The impact of geopolitical changes in the European post-communist countries on the circulation of daily newspapers

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Abstract. As a result of the events which took place in Central Europe in the years 1989-1990 a totally new geopolitical situation came into existence. It was directly caused by the dismantling of the communist bloc. There were several changes noticed on the press market: an increase of the number of different newspapers, evident diversification of politic a I objectives of the newspapers, setting up newspapers conveying almost entirely reliable information, releasing short-lived newspapers, closure or considerable reduction in circulation of the former communist parties' newspapers, consolidation of publishing houses and noticeable changes in newspapers' circulation. The objective of this paper is to analyse (present) the impact of the collapse of the communist regimes (systems) on the daily newspaper market size (circulation) in the first years of the political transformation in those countries. The geographical range covers almost all European post-communist countries, except Russia, Bosnia and Herzegowina and Moldavia. The time range refers to the years 1990-1996 when the communist bloc came into its phase of decay.

The analysis made it possible to divide the post-communist countries into five groups. The first group is made up of the countries in which the newspaper circulation decreased. This group falls into two sub-groups. One of them consists of countries with average and big circulation of newspapers in the analysed time range (Ukraine, Lithuania, Estonia, Hungary, Belarus) and the Czech Republic (as the country of a large press circulation). A separate second group includes Slovenia with its average reading habit contrasted with continuously growing press circulation. Another group consists of countries in which there was an immediate increase in newspapers' circulation after 1999 giving then way to its fall. This type includes countries with a high reading habit (Slovenia and Romania), as well as those of average reading habit (Latvia and Poland) and a very low reading habit (Albania).

The fourth group of countries suffered the collapse of the press market directly after the tumbling of communism which then led to a

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revival of circulation. Such changes in the newspaper sales were typical of Bulgaria (high average circulation) and Croatia and Macedonia (very law average circulation). Yugoslavia makes up a separate group where the circulation of newspapers fluctuates and does not show any stable tendency. While the demographic situation, observance of freedom in general and freedom of the press in particular are related to standards of living and the pace of reforms, there is no tangible relationship between the above mentioned aspects and reading habits concerning daily newspapers.

Introduction

The events of 1989-1990 which took place in Central Europe led to an entirely new geopolitical situation. A very fast desintegration of the "external empire" belonging to the former USSR was followed by the dismantling of the "internal Soviet empire". The most important changes are as follows: re-gaining sovreignty by countries lying within the external and internal empires, re-unification of Germany, desintegration of Czechoslovakia and "old" Yugoslavia, liquidation of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance and the Warsaw Treaty (J. Wendt, 1999). The former post-communism countries started a difficult prosess of reforms finding themselves in different social, political and economic situations. Consequently the pace of reforms varied. In some countries reforms were even slowed down (sometimes came to a halt) by their governments or war activities. All this resulted in differences concerning both social welfare and the degree of optimism in those countries (S. Ciok, 2001; P.Eberhardt,2000). The remains of the communist system turned into a slight mess as far as moral and ethical values are concerned (O. Gubova, 2001). Moreover, the leftover conflicts and divisions sparked a war (as it was the case with former Jugoslavia) or were deeply instilled in the minds of people showing a more peaceful attitude by, for example, declaring strong political views (A. Ilies, V. Bodocan, 2001; M. Kowalski, 2001).

All these social, political and economic changes greatly affect alterations of the daily newspaper market. A separate factor strongly influencing the very market was the level of its development at the stage of the communist regime.

The daily press market has undergone great changes in the post-communist countries since 1989. They resulted in:

the increase of the number of newspaper titles;

the evident diversification of political profiles of the newspapers (see J. Wendt, 2002);

setting up newspapers conveying almost entirely objective information;

releasing short-lived newspapers;

closure or considerable reduction in circulation of the former communist parties newspaper (e.g. renaming the Polish United Workers" Party newspaper "Trybuna Ludu" for "Trybuna");

the merger of publishing houses often consisting in buying them by big western media (publishing corporations);

rapid changes in the circulation of newspapers.

The objective of this paper is to analyse the impact of collapsed communist regimes on the circulation of daily newspapers in the first years of the political transformation in those countries. The geographical range covers almost all Eurpoean post-communist countries except Russia (for such reasons as its huge territory, especially difficulties in assessing daily newspapers realia in Siberia or far east regions), Bosnia and Herzegowina and Moldovia (the last two are not included because of incomplete data). The time range spans the years 1990 and 1996, that is the period coming directly after the dismantling of the socialist bloc. The term "a daily newspaper" is understood as a newspaper which is issued at least four times a week.

