

## **RESEARCH REPORT IREX STG**

Grantee: James Miller  
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My research concerns media assistance given by Western donors during the nineties to central and eastern European countries "in transition to democracy." My specific focus has been on "democratic journalism" training. IREX supported my visits to the Czech Republic (Prague), Poland (Warsaw) and Hungary (Budapest). These visits took place within more extended, related fieldwork that included stops in London, Vienna and Paris.

Media assistance assumes that certain principles, policies and practices that developed in Western Europe and North America over many decades and under quite specific historical conditions are applicable - even essential - to newly developing democracies elsewhere in the world. In the case of journalism, donor organizations believe that news writing should be characterized by an impersonal voice, be structured in the inverted pyramid form, should rely on particular conventions of citing sources, etc. The notion seems to be that these occupational practices embody qualities like "objectivity," facticity and disinterestedness that add up to "professionalism" which itself contributes to a "watchdog" relationship to state institutions that, in the end, produces a knowledgeable citizenry able to govern itself. This is a complicated set of usually unexamined assumptions that may not travel well across political cultures. And the often-stated link between a certain kind of journalism and healthy democracy is highly problematic, to say the least.

My work seeks both to document media assistance efforts in central and eastern Europe and to explore their implicit claims to universality. This I am doing by placing Western journalism training in the contexts of foreign aid ("public diplomacy"), the history of the several journalisms in central and eastern Europe, the perhaps unique historical development of what is called Anglo-American journalism, the role of foundations in the export of culture, etc.

For this important fieldwork, which took place in June of 2002, I interviewed a number of scholars and practitioners (see list below) using a qualitative approach appropriate to such "expert respondents," and collected numerous documents - reports, syllabi, analyses - from them and other sources.

It appears that media assistance came into its own as part of Western aid to central and eastern Europe during the 1990s. Although there had been similar efforts before, and especially in so-called Third World countries, media assistance then became a high-profile element in civil-society construction. The evidence, however, suggests that its success was very mixed. Most donors came and went in the region within just the first few years of the beginning of the post-communist period. Much journalism training and support failed to appreciate the long-term process necessary to change the broad institutional environment of news reporting and consumption. Most of it seems to have been exported directly and rather arrogantly from the West without much sensitivity to local conditions.

I am on track to write and publish two articles in leading journalism studies journals. Having discovered both the richness and complexity of the subject, I am also working to assemble a team of European and US researchers that would write commissioned papers on aspects of media assistance to central and eastern Europe that I have identified, in part during this phase of fieldwork. We will be seeking support from the European Union and other organizations for this very worthwhile effort. Surely one goal would be to provide policy makers involved in future media assistance efforts a more informed sense of this project, either in order to refine it and make media assistance more effective, or even to reduce emphasis upon it, recognizing that it can be a strand of political-cultural domination, not always appropriate to regions with their own traditions of journalism.

### Interviewees

#### Prague

Daniel Raus, director of the Slovakian service of Radio Free Europe and Jana Sunkovska, outreach coordinator of RFE/RL; Professor Charles Hood, director of the Anglo-American College journalism program; Petra Breyerova, reporter for the *Prague Business Journal*; Jeremy Drucker, director and editor-in-chief of Transitions Online: Intelligent Eastern Europe;

#### Warsaw

Professor Janusz Adamowski, director of the Institute of Journalism, University of Warsaw; Professor Jerzy Oledzki, University of Warsaw;

**Budapest**

Professor Andras Bozoki and Professor Miklos Sukosd, Central European University; Illona Morocz, deputy director of the Center for Independent Journalism; Eva Vajda and Algirdas Lipstas, Network Media Program, Open Society Institute; Peter Bajomi-Lazar, editor-in-chief of *Mediakutato*.