Diversifying the Newsroom, Diversifying the News: Challenges and Obstacles in Central and Eastern Europe

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ABSTRACT: As immigration and the flow of labor continue to alter Central and Eastern Europe demographics, the imperative to increase diversity inside newsrooms and in news coverage becomes more critical. Media organizations must respond to that imperative to adequately serve their communities with relevant news and information. Obstacles to diversification of the newsrooms and news include: media consolidation and foreign ownership; economic constraints; established newsroom culture; traditional patterns of professional practice; and lingering communist-era legacies. This article explores major barriers to diversity within news organizations, as well as diversity in the types of stories covered and how reporters cover them in democratic and semi-democratic countries of the region. It includes a discussion of initiatives intended to improve diversity in both those contexts. It incorporates data on media diversity and lack of diversity, interviews with media diversity experts and trainers, and examples of media diversification initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe.

KEYWORDS: diversity, stereotypes, media concentration, journalism practices, news sources
INTRODUCTION

A “functioning public sphere”—a media sphere—that integrates underprivileged groups, ethnic and national minorities, women and other under-represented groups is essential to fully inform public opinion and decision-making in democratic societies (Kretzschmar, 2007: 204). A foundational rationale for diversity among newsroom staff is that employing professionals from a variety of backgrounds can bring different perspectives into the news they individually and collectively cover and present.

Lack of such diversity may be reflected in whether issues are covered, and if so, how journalists cover them. For example, more diverse coverage may improve reporting on such topics as human rights, immigration, discrimination, culture, religion and socio-economic barriers. It also may be reflected in reporters’ choices of news sources to interview.

In the democratic and semi-democratic1 countries of post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, labor migration, humanitarian migration, political migration and the lowering of national borders as legal impediments to movement are significantly altering demographics. As the make-up of national populations continue to change two decades after the Soviet Union collapsed and the Warsaw Pact dissolved, the imperative to increase diversity inside newsrooms—personnel—and in the news—coverage—becomes more urgent for media organizations to adequately serve their communities with relevant news and information. This is especially true in a period when traditional print and broadcast organizations are struggling for profitability—even survival—amid proliferating social media, online rivals and so-called “citizen journalism.”

This article draws on interviews and studies by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), multinational agencies and scholars to discuss obstacles to better newsroom and news coverage diversity in democratic and near-democratic post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe and several of their neighbors.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

What are the principal challenges to increasing diversity in newsrooms and in media organizations’ coverage amid changing demographics and economic conditions in Eastern and Central Europe?

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1 The U.S.-based nongovernmental organization Freedom House (2012) classifies these countries as “free” or “partly free.”
RACISM AND BIAS IN THE EUROPEAN PRESS

Hultén observed that “in recent years social cohesion and integration of migrants have gained importance in European media debate, focusing on the responsibilities of the press in contemporary multi-ethnic societies” (2009: 1). Milica Pesic, executive director of the United Kingdom-based Media Diversity Institute, said in an interview (2012) that negative stereotypes are particularly evident in commercial media: “They deal with diversity by looking at problems—immigrants taking jobs, the Roma in Eastern Europe since the fall of communism. They are now to be blamed for everything.”

The demographics of some Central and Eastern European states are more homogenous than others. For example in Estonia, 68.7 percent of the population are ethnic Estonian; 25.6 percent Russian; 2.1 percent Ukrainian; 1.2 percent Belarusian; 0.8 percent Finn; and 1.6 percent other. There is also a large linguistic gap, dominated by 67.3 percent Estonian speakers and 29.7 percent Russian speakers. By contrast, 96.7 percent of Poland’s population is ethnically Polish, with no other single group accounting for more than 1 percent; 97.8 percent speak Polish (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2012).

Population diversification continues apace across the region. The largest influxes of immigrants to some Eastern and Central European countries are from Russia, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, and Moldova (National Geographic, 2012). The continuing arrival of Muslim immigrants from North Africa, South Asia and the Greater Middle East has accelerated tensions, as well as attention to the question of how news organizations cover both individual events and broader trends. One estimate puts the number of Muslims in the European Union (EU) at 15 million (European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, 2008).

The backlash over immigration and different cultural values—particularly Muslim immigrants—has escalated physical, verbal and legislative-political attacks on non-white racial, national, religious and ethnic groups. Attacks motivated by homophobia continue as well. A 2006 editorial in the Pakistani newspaper Dawn commented: “The media in Europe has perhaps yet to become accustomed to the large and growing Muslim presence on the continent and finds it even more difficult to be understanding of Muslim beliefs in the current confusion about Islam and terrorism.”

