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Gernot Facius

Integration of the East German Media into an All-German Structure

For ruling Communist parties, and thus for the SED in the GDR, the monopoly on the dissemination of information through the media was an absolutely essential prerequisite for the power monopoly they claimed. What happens when these media are integrated into a new and democratic structure? Gernot Facius, a journalist for the daily newspaper Die Welt in Bonn well versed in this subject-matter, takes a closer look at this question. He outlines the political, organisational and, last but not least, financial problems which will have to be tackled in this context.

The Legacy of the Communist Past

"We East German journalists," says Helmut Harting, "we are not among history's victors." The journalist who survived the *Wende*, the radical political upheaval in the GDR in autumn 1989, as the editor-in-chief at the state broadcasting organisation *Deutscher Fernsehfunk* (DFF) feels that an appraisal of the past which refrains from extenuating realities is the best basis for a fresh start. And Alfred Eichhorn, the editor-in-chief of the GDR's Radio One (*Erstes Programm*) told the author during his visit to Bonn: "No, none of us were heroes." Those who speak so frankly are still unpopular among their colleagues. After returning to Berlin Eichhorn said that "there were some astonishing discussions between some of my colleagues." As a result of the dispute Eichhorn, who had broadcast a three-hour reading from Walter Janka's book *Schwierigkeiten mit der Wahrheit* on 5 November, 1989, stayed away from a discussion between prominent experts organised by the ARD in the Berlin Reichstag — a reflection of the current reality of broadcasting in the GDR. East German journalists are finding it hard to come to terms with the new age. Many a newspaper or broadcasting editor who reliably carried out his work under the "realities" of the Communist system now spearheads today's "revolutionaries."

The truth is that in 40 years of SED rule an entire profession was humiliated. The mass media in the GDR worked in accordance with the principles of the Marxist-Leninist theory of the press. In other words, in line with Lenin's instruction to be a collective propagandist, a collective agitator and a collective organiser. In its propagandist function the press had the task of disseminating Marxism-Leninism throughout all sections of the population. As an agitator its task was to support the day-to-day politics of the party dictatorship. As an organiser it was obliged to intervene in a guiding and controlling function in the respective political, economic and cultural development and bring about

the desired results. The press was viewed as an "instrument of the party to push through its revolutionary policies." Partiality was the supreme principle. "The freedom of the press," which was "guaranteed" by the former East German constitution, was only proclaimed as a "civil right" not as a human right.

There was no guarantee for the freedom of information. The limits to the freedom of the press were not, as in the Federal Republic of Germany, the "general laws," but the "principles of the constitution." These "principles" included, for example, the "leading role of the party, democratic centralism," the exercising of political power by the "working people" and the "irrevocable alliance with the Soviet Union." Any violations of these principles were classed as "counter-revolutionary", they were not covered by the freedom of expression and of the press. According to Article 6 of the GDR Constitution, "any form of militaristic and revanchist propaganda, incitement to war and declaration of religious, racial and ethnic hatred" was classified as a crime and punished accordingly. The criminal law introduced in 1968 also made "incitement to war and propaganda, fascist propaganda, agitation against ethnic groups and races, agitation against the state, public disparagement" and the "impairment of government or social activity" punishable offences.

The all-powerful SED alone determined what constituted such an offence. The party kept a cadre file on journalists in all media. If a journalist asked the director of a combine, for example, whether the new product his plant was producing was environment-friendly such audacity was registered in the file. Too many such bold remarks led to a ban on that journalist working in his profession. By the very nature of their profession journalists contributed to the intellectual degeneration in the GDR. They functioned as illustrators of SED policies. No trace of any "duty as chroniclers." When Erich Honecker visited the provinces the whole affair was stage-managed like a military operation — by East German television's "court reporters." Michael Schmidt, who today works in the Berlin head office of the news programme *Aktuelle Kamera*, was involved in the production work carried out by several workgroups of the SED regional section in Schwerin in 1987. As he explained recently during a conference at the University of Siegen he even knew in advance the answers two shop assistants would give to an apparently impromptu question asked by the chairman of the Council of State Honecker. Like many of his colleagues Schmidt admits that he must share the blame for this disgusting procedure, but he also pins his hopes on the "learning ability of journalists."

