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“Cultural Changes in Central - and South East Europe after 1989”

***POLITICAL IDENTITIES CONSTRUCTION IN UKRAINIAN AND FRENCH NEWS
MEDIA***

By Valentyna Dymytrova (doctoral student, Université Lyon 2, France)

My research is focusing on the relationship between the media and political identities. Thus, I investigate in what ways political identities are constructed within the Ukrainian and French printed media. How national, political and media cultures affect the media representations and shape political identities? Twelve minutes of presentation is not enough to present this problematic. According to the title of this forum, which is “Cultural Changes in Central - and South East Europe after 1989”, I will limit my purpose to Ukrainian printed media. And I will try to point out some changes and continuities in relations between media and political identities in Ukraine that I could observe working on my thesis.

It is important to precise that I am working within two disciplines: political anthropology and communication studies. Such interdisciplinary approach gives the possibility not to isolate media, politics and culture. It is especially important for one who would like understand Ukraine after 1989.

Media and politics in Ukraine after 1989

The Ukrainian media are known deep transformations, especially after the independence of the country proclaimed in 1991. New legislation, privatization, integration in global information flows have completely changed the conditions of media production. The format and the agenda of printed press changed too. Despite the domination of television and the increasing concurrence of Internet, printed press in Ukraine is still one of the important sources of information. Liberated from state censorship, Ukrainian media are involved in new relations with state and private owners and are still dominated by political interest or pressures, on the one hand, and market logic, on the other. Ukrainian political elites believe that media are of a great importance in shaping political orientations. But, as it was showed by Marta Dyszok, a Canadian media scholar, the role of the media has been ambiguous in

crucial moments of contemporary Ukraine's history in 1991 and 2004: "...*Opposition groups and leaders had little exposure in mainstream media, whether it was the all-Soviet media system during glasnost or the Ukrainian national media system in the new millennium. Yet in both cases the opposition succeeded*". It means that there is a high degree of continuity between the Soviet and post-Soviet eras in terms of societal scepticism towards elites that are in power. This seems to question the relations between media and political identities construction and invite to consider these relations as complex and dynamic interaction between persons, institutions and practices. When many scholars study these relations on macro-level, I try to do it on micro-level by mobilizing discourse analysis of text and semiotic analysis of photo. The media discourse is considered as a place of dialogue between journalist, present or potential readers and newspaper. The political identity is considered as the sense that can circulate and be interpreted in the media.

Media as mirrors, memories and organizers of identities

The relations between media and political identities are studied through three categories: media as mirrors, memories and organizers of identities.

The suggestion to consider media as mirrors of identities is based on the logic of the media to ensure the expression and the representation of identities. The reader recognizes his membership and his sociability by a double identification with the speaker (the journalist or the newspaper reporter) and with the actors or characters of media story.

The media ensure the continuity of political or social identity of the reader and the passages between individual memory and collective memory.

As organizers of identities, media contribute to the construction of knowledge, representations of social reality and to some extent, the construction of identities. This implies responsibility and questions the ethics of professionals of media.

Media during the "Orange Revolution": indicator of changes or continuities?

If the choice of the language of publication is one of the important identity issues, the new phenomenon in Ukraine is English versions of some newspapers oriented to political and intellectual elites. At the same time, newspapers published in Russian dominate Ukrainian media market as in Soviet time. In 2009, 1264 newspapers are published in Ukrainian with 900 000 copies per year, when 975 newspapers are

published in Russian with 2 millions copies per year. And 226 newspapers are bilingual with 200 000 copies per year¹.

Three Ukrainian newspapers were analysed in the period of mass manifestations, in November – December 2004, called “Orange Revolution”: *Den*, *Fakty i komentarii* and *Zerkalo nedeli*. These three newspapers appeared in 90s, their chief editors began their carriers in Ukrainian Republican media. Nevertheless, they represent different developments of Ukrainian journalism; they have different formats and are oriented to different readers.