Yet immigration, public attention to terrorism and other event-driven issues are not the only reasons for discrimination in the region. A recent report blamed bias against Roma, Jews, Ukrainians and other national minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina not only on “lingering animosities between former warring
factions but also constitutionally mandated separation by ethnicity in political and public life.” For example, the constitution allows only ethnic Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs to serve in the presidency and upper chamber of parliament (Human Rights Watch, 2012).

Scholars have found a lack of balance in coverage of immigrants and ethnic minorities by European mainstream media (Horsti, 2011). The 2006 global controversy about publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in Denmark’s Jyllands-Posten – and reprinted by many other media – triggered protests, as well as substantial scholarly research into press coverage of that controversy and those protests. Among them, one study concluded that two Greek newspapers had framed the issue as a clash between the “Muslim world” and “Europe” or the “European press” (Triandafyllidou, 2009: 45). It showed that those two newspapers, published in a country with a 10 percent immigrant population and 1 percent Muslim population, usually assigned “Muslim” news sources a more passive role than assigned to “European actors” (46).

Controversy about publication of the cartoons is but one illustration of the debate about how the region’s media represent Islam and Muslims. Creutz-Kämppi’s study of Swedish-language newspapers in Finland described it as “the otherising of Islam,” a characterization that includes conflict-oriented coverage and discourses of violence, colonialism and clashing civilizations. As for the societal implications, she wrote, “Collective representations are more than the sum of individual opinions – they form the network of social life, establishing meanings and creating feelings of belonging through communication and social interaction” (Creutz-Kämppi, 2008: 306).

Nor are Muslims the only religious, ethnic, or minority group whose portrayal is frequently distorted by media. Nicolae said the estimated 10 million Roma in the EU are the ethnic group that suffers the most discrimination on the continent; he points to examples from Radio Prague and tabloids in the United Kingdom:

The media, in general, focuses on problem areas and has a marked tendency to reinforce stenotypes. Roma victims of racist attacks receive very little media coverage. Exceptionally, there is some media interest, often in cases where the Roma are saved or helped by non-Roma, so reinforcing the positive stereotype of a tolerant and helpful majority and accentuating the half-human, half-beast image of Roma (2006: 140).

Stereotyping by the European press is nothing new; elements of the press have a lengthy record of promoting anti-tolerance. Most famously, the Nazis used the
press in Germany and German-occupied countries to demonize Jews, Poles, Roma, homosexuals and other targeted groups. As just one of many early examples, consider the two most influential early Lithuanian literary publications, *Aušra* (1883-86) and *Varpas* (1889-1906). *Aušra* and a Polish-language newspaper engaged in “an endless series of mutual recriminations about history and culture” that led to *Ausra* “expressing some clearly anti-Polish sentiment” (Balkelis, 2009: 28). Although *Aušra* “only occasionally displayed signs of anti-Semitism, *Varpas* took a tougher and less tolerant position toward the Jews,” according to Balkelis, who quoted from an 1890 article accusing Jews of “trying to push us away from all positions, especially the educated Jews such as pharmacists and lawyers,” and uses the phrase “the crookery of Jews” (Ibid: 30-31). The first Lithuanian daily newspaper, *Vilniaus žinios*, published “occasional anti-Polish and anti-Semitic slurs” (Ibid: 46).

Stereotyping in news coverage can reinforce negative roles in society. Horsti (2011) described a double standard in which the press usually doesn’t treat minorities as legitimate news sources but pays attention to them in connection with negative events, including crime. Thus their treatment falls into either invisibility or stigmatization. Nicolae pointed to the same pattern in the case of the Roma:

“[I]n practice, Roma are disregarded as a sub-human species or viewed as unable to defend their own point of view, ‘requiring’ the paternalism of everybody from decision-makers to journalists. Public authorities tend to speak for or about Roma without asking Roma for their opinion” (2006: 139).

Sue Folger, the chief-of-party in Bosnia-Herzegovina for the U.S.-based media development NGO Internews, said in an interview:

Coverage of women in the news is horrendous, absolutely horrendous… Semi-clad women… There’s not a lot of serious reporting about women—it’s gossipy or sensational… Women’s magazines are all about beauty and have little on social issues. LGBT rights are very underground here still (2012).