This will not be easy. Many politicians in the West wag their fingers in warning. For example, the Prime Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia and the deputy chairman of the SPD, Johannes Rau. He points out that the media in the GDR contributed to impeding and suppressing the movement for peace in the East German population as long as they could. "Up until the upheavals at the end of 1989, therefore, they were a constitutive part of the state security (MfS) system in the GDR. The triumph of the people also meant the collapse of these

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media institutions." Rau came to the conclusion that a truly democratic new start is only possible with new people. People who view the state and the media as antagonists and who do not simply view themselves as the mouthpiece of politicians. "For a few weeks it did look as if something resembling an upheaval was indeed in progress, especially in the field of television," the writer Anna Jonas remarked. "But because no-one seriously kept the revolution going it ceased to be a proper revolution and degenerated into no more than a change. No-one seriously cleared out the broadcasting centres and studios or even replaced them. Persons previously in top positions stayed on and soon returned to 'business as usual.' Most rituals have returned, and television and radio again practice deception on a large scale."

The "forces of self-purification" on which GDR Media Minister Gottfried Müller pins his hopes have not yet developed. Persons working today for East German radio, television, newspapers, magazines and book publishers were carefully selected by the former Communist rulers. They went through training courses marked by the instrumental character of the media as the transmission medium of the party. The *Rotes Kloster* (red cloister), the journalism section of the Karl Marx University in Leipzig, demanded a great deal from future East German journalists, especially in the field of socialist argumentation. The selection procedure already began in the fifth form at school. The decisive factor was generally a one-week test in a holiday centre of the SED printing works Zentrag. Loyalty to the party line and party membership were the main requirements for admission to the "cloister." After all, the aim was to train party workers, not to encourage investigative journalism.

The *Rotes Kloster* was not closed down, but continued with reformed university regulations. In future, 100 students — 20 less than before autumn 1989 — are to be prepared for the journalistic profession in Leipzig. In addition, there will be 40 university places for journalism as a subsidiary subject and 25 places for communication sciences/media theory as principal and subsidiary subjects. It is hoped that students in this discipline will learn for the first time to critically assess media research, media policy and public relations activities. As regards personnel, however, there is every indication of continuity. In the revolutionary autumn of 1989, for example, Professor Klaus Preisigke taught the "cloister students" the art of "political argumentation." Today, Preisigke is deputy department director. Consolation for those who are not bent on obtaining the academic title of *Diplom-Journalist* which the former cadre forge of the Ulbricht and Honecker era conferred on its graduates. Publishers' associations, journalist organisations and individual publishing houses are making efforts to give future journalists a chance. In the GDR there is also a growing trend towards trainee periods with on-the-job upgrading.

The New Start for the Print Media

The discussion on a new media system in Germany is taking place against this background. It centres on the print media. Private-sector initiatives are best

able to foster the process of democratisation in the GDR and satisfy the population's reading needs. The Dortmund media expert Horst Röper discovered that at times the inhabitants of the GDR became world champions in newspaper reading. Set in relation to the population figure the turnover of newspapers was higher than the corresponding figure of the traditional leader in this field, Japan. Ongoing developments have disrupted media structures which ossified during decades of "continuity" — both in East and West Germany. Up until autumn last year 39 newspapers were published in the territory of the GDR, all of them licensed by the Council of Ministers in East Berlin. According to official statistics, the total circulation figure of the daily press in the GDR in 1987 was approximately 9.5 million. Fifteen papers with a total of 218 local editions were owned by the Communist SED. The "bloc parties" obliged to toe the Communist party line were allotted smaller shares. The CDU had six newspapers, the LDPD five, the NDPD six and the DBPD one. The *Junge Welt* published by the Communist youth organisation FDJ was the top seller with 1.3 million copies.

In comparison with the circulation figures for most regional newspapers in the Federal Republic of Germany the regional newspapers of the SED were giants. Their circulation figures often reached the fantastic level of 300,000 or 400,000. This explains the jostling between western publishers for the former party newspapers. Although the circulation of the papers of the former regime has dropped this does not change the old wise saying that it is still cheaper to buy up a newspaper than to launch a new one on the market. The case of the Thuringian newspaper *Die Neue* is perhaps symptomatic for the current situation. The newspaper, with its head office in Suhl, was taken off the market only four months after its first appearance. The principal shareholder, the Würzburg-based company Mainpresse-Richterdruck, referred to the unexpected development of the circulation of former SED newspapers as the main reason. The latter have only lost between 4 and 15 per cent of their subscribers. *Die Neue*, therefore, was unable to live up to prior financial expectations.