Statistical data used in this paper are derived from the "World Development Indicators 2001" data base of the World Bank. In some cases the needed data were obtained from year-books concerning particular countries. The algorithm used in this paper follows the pattern:

Forming the matrix with countries in lines, and years in columns.

The analysis of the time range continuity.

Talking a decision of excluding certain countries from the analysis (if the information is not complete) or completing information gaps (by means of Z. Hellwig's method, 1968).

Forming a correlation matrix and sorting out (by means of L. L. Mc Quitty's method, 1957) countries with similar chains of changes in newspapers' circulation.

Calculating the average newspapers' circulations (in the years 1990-1996) for particular countries and dividing them into groups of similar circulations.

Comparing groups of countries with similar chains of changes in circulation and countries with similar average numbers of newspaper copies - thus giving a basis for the final defining of types and subtypes of countries.

Analysis

The analysis, being a result of carrying out the above mentioned classifying procedure, has led to the defining of five groups of countries:

with a predominant falling trend,

with a predominant rising trend,

showing initial fall and a subsequent increase in circulation,
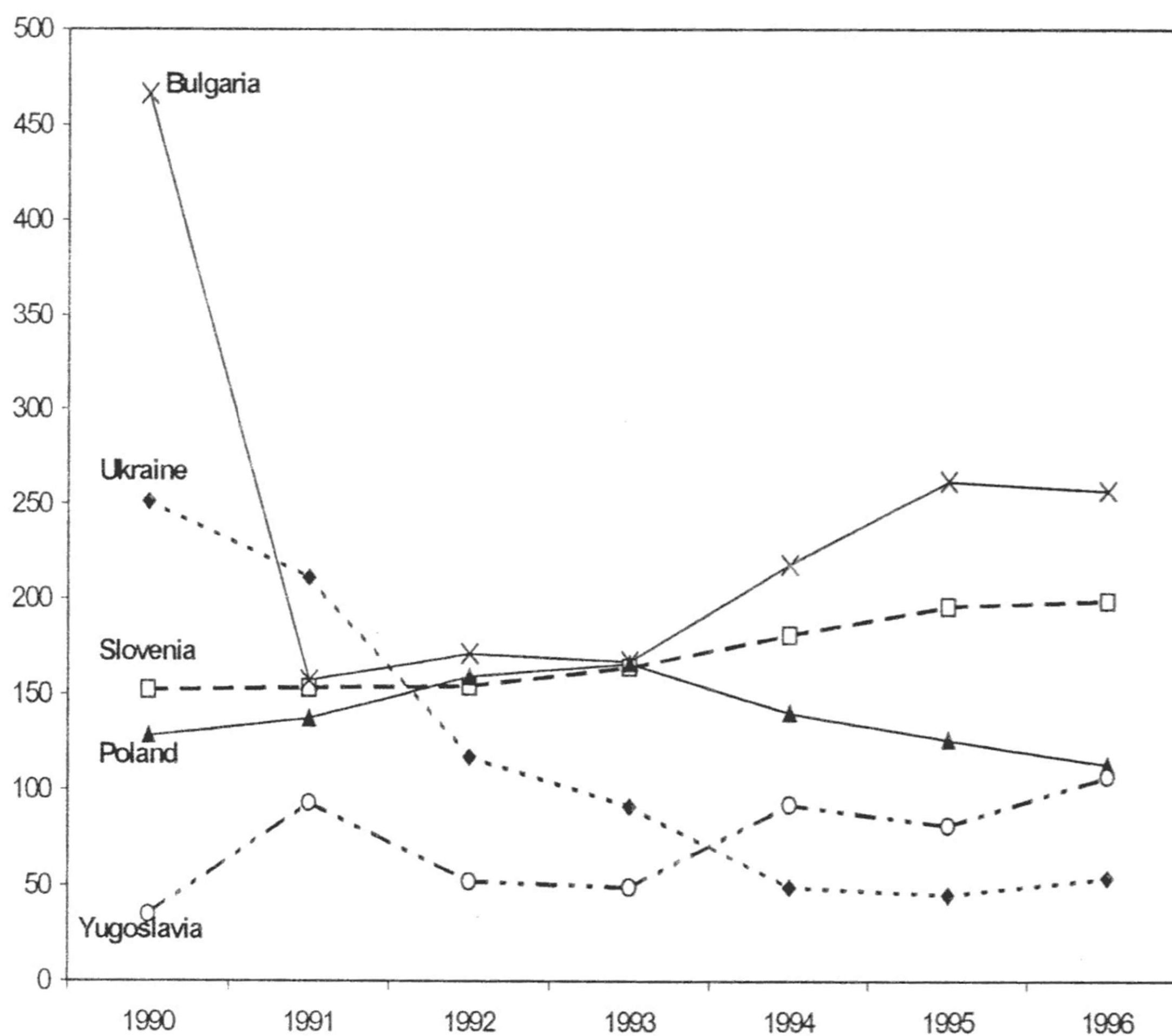
showing initial increase and a subsequent fall in circulation,

Yugoslavia (without any clear tendency).