There’s no doubt that cultural understanding is important in reporting many of the stories of our times: Consider recent controversies in Europe about whether Muslim girls can wear head scarves to schools, or honor murders of Muslim women, or bans on building minarets or mosques, or prohibitions on gay pride parades.

It is difficult to generalize or promise that hiring more foreign-born journalists, for example, will improve coverage of immigration-related and immigrant-related is-
sues. The absence of such stories may reflect factors other than the lack of non-native journalists, such as deadlines, a “newsroom culture that sticks to established reporting patterns and inaccurate stereotypes,” Hultén said (2009: 7). Certainly a journalist’s ethnic, racial, or religious background doesn’t guarantee that he or she will find more stories relevant to that group or report them as well as someone with a more mainstream background. And some journalists resent being assigned certain stories or certain beats simply based on their personal demographic. A Swedish study quoted one foreign-born journalist as saying, “Maybe I have consciously avoided issues concerning refugee policies, I can feel like a traitor because you can’t disregard who you are, but I hate to do things just because they are expected of me” (Hultén, 2009: 8).

In addition, diversity is about reporting practices. For example, research shows that political and business reporters cite many more men than women as expert news sources – specialists – to comment on election and economic issues (Freedman, Fico and Love, 2007; Armstrong, 2006). Diversity also can assist journalists in gaining access to otherwise unreachable sources. To illustrate, National Public Radio foreign correspondent Anne Garrels wrote about the advantages of her gender and age when reporting in the Middle East:

“I have only benefitted from my sex, reporting from overseas especially, ironically in societies where women are sequestered. Whether in Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia, I can walk both sides of the street, talking the talk with male officials while visiting the women’s inner sanctums, which are often off-limits to foreign males. And being an older woman has its advantages too. I would never have been able to interview a mullah along the Pakistan-Afghan border were he not assured in advance that I was an “old woman” (2004: 31).

LACK OF NEWSROOM DIVERSITY

Press outlets in Europe face daunting questions about whether and how to make their newsrooms more closely reflect the changing population of their communities, whether local or national. In this context, “newsroom” refers to journalistic professionals who work for media organizations—editors, reporters, photographers, videographers and designers—as well as their managers and owners. “Diversity” refers principally to the gender, racial, ethnic, sexuality and religious makeup of those personnel.

For example, a 2009 study of 103 Swedish media companies showed the make-up of newsrooms differed significantly from the country’s demographics when it came to
country of birth. Geographic variations within the country also exist; Stockholm had a higher percentage of both residents and journalists with immigrant backgrounds. Interviews for the study found that journalists often feel much of their companies’ diversity efforts are window-dressing and empty words (Hultén, 2009: 7).

Conscious and subconscious stereotypes play a role in both production and consumption of news. A natural human process of tending to favor people who are most like ourselves affects newsroom cultures and systems, often giving an advantage to white and male journalists. How is that manifested in such professional settings? When editors say they want an “ideal journalist” to be “aggressive and goal-driven” and able to “compete with the big boys,” those characteristics fit the male stereotype. But they ignore or downgrade what are stereotypical female skills such as persistence, verbal talents and the ability to develop trust with news sources (Lehrman, 2006).

Many Central and Eastern European media companies, especially public service and broadcasters and independent media outlets, have encouraged their own newsroom diversity. Those efforts include recruitment of minority professionals by mainstream media, but have achieved only limited success.

However, comprehensive and up-to-date details on newsroom diversity are spoty. As Vanja Ibrahimbegovic-Tihak (2012), an institutional development expert at the Bosnia-Herzegovina office of the U.S.-based media development NGO Internews, put it, “In Bosnia we are very poor on data.” A study for the International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF) of 170,000 professionals at more than 500 media companies in nearly 60 countries said “companies surveyed were often reluctant to provide information about the salaries of their employees, even though they were assured anonymity and that any figures they provided would be aggregated by both nation and region in the published report” (Byerly, 2010: 29).

The IWMF study showed men holding the vast majority of management jobs and news-gathering positions in most nations. In Eastern Europe, the survey included only Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Ukraine, Russia and Romania; in Nordic Europe, it covered Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway. It identified glass ceilings for women in 20 of 59 nations studied, most commonly in middle and senior management positions. Slightly more than half of the companies said they had company-wide gender equity policies, ranging from 16 percent in Eastern Europe to 69 percent in Western Europe.

