Mediatization, Religion, and Human Rights: A perspective through the television program "The right to have an opinion"

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RESUMO EXPANDIDO

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 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.

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:

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> 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[10]). 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 periodical, which has enjoyed uninterrupted publication since 1853, is edited bimonthly in Sibiu[11]. 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[12]. 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)[13] (Tudor and Bratosin, forthcoming study).

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 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]
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> 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

[10] 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.

[11] 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.

[12] Valeriu Petrescu, *op.cit.*, 70-71, and personal interviews with the members of the former editorial teams.

[13] Cf. document prepared by the censure in the 1949 years (CC al PCR Fund, Department of Propaganda and Agitation, File 103/1949).

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).

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).

[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).