Fig. i shows a graphic presentation of five countries according to five previously defined types of changes in daily newspapers' circulations. Changes in daily newspapers[1] circulation (pes per 1000 people) in chosen post-communist countries in the first years -of social and economic reforms after the collapse of communism.

Source: author's own presentation based on World Development Indicators 2001, 2001, World Bank, Washington.

The first group is made up of countries characterised by a falling circulation of newspapers. There are two subtypes within this group: countries of average and mass -circulation of newspapers in the analysed period (Ukraine, Lithuania, Estonia, Hungary, Belarus) and the Czech

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Republic (with a very high circulation). The only common feature for these countries is a very high circulation of newspapers in the period prior to the collapse of the socialist bloc. This is also the group of countries which makes it impossible to find one explanation for the decrease in the reading habit related to daily newspapers. This inference is substantiated by the fact that the group consists of both wealthy and poor countries. Some of them enjoy political freedom and belong to NATO, whereas other countries violate freedom of speech. What is more, the group includes reformed and well-developed economies awaiting their imminent membership of the European Community. On the other hand, there are countries in this group whose economies bear a heavy relation to socialist economic principles.

Slovenia makes up a group by itself showing a permanent increase in the press circulation. This tendency is relatively easy to explain. Within the former state of Yugoslavia this country (i. e. Slovenia) was the richest province which had to transfer a considerable part of the revenues to the central budget. Citizens of Slovenia, being more and more well off (presently it is the wealthiest post-communist country), enhanced then-reading habits thus contributed to the increase in daily newspapers' circulation.

Another group includes those countries in which there was an increase in circulation just after 1989 giving then way to a fall. This type embraces both countries with a wide-spread reading habit of newspapers (Slovenia and Romania) as well as countries with average (Latvia and Poland) and low reading habit (Albania).

This tendency is probably due to a release of numerous social initiatives which, in turn, affected setting up new press titles and made reading newspapers more popular. A relatively fast decrease in reading habit (after the period 1992-1993) entailing a fall in the circulation of newspapers is, however, more difficult to interpret. Two reasons might be considered: (1) a fast development of other sources of information or (2) an economic crisis (in some countries).

The countries, in which directly after the collapse of the communist regime a decline in the daily press market was soon followed by an increase in circulation, form the fourth group. Such changes in the sales of newspapers were characteristic of Bulgaria (high average circulation) and Croatia as well as Macedonia (very low average circulation). These were the countries which directly after 1989 were affected by either serious economic hardships or political problems. Each of these reasons may account for a rapid fall in the circulation of daily newspapers. Contrarily, when the situation became stable the circulation of newspapers went up.

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There was another decline in the circulation in Macedonia in 1996 caused by a renewed political instability.

Yugoslavia makes up a separate group where the circulation of newspapers fluctuates and does not show any stable tendency.

Summary

The tumble of communism in Europe resulted in many serious social changes which exerted impact, among other things, on the demographic situation (falling birth rate), migration (a fall in the migration from rural to urban areas and an increase in departures for foreign countries), legal systems (gaining independence from the state by courts in most of the countries) and freedom of speech (in most of the countries). All these changes show a close relation to the social and economic development of each of the countries shortly before 1989 and the pace of reforms which followed. Examples of such changes may refer to the health situation (T. Michalski, 2001) or the freedom of the press (G. Eldestam,2002).

However, there seem to be no clear relationship between the social and economic development of each country before the collapse of the communist regimes and the pace of reforms on the one hand and the changes in the circulation of daily newspapers on the other hand.

There are probably two reasons behind the above mentioned conclusion:

1. New and competitive sources of information, particularly (cable and satelitte) television and LAN/VAN networks. The extent of intluence of these new information media mainly depends on the wellbeing of the society. It is less related to cultural habits.
2. Diversification of reading habits which, to a great extent, has become independent from the wellbeing and cultural tradition of a society in the last one hundred years.

The affluence of a society is very closely related to the reading of quality magazines rather than daily newspapers.

It is obvious that besides the two factors there are plenty others (to mention only the degree of urbanisation i. e. the rate of the population living in big cities), which favour the increase of the daily newspapers' reading habit.

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