Overall, the gender study tallied 73 percent of top management jobs held by men. Among reporters, men hold 64 percent of the jobs. Women do better – but do not have nearly equal representation – in senior professional positions, holding 41 percent of news gathering, editing and writing jobs.
Results varied among countries and regions, with higher proportions of women in both governance and top management in Eastern Europe (33 percent and 43 percent, respectively) and Nordic Europe (36 percent and 37 percent, respectively), compared to other regions. IWMF cited the “exceptionally high occupational standing” of female Bulgarian employees and a “high degree of equality” at Estonian companies (Byerly, 2010: 12). In Lithuania, for example, women “dominate in terms of numbers in the reporting ranks of junior and senior professional levels” (78.5 percent and 70.6 percent, respectively), “and their representation is nearing equality in the middle and top management ranks” (Byerly, 2010: 30).

**CHALLENGES FACING PRESS ORGANIZATIONS**

Today, many challenges to diversity confront legacy media – traditional Central and Eastern Europe print and broadcast outlets – even those that also embrace the Web, social media, podcasts and other rapidly evolving technologies to keep and build their audiences and revenue base.

Add another factor to that combination: perceived societal benefits from more diversity in the newsroom and in the news. As a European Commission study stated, “A more balanced and faithful representation of Europe’s diversity will reap a dividend of greater social cohesion and security, public trust in the media and new avenues for income through journalism and production that has greater resonance with its audience” (2009: 7). Lack of trust in the news media remains a serious concern in the EU, where a recent survey found that “trust in the media remains relatively fragile and limited.” Overall, 52 percent of respondents said they tend not to trust the press – newspapers – as a source of information about European political matters; 45 percent tend not to trust television; 35 percent tend not to trust radio; and 41 percent tend not to trust the Internet (Eurobarometer, 2010: 14).

Journalists collaborating with the European Broadcasting Union tendered a moral rationale for their development of training materials to increase diversity in the newsroom and in the news:

> As public service broadcasters, we have a mission to foster cultural diversity, to serve entire national populations and to reflect the cultural, racial and linguistically diverse character of society accurately in content and in the workforce… As programme-makers and journalists, we need to raise awareness of the effects of unconscious mindsets and a lack of information about all sections of the community (Polak, 2008: 9).
Similarly, Pesic (2012) said, “We care about marginalized, deprived communities and the responsibility of media to give them a voice. We talk about inclusion as one of the main principles of democracy.”

But when it comes to diversity, ethical and pragmatic considerations intersect. Widestedt (2008: 47) asserted that national broadcasters in general and public broadcasters in particular, carry a special obligation because “their wide reach is accompanied by a responsibility towards subordinated groups in society.”

**MEDIA ECONOMICS**

Economic realities pose a second major challenge. News organizations laid off personnel, shuttered foreign bureaus, trimmed the number of pages they print and pushed to sell more advertising in a down economy. Many media companies closed less profitable or unprofitable news outlets, replaced regular employees with freelancers, merged with larger companies, or even abandoned the media business altogether. This challenge is partly due to forces beyond the industry’s control – a global economic crisis – but partly of their own making. For instance, most traditional media companies gambled the wrong way on the Internet. Instead of selling their online content – like they charge for the newspapers and magazines sold at kiosks – they gave away content free online while still incurring the expenses of gathering, editing and posting that content.

Based on interviews with fourteen journalists of foreign background in the Stockholm area, Hultén said the respondents identified the dilemma of implementing diversity programs in a climate of economic decline and budgetary constraints, for example, citing “the classic problem of the ‘last-hired-first-fired’ as an obstacle to more diverse newsrooms” (2009: 6).

**NEWSROOM CULTURES**

Newsroom cultures contribute significantly to the challenge. How should journalists with foreign or other minority backgrounds adapt to organizational culture if they want to succeed? Should news organizations change their own editorial organizational patterns, newsroom cultures and reporting practices – and if so, how? How do owners, managers and rank-and-file journalists at news organizations handle controversial topics internal to newsrooms: quotas, reverse discrimination, favoritism and the scope of affirmative action?

**NEWS ORGANIZATION PERSONNEL PRACTICES**

A major dilemma is how to diversify the newsroom while fiscal pressures are shrinking newsrooms. Once “diverse” employees are hired and acclimated to a
newsroom’s culture, the next question becomes retention – how to keep them on staff – and promotion.