Irrespective of the confusion of the situation in individual cases, the overall situation on the newspaper market between Rügen and the Thuringian forest is marked by three trends. Some publishers try to cope with the problems which have arisen since the opening up of the borders on their own; the number of such publishers, however, is declining. The majority of East German publishers have obtained the support of a western partner. More and more western newspapers are selling their publications in East Germany. Above all the publishers in what was up to now the border area between the two countries acted resolutely after 9 November, 1989, by extending their areas of circulation or re-opening circulation areas which were segmented as a result of division of Germany. Here too, a market which belongs together is growing together. Up until mid-May, 1990, 30 newspapers re-emerged in the area near the border. Nowhere have newspaper readers got such a wide range of news-

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united Germany is weak. "What East German identity is supposed to be saved," Anna Jonas asked in the leftwing alternative newspaper *TAZ*, "if identity is simply a synonym for nationalism? The identity of a cringing society condemned to unquestioning obedience? The identity built up around 'people's own businesses' and 'agricultural production cooperatives,' which deprived the country and its citizens of their rights, exploited and literally poisoned them? The society based on a niche identity? On the contrary, one can only hope that as little as possible or even nothing remains, since this would be the only chance for a shared and better society."

Problems of Guaranteeing Pluralism for the Broadcasting Corporations

Personnel decisions, especially in the radio and television broadcasting sector, reflect the dilemma between a credible new start and an "integration" of former personnel. As these decisions not only relate to those who share the blame for the errors of the past or to fellow travellers "responsibility and circumspection, not blind rage, are required when deciding on dismissals" (Jonas). The leftwing poet Jonas and the conservative politician Wiechatzek agree that all those who want a pluralist democracy, in other words a genuinely different republic than the SED, have the right to dismiss those persons who try to prevent this and who are best suited to do so, "since this and hardly anything else is exactly what they have learnt."

The "personnel replacement" in the media sector is an almost insoluble problem for the politicians responsible. In comparison, the creation of an all-German broadcasting structure looks like a media policy stroll, despite all the petty jealousies and all the party-political reservations. Nevertheless, the democratisation and decentralisation of the mammoth East German broadcasting enterprise (all in all, 14,000 employees) will have serious repercussions for radio and TV broadcasting in the Federal Republic of Germany. The escalating discussion over the fate of the two West German radio stations *Deutschlandfunk* (DLF) and *Deutsche Welle* (DW) can easily obscure the view of the emerging upheaval in the electronic media landscape in Germany. One thing is certain: the GDR will probably return to the regionalisation of broadcasting as it already developed under the Soviet military administration between September 1945 and January 1946; the centralisation of broadcasting in Berlin was the result of the establishment of the State Broadcasting Committee on 1 September, 1952.

The key motto is federalisation. The GDR deliberately orientates its plans to the broadcasting structure in the Federal Republic of Germany to make their radio stations and TV channels compatible with the "rules of the game" of the ARD in the Federal Republic of Germany. The sovereignty in the media sector will lie with the re-emerging five *Länder* (states): Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia. The draft of a "Broadcasting Transition Act" envisages the dissolution of the *Deutscher Fern-*

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sehfunk (DFF) and of the radio broadcasting system of the GDR. The "general legal successors" of the two institutions are to be *Land* broadcasting directorates, which will then be transformed into *Land* broadcasting corporations once the *Land* broadcasting laws come into force. The *Land* broadcasting directorates will jointly produce the previous East German programmes. In addition, each directorate can broadcast two regional radio programmes and one regional television channel on their own or together with other broadcasters. The DFF empire in Berlin-Adlershof will be reduced to the status of a production centre.

The media policy significance of the limitation of the number of radio programmes and TV channels operated by the future *Land* broadcasting corporations extends far beyond the GDR. The aim is to prevent public broadcasting in the GDR from occupying all frequencies and thus blocking the development of a private broadcasting system (and thus the path to a combined public and private system). Media law expert Professor Reinhart Ricker from the University of Mainz discovers even more positive aspects in the draft. "The pluralism of the media system as the basis for a structure which fosters the freedom of expression is reinforced by the setting up of councils which share responsibility for the media with *Land* broadcasting directors. The draft deliberately opted for a slim path, in which society is not represented by so-called relevant groups but by a small number of respected personalities." Professor Ricker feels that this solution is not only necessary to ensure that the reorganised broadcasting system can take swift action, "but it would, in view of the previously dubious efficiency of the large broadcasting bodies in the Federal Republic of Germany also be suitable as an incentive to examine the structures in the Federal Republic of Germany itself." A board system, therefore, in line with the British and American models. Why not learn from the GDR?

