



**DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM, MEDIA AND  
COMMUNICATION, JMG**

## **Comparing Media Systems Applied in Post-Soviet Countries**

**Political Parallelism and Role of the State in Armenia, Belarus and Russia**

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Essay/Thesis:	15 credits
Program and/or course:	Master's program in Investigative Journalism (MIJ), Master's thesis in Investigative Journalism, JU2603
Level:	Second Cycle
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## Abstract

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**Purpose:** The research aims to reveal the media models operating in the selected three post-Soviet countries: Armenia, Belarus, Russia. As the latter have a joint history the thesis seeks to find out the historical, economic and socio-political causal links that have contributed to the development of the current media systems.

**Theory:** The thesis is based on the theoretical framework of Hallin and Mancini described in "Comparing Media Systems." More specifically, to identify the media model(s) and to discover the character of the media-state relationship two of the dimensions proposed by Hallin and Mancini will be further used with a greater emphasis, which are political parallelism and role of the state. Nevertheless, as the dimensions have been designed to be implemented in Western countries, the research also relies on the critiques on the book.

**Method:** The analysis is based on both secondary research and qualitative study conducted within the scope of this particular research. The theory has been designed to be implemented on already existing information. To fill in the gaps in the research, interviews have been carried out with 5 investigative journalists from the selected countries altogether.

**Result:** The analysis has revealed that three of the selected countries share one type of media system. Nevertheless, the media model differs from those proposed by

Hallin and Mancini due to historical, economic, socio-political characteristics of the countries.

## **Foreword**

I would like to express my gratitude towards my supervisor Monica Löfgren Nilsson who has helped me throughout the whole writing process by putting me on the right track. I would also like to thank the other professors in particular Ulla Sättereie and Brigitte Alfter, Sandra Foresti, Helena Löfving and Mathias A. Färdigh for their support and the acquired knowledge.

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# Introduction

Armenia, Belarus and Russia united by the Soviet system up to these days have media systems which operate under the inherited authoritarian traditions. The three post-Soviet countries are good examples of how politicized the media system can be. Having a shared past, the current situation cannot be analyzed without taking into consideration the chronology of historical events and causal links that eventually created the current state of the media systems in these countries. The best way to point to the similarities and differences among the three post-Soviet countries' media systems is to carry out a comparative study. While scholars often overlook comparative studies, the topic of media itself was majorly overlooked by the political scholars previously in the countries mentioned above. To understand the relation between the press and the abovementioned system it is important to take into consideration the societal beliefs and assumptions such as the nature of the person, society and the state, the attitude of the person towards the state, the perceived notion of knowledge and the truth. The theoretical framework which the comparative analysis will be based on is the book by Hallin and Mancini "Comparing Media Systems." The book explores the philosophical rationales lying behind the different types of the press along with political rationales. The theoretical framework of the book is designed for implementation on already existing research. (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) Nevertheless, the selected countries for this particular research which are Armenia, Belarus and Russia considerably lack prior research on the matter, especially Armenia. In order to both fill in the gaps of academic research and add actual human experience to the facts, interviews with investigative journalists from the countries have been conducted. The latter shed light on the working conditions and environment for practice of journalism in the selected countries.

The main research question that will be further discussed in the thesis is the following, "What are the main similarities and differences among Armenia, Belarus and Russia from the perspective of political parallelism and role of the state?"

The following hypotheses will be tested throughout the thesis: H1. The similarities among the media systems of the three countries are conditioned by the shared past. H2. The three countries can be classified under a single media system model. H3. The model(s) that the three countries are closer to differ(s) from those proposed by Hallin and Mancini. H4. The media system that has the highest role of the state and political parallelism is Belarusian. H5.

From the three media system models proposed by Hallin and Mancini the three countries are the closest to the Mediterranean Polarized Pluralist model.