The daily newspaper *Den (The Day)* is published since 1996 in Ukrainian, Russian and English with 60 000 copies. The newspaper offers news, analysis and commentary by experts and renowned scientists and targets the political and economic elites of the country. It is close to Social democratic party of Ukraine unified and has the good contacts with the West. Its editorial line is pro-Western; the newspaper campaigned for the country's accession to NATO.

Created in 1997, *Facts and comments (Fakty i komentarii)* is a daily newspaper of a tabloid format published in Russian. It belongs to Viktor Pintchouk, Ukrainian billionaire, brother-in-law of the ancient president Leonid Koutchma. The newspaper is a very successful commercial project with the circulation of 800 000 copies despite its high price compared to other Ukrainian newspapers. The editorial politics is oriented to facts and photos with an accent on individual destinies “*that will shock people or arouse their emotions*”.

And *Mirror Weekly (Zerkalo nedeli)* is an influential weekly newspaper published since 1994 in Ukrainian, Russian and English. With 57 000 copies, its independence is guaranteed by an American owner and a strong team of independent journalists recognized by several prestigious awards. The newspaper gives great importance to political, economic and societal news and presents a lot of analytical materials.

The relations between media discourse and political identities during the Orange Revolution are differently constructed through these newspapers. It is not only the question of different positions towards the event that can be described through the categories of adhesion/ or denunciation or legitimacy of power/or people as you can see in the handouts. The question is about the place accorded to citizens in political life. *Zerkalo nedeli (Daily mirror)* offers a lot of analytical materials and presents

¹ http://comin.kmu.gov.ua/control/uk/publish/article?art_id=74512&cat_id=73033.

different perspectives on the event combining the adhesion to the movement with the critics of leaders of opposition and their actions. *Den (The Day)* completely emancipated from the influence of power during this period supports the opposition and its actions. The newspaper offers detailed coverage of events in Kiev and regions, a lot of interviews with politicians and experts, the regards on Ukrainian events from abroad and a lot of photos with pro-orange rhetoric. Both *Zerkalo nedeli* and *Den* use an elaborated and complex set of codes of written language and connote their discourse by authority, formality and seriousness. As for *Fakty i komentarii (Facts and comments)* the newspaper presents the point of view of power but takes the distance with the candidate of power. On the beginning of the movement, the newspaper played on the emotions of fear, danger of violence or economic crash. In several days, the movement is compared to fun fair or festival. The newspaper even organizes the competition "Miss Revolution". The orange rioters are presented through the individual destinies. For example, there are several stories on young people who are got acquainted and married during the manifestations. Political motives of mobilization are presented as the battle for powers between political leaders which does not concern ordinary people. The newspaper uses an orally-based, restricted set of vocabulary and sentence structures like contrastive stress, features of spoken discourse, short or incomplete sentences, modality etc. Analyzed newspapers use different news values codes and news discourses. The reader of *Den* does not have the same information as the reader of *Fakty i komentarii*. There is the same dilemma for Ukrainian media, as for French ones, between familiarity, camaraderie and entertainment values opposed to authority, formality and seriousness.

There is no doubt that readers are likely to decode meanings proposed by press in a wide variety of ways and of social contexts of reading. They can also read different newspapers or consult different media and confront competing views of identities proposed by them. Reading and discussing news in family or at work as it was the case during the Orange revolution involves recoding news discourse in a quite different way to its original presentation in newspapers.

Conclusion

So if we look to the news discourse of the time of the Orange Revolution should we consider it as an indicator of changes or continuities in the relations between media

and political identities? The answer is complex. It needs to take into account much more factors. Certainly, in many ways there are profound changes. The Orange revolution provoked a brief emancipation of media from state's or owner's censorship. But pluralist points of view in Ukrainian media can be explained as well by the progress of democratic values as by the lack of elite consolidation and the logic of clans. Another change concerns the commercial logics that provoke the depolitisation of readers and their transformation into consumers of information. But there is also some continuity. Ukrainian political elites as Soviet ones still believe that media are of a great importance in shaping political orientations and try to influence them. And on the other hand, there is still some societal scepticism towards elites in power that make unpredictable relations between media and political identities in Contemporary Ukraine.