The draft also envisages the application of the *Tendenzschutz* stipulation specified in the West German Works Constitution Act, according to which organisation concerned with propagating attitudes (i.e. press, political parties, charitable institutions) are exempted from the provisions of industrial relations legislation, to the field of broadcasting. It would above all protect the internally pluralistic constitution of the public law medium, which is financed by tax-like fees, from a journalistic codetermination right of editorial councils. This would deny those who are to be controlled the possibility of becoming their own controllers. On the basis of trade union initiatives, approaches contrary to those discernible in this draft also exist in the Federal Republic of Germany. Admittedly, the draft of a "Broadcasting Transition Act" also contains problematic aspects. The fact that directors and councils are to be appointed by the Prime Minister in agreement with the Volkskammer press and media committee is incompatible with the principle of the absence of state interven-

tion in broadcasting. If the Prime Minister has the task of appointing executive employees they would not be selected on the basis of professional qualifications, but on the basis of party-political proportional representation. This would create "little legal monsters" for the GDR *Länder* yet to be created, the former director of the Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) Friedrich Wilhelm von Sell, who advises the East German SPD on media questions, complained.

Broadcasting Structure and Financing Problems

The main objection to the "Broadcasting Transition Act," however, is raised against a different, in fact the key aspect of the draft. There is fear of a federalisation which fails to take into account the financial policy realities of the GDR. Can five, or including the special case of Berlin six, *Land* broadcasting corporations be at all financed? Legislators have indeed opted for the most expensive solution. The ARD is particularly worried about its implications. A host of East German radio stations and TV channels would complicate the already awkward coordination process within the ARD. In addition, it would mean a greater financial burden for Channel One (*Erstes Programm*) in the Federal Republic of Germany, which will probably serve as a model for the newcomers. If the "five solution" at *Land* level in the GDR is accepted, the fee revenue there would not suffice to finance this media policy particularism. The *Westdeutsche Rundfunk* (WDR) already considered what this decision would mean in more concrete terms. "The share of channels and stations held by West German broadcasting organisations in the ARD would be reduced. Those broadcasting organisations which receive financial equalisation (*Finanzausgleich*) payments in the West will become even more needy. Additional equalisation recipients will emerge in the East." The East German broadcasters would have to be maintained by the West. ARD directors and the media experts of the major parties in the Bundestag feel that at most two *Land* broadcasting corporations on the territory of what is still the GDR are economically viable. This "two solution" would mean: "The share of channels and stations held by West German broadcasting organisations in the ARD would be reduced. All broadcasting organisations, however, would be financed by their own revenue" (according to the WDR paper).

The former head of the WDR von Sell also recommends more exact calculations. In his opinion only one *Land* broadcasting organisation should be created in the GDR with powerful regional broadcasting centres. Such an "East German broadcasting organisation" would be the second largest *Land* broadcasting organisation in Germany (behind the WDR). A prospect which has really got politicians and media experts in the south and south-west of Germany worried, who fear a "predominance of left-wingers." They are afraid that the ARD would then become a left-wing institution. The *Bayerischer Rundfunk* (BR) would become just one of the, in all probability, twelve ARD broadcasting organisations. The other side argues that the ARD would run into tremen-

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dous difficulties if the five or six GDR broadcasting organisations were to join it. Von Sell pointed out that this could induce the ARD to refuse membership to the smaller East German broadcasters and prompt the West German broadcasting organisations which broadcast in areas bordering on the GDR to extend their transmission areas. The *Norddeutscher Rundfunk* (NDR), for example, has shown an interest in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern for some time now; its media planners would like to see an NDR broadcasting centre in Schwerin. Hesse and Bavaria border Thuringia or on Thuringia and Saxony. Are the *Hessischer Rundfunk* (HR) and the BR also interested in an eastward extension?