## Background

The Soviet Union and those countries that were under the control of the latter up until its fall, had a joint history, culture, political ideologies and societal norms. Undoubtedly, media systems operating under one common roof within shared socio-political ideologies were similar as well. The media was predominantly used as a tool for achieving the desired results by the Communist party. Nowadays, even without the existence of the Soviet Union many post-Soviet countries fail to ensure the independent practice of journalism and reduce the state intervention. Instead, those countries continue proceeding with the inherited media model from the Soviet era. Nowadays, many scholars and media representatives themselves point to the hierarchical relationship between the state and the press in Russia, obviously in favor of the state where the media is the dependent variable. (see: Vartanova, 2012)

Nevertheless, the relations between the state, politics, society and the press in Russia can only be explained if analyzed also in the historical framework as the state went through drastic transitions over its history. Even though, after the fall of the authoritarian monarchy, the Communist system implemented actions towards creating an illusion of a Western democracy-like model by applying the concepts successfully performed in the West. Those concepts were poorly adopted by Russia. The reason is that while the concepts and not only, including technologies, science, lifestyle were borrowed from the Western democratic model the premises for their successful performance, such as creation of a contributing environment due to social mechanisms were not initiated. As for Armenia, after gaining independence the state did not give up the Soviet-like hierarchical bureaucratic ideologies. Although the state went through a Velvet Revolution in 2018 which ended with the resignation of the previous Prime Minister, the clear subordination exists between the state and the media without giving the latter the opportunity to operate independently.

The fact that Belarus is considered as the most dangerous state for journalists (Reporters Without Border, 2021) speaks for itself. With frequent website blocking, the state control over not only the media outlets but also the internet, harsh censorship both internal and external, restricted access to information, makes the practice of journalism in Belarus significantly difficult. The described situation, along with prevention of coverage of certain events by the police, harassment, fines, threats, violence and arrests, not only the practice of journalism is endangered but also the lives of those practicing it as well.

# Literature Review

The manifestations of political parallelism and role of the state can indeed vary based on the country that the latter are being practiced in. From the organizational connections between the newsrooms and political personnel to physical attacks and threats the two phenomena are to some degree limiting the independent practice of journalism. The situation in authoritarian or hybrid-regime countries significantly differs from that of Western democracies. Several reasons for such differences are societal, cultural, economic, and political factors. Thus, even though the dimensions proposed by Hallin and Mancini can be applied both within and outside the West, while applied outside the Western countries should take into consideration the factors mentioned above as well. The latter ideas will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapters.

## *3.1 Comparing Media Systems*

The following text is mainly based on the theoretical framework of Hallin and Manini described in the “Comparing Media Systems” book. The significance of comparative studies is undeniable as it emphasizes the differences and similarities contributing to the formation of a concept. A great part of literature on media is ethnocentric, addressing the practice only in one country yet in a generalized manner. Comparative study points on the aspects that are not yet conceptualized and also questions the applicability of the already existing employed concepts. (Hallin & Mancini, 1984) It also scrutinizes the implicit existence of generalization. (Bendix, 1963, 535) As believed by Hallin and Mancini, properly applied comparative study will serve as a base for further systematic critique of the studies done with narrow concepts and generalization. Besides, comparative study examines the interrelationships evolved around a social phenomenon. To study the causal link between phenomena it is important to compare environments where the phenomena are concurrently existing or absent. (Hinkle, 1976)

The aim of the study conducted by Hallin and Mancini is to explore by implementing comparative analysis with the aim of clarifying a number of concepts, developing the theory,

questioning a set of hypotheses and finding out the causal connections. (Hallin & Mancini, 1984)

The strength of “Comparing Media Systems” is that it does not specify general categories without taking into consideration such important factors as time and place. Instead, it is a historical and concrete analysis.

