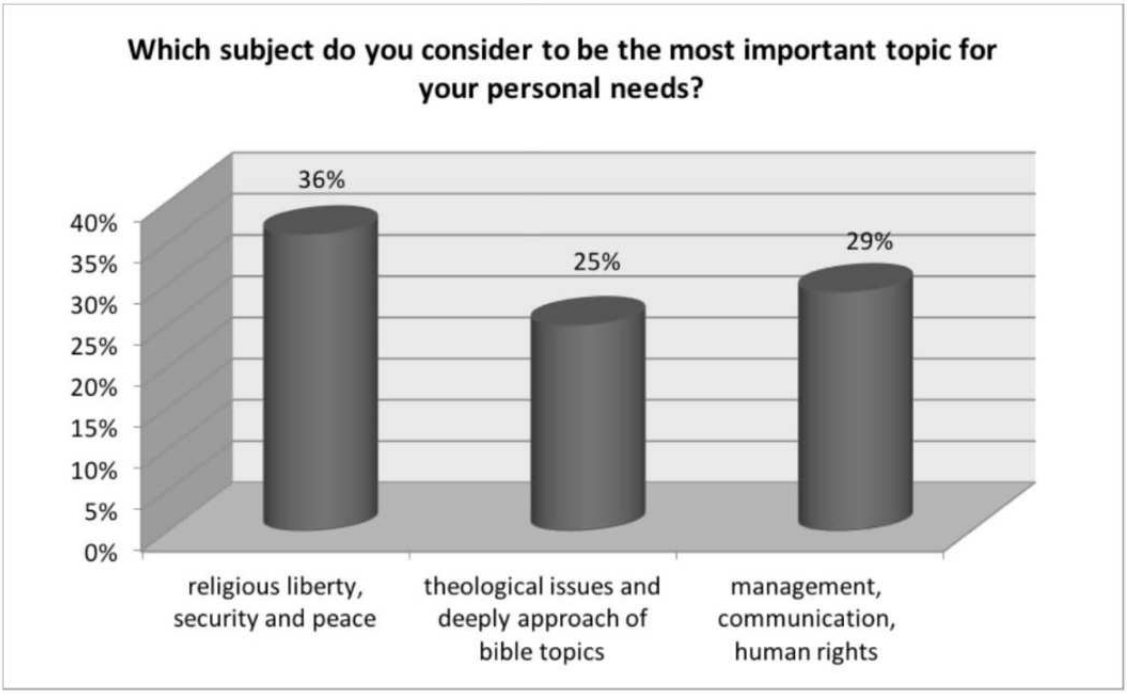

Figure 3[17]

The fourth question was focused on the importance of current matters which we talked about in the TV program. Approximately 49% of respondents evaluated that the subjects which were talked about at the TV program were current topics and they were really necessarily at the time of communicating. Almost 39% estimated that just some of the topics

17. Burcea, N., *Communication, Management, Human, Rights*, Cambridge, MA, Scientific Press, 2016, p. 48

were current topics and them tried to recommend other topics to be treated in their personal opinion. the rest of 12% of the respondents thought the topics of the TV program were little outdated and they recommended to the producer to be more focused on the current topics.

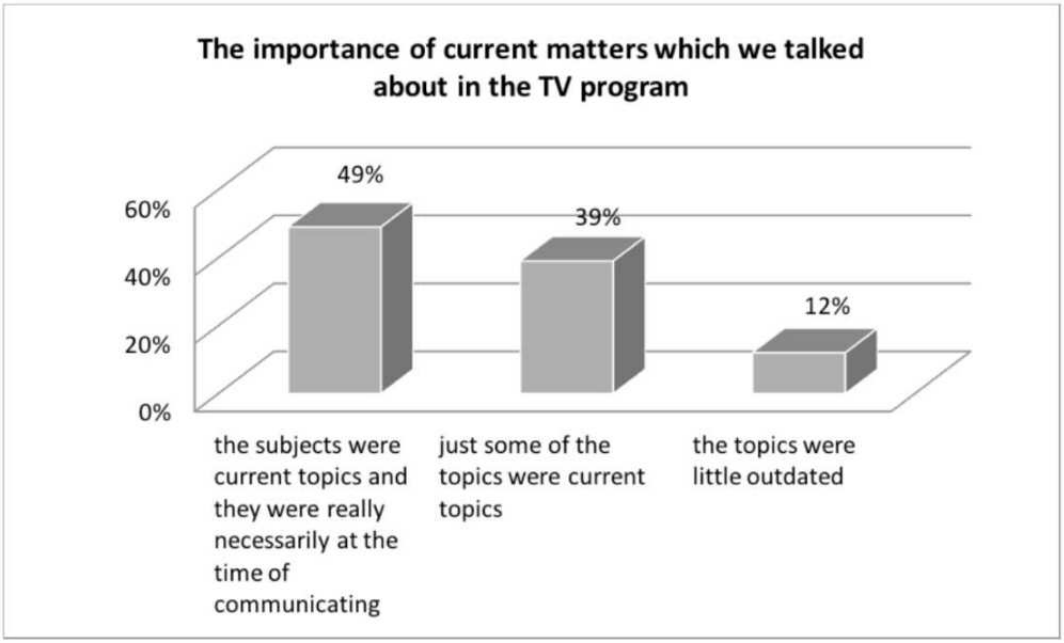

Figure 4[18]

The survey which I did could be relevant in the context of the analysis the influence of religion on mass-media. In the continuing process of the increased people interest on digital communication movements, the study of the impact of religion on mass-media and the influence of mass-media on the religious activities become very significant (Bratosin, 2016).

Reading the surveys which I did for this topic, I could have realized that the perspective of media and religion could be a true challenge in the world today if we consider the dynamic of the communication which has been developing very fast. The dilemma which is very clear here is: which should adapt to other: should the technology and philosophy of communication be adapted to the religion or the religion should be adapted to communication. Each answer that the participants gave in the surveys shows the importance of this matter in the religious context. The differences of the answers could be seen as a very deeply matter if we count the differences of the

18. Burcea, N., *Communication, Management, Human, Rights*, Cambridge, MA, Scientific Press, 2016, p. 54

religions, some of them more conservative than others and the other more deeply involved in the modern strategies of their mission trough different methods of approaching people. Although this topic of the differences between religions is not a part of our study, it has been significant in the process of current religious communication understanding.

5 Conclusions

Trough this study I tried to analyze the religious media impact in the Romanian context. The case study was the television program *The right to have an opinion* and its impact on the public in a specific period of time between 2009-2015.

I suppose that these results of this study could be suitable in the process of understating of religion and communication if it could be taken into consideration the necessity of choosing the most important thing between the following two elements: the demand and the expectations of the public which are interested in this possible media program and the importance of the clear communication and mission of the religious institutions.

As could be seen in this article, defining the public is a truly long process and it has to consider the mentality, the influence of recent history on the public, the diversity of this kind tv programs, the age, religion, sex, level of education of people who are in the public and so on. But when the public is defined it is easier to know its understandings, expectations, reactions, and decisions. Although the public could be not the most important element in the process of the religious communication, it should be considered as an important part of the communication process.

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Notas:

i Idem.

ii It refers to the obligation for a cable service or satellite distributor to relay a TV channel.

iii Mihaela Tudor, op. cit. (2015a).

iv http://trinitastv.ro/despre-trinitas-tv (accessed on September 7, 2016).

v For more details see full article: Mihaela Tudor, op. cit. (2015a).

vi Nicolae Dascalu, op. cit., 304.

vii http://www.radioislam.ro/new/?page_id=40 (accessed on September 2016).