Kretszchmar captured a key duality for diversity in the contemporary uber-environment where politics, public policy and economics converge:

On the one hand, problems of dis-integration of ethnic minorities in the EU are getting increasingly obvious and the pressure to find political solutions for the situation is rising. On the other hand, the situation on the EU media markets is favouring “mainstream” content, reflecting diversity only insufficiently (2007: 203).

Aidan White, former general secretary of the labor coalition International Federation of Journalists and now director of the Coalition for Ethical Journalism, cites labor-management relations as a factor in that dilemma. In an interview, he said, “Unions get locked into protecting the interests of those who are well-established and whose jobs are under attack.” And as media managers target the highest-paid employees for buy-outs or layoffs, “there is not much pressure on unions, particularly from within, to press management to employ people from different communities” (White, 2012).

Even motivated employers may have fewer avenues for newsroom diversification as their companies rely more heavily on freelancers rather than more expensive employees. And with smaller staffs amid tough economic times, employers may be less willing to assume the risk of hiring nontraditional applicants.

Salary levels may impede efforts to build and maintain diverse newsrooms as talented journalists are lured by higher-paying jobs in public relations, corporate and government communications and other fields that seek their talent. The shrinking job market for journalists, coupled with declining career security and reduced benefits at many media companies bolster the allure of leaving the profession. Membership in a minority group may be an asset in the minds of non-journalism employers seeking to improve their own diversity records and reach minority markets. For parents of young children, especially women, non-journalism jobs usually offer the attraction of predictable, stable work hours. In contrast, journalists: often work nights and weekends: receive late-night calls to cover breaking news; confront intense competition with rival journalists on high-stress 24/7 news cycles; travel on short notice; face physical and psychological dangers on assignment; and undertake a “routine” assignment that stretches for days or weeks as a story develops and evolves. At the same time, the newsroom culture expects a macho approach to uncertain and difficult working conditions, a willingness to tough it out – even boast about toughing it out – under such circumstances.
MEDIA CREDIBILITY

Credibility is another challenge. This is the age of reality TV, of “talk radio” shows, of bloggers and of so-called “citizen journalists” who usually lack professional training and are not imbued with the same ethical standards and constraints as professionals. Further contributing to the credibility challenge are well-publicized ethical violations by journalists and news organizations that undermine citizen trust, such as the United Kingdom’s News Corp scandal with its repercussions for the profession literally around the world. These factors make it increasingly difficult for audiences to identify whether “news” and information comes from professional journalists committed to fair, accurate, balanced and ethical reporting. If the public already mistrusts traditional news outlets for those reasons, a perception that coverage lacks diverse viewpoints and ignores or distorts issues of immigration, gender rights, religious rights and minority rights will further erode public confidence in those media.

Meanwhile, new media make it easier for special interests – politicians, parties, government agencies, businesses and advocacy groups – to present their opinions, assertions and interpretations without independent press scrutiny or gatekeeping, and without charging the public for access.

COMPETITION

Competition is one major challenge. Of course, competition has always existed among market-supported media. News organizations have always faced the need to keep up with – and beat – competitors with technological advances. Thus newspapers that used the telegraph could get stories faster than rivals slower to adopt that technology. Thus the arrival of radio put pressure on newspapers and magazines. Thus the advent of television put pressure on radio, newspapers and magazines. And thus the Internet – Web portals, blogs and the 24/7 news cycle – puts tremendous pressure on television, radio, newspapers and magazines. From a management perspective, competition also includes competition for talented personnel. From a journalistic perspective, competition goes far beyond speed – getting the story first. It encompasses vying for the “best” stories, images, news sources and design: in other words, the quality of the professional product.

POST-COMMUNIST MINDSETS

The lingering legacy of communist-era thinking creates an additional barrier to achieving media diversity, according to Pesic of the Media Diversity Institute.
She explained in an interview (2012), “In communism you had this kind of obligation to diversify your forces, your committees, any bodies which existed in that kind of society. It was absolutely artificial but it was compulsory.” She described an institute study that interviewed more than 600 people from the media and civil society organizations: “What we heard from one of them can summarize our main challenge when we talk about diversifying the newsroom. He said, ‘We've had enough with one Moscow. We don't need another one,’” meaning Brussels, home of the European Commission and European Council. In Yugoslavia before it broke apart, positions were compulsory diversified – “at least one Albanian, at least one Roma, at least one farmer, at least one woman. When you go now to [people] and start talking about diversifying newsrooms – particularly the generations who remember the communist and Soviet era, they immediately say, 'You want us to have one farmer, one Roma?' We need to find a way not to remind them of that era.”