The ARD has just celebrated its 40th anniversary. In the words of its chairman Professor Hartwig Kelm it can still cope with a lot more. In the same breath, however, Kelm added: "It will undoubtedly change." The integration of broadcasting in the GDR will be a very expensive and important media policy task. But what will happen to the very small broadcasters such as the *Saarländischer Rundfunk* and *Radio Bremen* (RB) in the wake of such integration? As regards their financing they are given artificial respiration by the other ARD broadcasters. They exclusively owe their continued existence to political decisions. *Radio Bremen* currently has a three per cent share of the total ARD programmes broadcast. A reduction of this share would upset the cleverly designed financial equalisation system. RB would be virtually left with nothing. It is the broadcasting organisation which stands to suffer most from a restructuring of the ARD, which is also being demanded as part of a new all-German media order. Some thinking out loud is being done about the "limits to federalism." Premier Rau voiced his opinion on this point during the mid-June 1990 "North Rhine-Westphalia Media Forum" in Cologne. "Far-reaching solutions" could be considered: for example, a reduction of the number of *Länder* and thus of the number of broadcasting corporations. At the same time he considered less far-reaching solutions such as concentrating on "essential tasks" and "reducing the complexity through procedures." Rau was criticised for many of his recommendations. Above all, for asking "Do the ARD broadcasters have to provide over three dozen different radio channels until the end of this century?" Does this mean that the Premier of the largest West German *Land* supports "shrinking down" the ARD to a "healthy size?"

It is all too clear that the decisive problem is money. Integration, unification and a joint public broadcasting system on the basis of the ARD cannot be created free of charge, especially since the ARD is interested in the *Deutschlandfunk* — which it has no intention, as expressed in a CDU paper, of letting the ZDF, the second nationwide West German public broadcasting corporation (based in Mainz) take over — and would also like to integrate Rias Berlin "into our structure" (Kelm). The ARD has plans for the *Deutschlandfunk*, which would be the tenth broadcasting organisation in the ARD, to produce the first national radio station; the foreign-language programmes of the DLF would

then be taken over by the *Deutsche Welle* (DW). This would prevent private radio stations from taking a lead in national radio broadcasting. There is plenty of media policy dynamite here. ARD broadcasters will not only have to make concessions with respect to frequencies and money. The DLF has an inadequate VHF frequency range. If new frequencies are needed this will necessitate difficult negotiations with, above all, the broadcasting organisations belonging to the ARD, which themselves plan new radio stations: WDR, BR and *Südwestfunk*. According to the ARD model, the channel *Freies Berlin* (SFB) and Rias Berlin should develop a programme for Greater Berlin, with a meaningful integration of the East Berlin radio system. As Rias has also broadcast television since 1988 this must also be catered for: the DW is weak in the TV sector; it has an eye on Rias television. The ARD is also looking for new partners and has praised Rias TV as "breakfast television with a high standard and informative content." According to the ARD chairman Kelm, this type of television is precisely what has been missing in the ARD so far. The ARD and the ZDF, could join forces here. "After all, DM 200 million which would have to be financed by the fee and advertising revenue of the ARD and perhaps the ZDF are at stake." Rias, which is under American management, has been financed so far by the Federal Government in Bonn. Together with its share in licence fees the DLF also receives money from Bonn. There is already talk of an "appropriate increase in fees", of a new financial allocation ratio, which takes this into account.

In line with this logic, a restructuring of the German broadcasting system will inevitably lead to the reallocation of fee revenue between the ARD and the ZDF. Up to now the ARD has received 70 per cent of the revenue and the ZDF 30 per cent. Kelm explains the ARD's position: "The current allocation is already extremely favourable for the ZDF. If the ZDF is now allowed to extend its broadcasting activities to the GDR and obtain a 30 per cent share of the television licence fees from that area, but only has to finance two or three new studios in the territory of the GDR, the colleagues from Mainz will benefit substantially and have little or no financial burden. And the private broadcasters can move into a new field, reap the rewards without any burden. Not so the ARD." Although the ARD will also be able to extend its fee-paying catchment area, the additional revenue will have to be channelled into financing the new East German broadcasters. The GDR broadcasters will be unable to finance their activities through their own fees if they intend adjusting their technical equipment to western standards and retaining their exaggeratedly high staff figures. As the temporary director-general Manfred Klein announced in June, 1990, the GDR radio broadcasting system alone lacks over DM 30 million for the second half of 1990.

In order to improve the situation for the future five *Land* broadcasting corporations the up to now central "radio factory" in East Berlin must not only go easy on funds, but also cut back its personnel. Despite the fact that an increase