**DIVERSITY OF MEDIA OWNERSHIP**

Cultural and media policies are interrelated and transcend technology, politics, social life and economics. They affect rights, legitimization of the civic arena and conditions for citizenship. At the same time, economics drives market integration in Europe and elsewhere.

After the fall of the Eastern Bloc, the ownership of large segments of Eastern Europe's print media passed into the hands of foreign, largely Western companies. Simultaneously, the move towards privatization and liberalization of communication industries throughout the industrialized world opened the doors to greater informational ownership of media companies (Hollifield, 1999: 66).

Doyle observed a shift in the 1990s from predominantly national-level media concentrations in Europe to “transnational media empire-building.” To illustrate, she pointed to “the strategic expansion of dominant players…from Germany and Scandinavia into Central and Eastern Europe” and noted that Norwegian and Swedish media conglomerates now dominate the daily newspaper market in Estonia (2007: 137). Juraitė wrote that foreign-owned media outlets in Lithuania are few in number “but quite important,” such as Swedish-owned TV3, Estonian-owned news portal Delfi.lt, and the Norwegian-owned free daily newspaper 15 min (2008: 128). Of course, even media in acquiring countries are subject to transnational acquisitions, as illustrated by News Corp's ownership of Germany's Sky Deutschland.
White (2012) said a transnational media company’s acquisition of media outlets elsewhere “regrettably” may not advance diversity. “What the big players do when they go into a country is to exploit local conditions and keep local conditions.” As an example, he said a German newspaper chain said it “wanted to improve standards but in fact they didn’t do it” when they opened outlets in Croatia, Serbia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. Lauk made a similar observation after describing Western European and Scandinavian acquisitions of press markets in ex-communist countries; “There are...no indications that they have remarkably contributed to introducing similar professional values in the countries of their destination as in their home countries.... Vice versa, aggressive commercial policies are being pursued at the expense of journalistic standards” (2009: 76).

Although the Internet makes it possible for anyone to be a publisher or broadcaster, the proliferation of online portals and narrowly focused websites does not replace the reduced amount of diversity in mainstream media ownership. In addition, it is the mainstream media that have the reputation and resources to make the greatest impact on the general public and on policymakers and decision-makers.

The European Parliament’s interest in controlling the concentration of media power comes from a perceived need to maintain plurality of viewpoints, a concept associated with diversity. That underscores Doyle’s point: A plurality of sources, voices and ownership is generally regarded essential to advancing democracy and “building social cohesiveness” as broad cultural and socio-political aims (2007: 136).

Small media markets face additional obstacles to diversification of media ownership. Aside from their vulnerability to foreign acquisition—as the Estonian experience confirms—revenue to support more media outlets is limited; wealth and market size therefore limit media pluralism. Balčytienė and Harro-Loit observed, “Traditional news agencies have found survival difficult in the small markets of the Baltic countries” (2009: 521) amid a preference among consumers – media users – for free news and infotainment. For such news agencies, content imported from other news organizations is cheaper than content produced by their own staffs.

Transnational companies hold another advantage: the low cost of sharing content among their properties. Journalists employed by one media property may find their work published, broadcast and posted by multiple media outlets in multiple countries. The range of News Corp holdings is illustrative: daily and weekly newspapers, magazines, over-the-air television, satellite and cable television channels, film and television production, websites and book publishing.
In addition, individual transnational media groups each determine how much control to exercise over the content and hiring practices of their far-flung properties; such control can be exercised explicitly or tacitly. Consider Hollifield’s study of the influence of a Canadian media company on how several of its U.S.-owned newspapers covered Canada. It found that foreign ownership did not necessarily affect the amount of coverage Canada received. However, when its U.S. newspapers wrote about Canada, their overall coverage was most apt to be news and business stories rather than sports, entertainment, or features. It described another possible source of influence: “heightened awareness of the home country among the editors as a result of having a parent company in that country” (1999: 79).

Even so, there is no assurance that more private-sector ownership diversity will generate greater diversity in the newsroom and in news content. As for filling the diversity-of-ownership gap through online media, Balčytienė and Harro-Loit observed that online content largely comes from “a few authoritative sources” that frame the news “along the same editorial lines” (2009: 519) and obtain much of their content from free public relations material and material from other news agencies.

TAKING ACTION

Diversity is part of the news media’s democratic mission and is what many journalists consider an ethical obligation. However, journalists instinctively tend to be skeptics and know from experience that nobody’s motivations are completely pure, that everyone acts from mixed motives in their professional and personal lives. That is why diversity can be an element in media strategies to win audiences. Hultén’s wrote about market justifications and mission justifications, warning, “Those who ignore the demographic shift may not survive in the marketplace” (2009: 4).

That said, there is no assurance that expanding diversity will extend or retain audiences, according to Leon Morse, managing editor of the Media Diversity Index issued annually by the U.S.–based NGO International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX). The IREX index is based in large part on panels of journalists and media policy experts in each country studied.\(^2\) “I haven’t seen panelists say minority reporting was a real boon to us, that it helped sales or cemented audiences,” Morse said in an interview. And although international donors may subsidize more diverse coverage, a subsidy model is not sustainable (Morse, 2012).
Studies have highlighted a variety of successful diversity initiatives across the twenty-seven EU member states and Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. One report (European Commission, 2009) focused on thirty case studies drawn from 150 initiatives, chosen based on such elements as insight into driving forces affecting diversity, holistic and partnership strategies, effective procedures to monitoring and manage, audience impact, leadership impact and financial benefits. Many were designed by NGOs. Media companies or journalism organizations organized several; among those, the Center for Independent Journalism created the Roma Mainstream Media Internship Programme in Hungary and Teleman Production Company in Bulgaria created “Romeo and Juliet,” aimed at anti-Roma bias, for a weekly prime-time television show.

Diversity initiatives may come from established media organizations. Hultén (2009) described how the Norwegian-owned Swedish daily Svenska Dagbladet pursued diversity goals despite budget constraints that led to job cuts. Among other measures, the newspaper adopted a diversity program in 2005 to reach the country’s immigrant population and employ more foreign-born journalists. Its strategy includes the goal of including members of the “big eight” targeted immigrant groups in 16 percent of news photos, reflecting their proportion of Stockholm’s population.

European public service broadcasters generally have a statutory mandate to encompass diversity. Public service broadcaster Sveriges Radio in Sweden operates with a government license that requires it to provide a wide range of programming reflects the country’s varied cultures. Company policy recognizes the multicultural nature of Swedish society, and “overall programming aims at appealing to all Swedes, wherever they live and regardless of their age, gender and cultural background” (Hultén, 2009: 11). Its first foreign-language broadcasts date to 1939, when the station added German and English programming. It now broadcasts in minority languages Finnish and Sami and immigrant languages such as Russian, Persian, Dari and Kurdish. Funding comes from parliamentary-mandated license fees; it accepts no advertising.

Private media lack such a mandate. In market economies, can we expect or require media owners to spend money to advance diversity in their newsrooms and their coverage if they do not see a professional, financial, or moral advantage in doing so? If private-sector media organizations cannot be compelled to cover diversity issues or hire minorities, can governments provide economic or other incentives do so as occurs in Austria and Nordic countries where government subsidies underwrite small local newspapers (Balčytienė, 2009)? Should news outlets cover diversity issues if their audiences are uninterested in such stories? And how should media outlets targeted principally at minority audiences be financed?
If privately owned, mainstream media companies – whether controlled domestically or transnationally – fail to adequately cover events and news of interest to diverse, one long-established set of alternative venues has been ethnic-language newspapers and broadcast outlets. They concentrate on providing audiences from national minorities with news, information and entertainment in their own languages. In doing so, they offer positives and negatives. As Pietikäinen (2008) explained in her study of Sami media production, such media can become symbols of empowerment and political mobilization and language survival. On the other hand, she said, they may be constrained by limited financial resources, small audiences and “the fine divide between professional norms of balance and objectivity, professional status, cultural obligations and audience expectations” (2008: 178).

Other types of alternative venues may also help fill gaps in news coverage. They may be difficult to sustain but have potentially further-reaching impact and audience scope than ethnic and national language outlets and Radio Orange4 in Austria.

Vienna-based Radio Orange is an independent, non-commercial station providing open access for an array of ethnic groups in a country with a foreign-born population of about 9.6 percent nationally and about 18 percent in Vienna. They come mainly from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey, but there are many from Africa and the former Soviet Union. About 20 percent of Austrian residents either speak more than one language or don’t speak German, the official language.

The station says Austria’s mainstream media display a “rather negative attitude” on immigration topics. The vice president of the Foreigner Integration Council in Linz has described a “xenophobic attitude and a deficit in neutral reporting” about ethnic minorities; a station official remarked that “ethnic minorities almost do not exist in the media at all, although they have lived in Austria for years” (Stübner, n/a). The Turkish community publishes its own newspapers, but other groups, especially newer and smaller ethnic communities such as ones from Africa, do not. Radio Orange asserts that those groups should be represented in the media to keep their identity and preserve their roots while living in an alien environment.

According to Stübner (n/a), the station’s independence lets it focus on audiences such as immigrants. Much of its programming airs in foreign languages or addresses immigration-relevant topics. It also tries to increase direct participation of immigrants and minorities in moderating shows and working within the station’s internal structures.
Radio Orange offers a wide range of broadcasts about intercultural topics:

- **Programs from members of an ethnic community addressed to members of their own community**, such as Ada vapuru (Turkish); Radio Dersim (Kurdish); Radio Nachtwerk (Serbian); and Viennahu – Becs magyar hangja (Hungarian). The Turkish and Kurdish communities have multiple programs that reflect internal diversity in political views and cultural values.

- **Programs by immigrants aimed at the general public**, such as “Arabischer Morgen (Arabian Morning)” and “Afropa Literatur” about foreign literature.

- **Programs by people from minority backgrounds** who aren’t immigrants and who broadcast mostly in German. These programs come from the so-called second generation of younger people born in Austria of immigrant parents.

- **Programs by members of the Austrian majority on immigrant topics**, such as “Radio Stimme,” which deals with minorities in general – both ethnic minorities and those of different sexual orientation and with disabilities.

A bi-monthly free newspaper launched in 2006 is distributed without charge among minority groups in suburban Stockholm. *Sdra Sidan* attempts to address “counter-issues, that is news issues not found in the agendas of the mainstream media” and “focuses on the relationships between different ethnic groups in the host country and on issues of communicative rights in multi-ethnic societies” (Hultén, 2009: 9). Beyond what appears in its pages, the newspaper organizes public meetings on local issues and has a readership panel to help staff understand reader needs and provide market research.

Training and media support projects also may encourage diversity. For instance, IREX operates one for Serbian radio and television journalists. A component is enhancing the availability and quality of information for the public; another element is supporting existing media centers, “especially those that help minority media and journalists” – in other words, “training activities [that] promote coverage of minority issues and focus on journalists who are members of minority ethnic groups” and that “increase the capacity of women managers as leaders” (IREX, 2012).
In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Internews is funding several projects on women-run radio stations dealing with post-war conflicts, reconciliation and women. Internews said, “There isn’t a lot of equality in the newsroom because it’s a male-dominated society here. We have some editors-in-chief who are women, but not many… However, any event or training is mostly women” (Folger, 2012). In another endeavor, Internews helped fund Radio Sarajevo’s Manjine.ba, as “an online portal for minorities and underprivileged people” in the country (Internews, 2012).

CONCLUSION

It is neither realistic nor desirable for news media to ignore or downplay politico-ethnic-cultural tensions and events, whether they involve demonstrations and fights in the streets, parliamentary debates about language policy at state-funded schools, the staking out of political party turf, or questions of employment, social services, or housing. Instead, the issues concern which of those stories are covered, how are they reported and who is in the pool of professional journalists providing that coverage.

Experience reveals a dilemma in the quest for better representation of Central and Eastern Europe's diverse populations in the newsroom and in the news: finding ways to transform verbal and written commitments into tangible results. Neither the EU nor individual democratic governments can tell privately owned media organizations whom to hire, nor can they dictate media content. Prospects for dramatic improvements are not on the immediate horizon, according to White (2012), who sees “no evidence at all that media organizations are willing to invest in diversity issues in the present climate. It’s just not going to happen”.

Finally, the success or failure of efforts to diversify professional staffs and coverage in the region will directly impact power relationships in the newsroom and in society.
REFERENCES


*Diversifying the newsroom, diversifying the news: Challenges and obstacles in Central and Eastern Europe*