The “Four Theories of the Press” by Siebert, Schramm and Peterson, is another famous academic work serving as a basis for a number of comparative studies of the media. (1956) Nevertheless, the book is often criticized. The book suggests that in order to differentiate the types of press systems it is crucial to take into consideration the social system as the press functions within the system. Hallin and Mancini do agree with the existing link between the political culture, conceptions shared by the society and different types of the press. Nevertheless, the two authors consider that the main failure of the “Four Theories of the Press” is specifically the focus on the philosophy that the press holds, in other words their ideologies. (Hallin & Mancini, 1984) By focusing on the philosophy, the book fails to analyze the relationship between the social and media systems empirically. The book lacks the actual analysis of how the media and social systems function by concentrating on the rationales and the theory. Thus the “material existence of the media” is disregarded. (Nerone, 1995, p.23) As proposed by Sibert, Peterson and Schramm in the “Four Theories of the Press” the media models profoundly correlate with the economic and political conditions of the specific country. Hence, in order to analyze the media system, the nature of the addressed state, how the political parties operate within the state, the correlation of the political and economic interests, the civil society and its development, along with other nuances of the social structure should be well studied beforehand. (Sibert et al., 1984) The idea of the media being the “dependent variable” when juxtaposed with the “system of social control” the reflection of which is one of the core duties of the media is very similar to Marx theory of superstructure. In fact, many social structures are impacted by the actions of the media. (Lafferty, 1996) The “Four Theories of the Press”, by attributing the existence of diverse media systems to the philosophical rationale, overlooked the actual analysis of the relationship between the press and the social system in which the press operates. The aim of Hallin and Mancini was to replace the theories by modern which are better-grounded in the empirical sense (Hallin & Mancini, 2004)

Hallin and Mancini propose three models of media systems. The latter are the Liberal Model in other way called North Atlantic, prevailing across the US, Great Britain, Canada and Ireland, the Democratic Corporatist Model or in other way called North/Central European model, prevailing across Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, Germany, Finland, Denmark, Belgium and Austria, and the Polarized Pluralist Model or in other way called Mediterranean model, prevailing across Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece and France. (Hallin & Mancini, 2004)

The comparative study of the Western country's media systems aimed to show that the generalized Western media system did not exist. In fact, media systems were developed within the specific country, under the aggregation of many economic, social and political factors. Moreover, the authors note that even those countries which are classified within one media system model are actually very different from one another, for example the US and Great Britain. Besides, the authors note that the models are not static as changes occur constantly. Media institutions also develop over time influenced by history, more specifically the earlier periods. (Hallin & Mancini, 2004)

The four dimensions in accordance with which Hallin and Mancini proposed to compare media systems are the structure of the media market, political parallelism, professionalization of journalism, and the state's role. The first shows the development of the media markets, including the circulation rates of newspapers, the relations of the readers and the newspaper, how the neighboring countries impact the local media, segmentations of the markets, how gender varies in the reach of the newspaper, clear distinctions between good journalistic and yellow press pieces. Political parallelism reflects the political orientation of the media in the specific country. In order to measure its extent besides political orientation factors such as relations between media and political figures, presence of media representatives in the political field, the orientation of the role the journalist has decided to employ should also be taken into consideration. Professionalization is often characterized by the degree to which the media of the particular country preserves the ethical standards and norms and whether the media serves its public instead of satisfying the needs and interests of individuals. The role of the state can be measured by assessing the presence of censorship, allocation of subsidies by the government, certain political figures owning their own media organizations, media laws and the government is the main source of information. Even though the dimensions were proposed to compare Western European and North American countries,

nowadays, the dimensions are successfully put into practice to compare other regions as well. (Hallin, Mancini, 2004)

While the book written by Hallin and Mancini provides a theoretical framework for the analysis of media systems, the theory was designed in order to analyze Western media systems more specifically 18 Western European and North American countries. As claimed by the authors, the reason for limiting the study to the West was not conditioned by the fact that the Western media systems are of a greater significance or are models which can be referred to in the context. In fact the reason behind the limitation was the lack of equal knowledge on the media systems outside the West and the fact that the authors possessed enough knowledge on the languages of specifically those 18 countries to conduct a reliable and credible study. Realizing the gap, Hallin and Mancini themselves made a decision to expand the study and apply the theory beyond Western countries. Even while analysing to some extent similar media systems, which are the Western media systems, Hallin and Mancini managed to distinguish 3 different media models. The countries were characterized into the three models even though they have comparably similar economic development, to some extent shared culture and history in a political framework. (Vartanova, 2012) The comparative study was designed to be implemented on already existing research, and while many countries beyond the West were lacking sufficient research on the matter, the most efficient method for the authors was involving scholars rather than deepening their own knowledge in various regions. (Hallin & Mancini, 2012)

The core aim of the study was to establish a base which would serve as a framework for comparisons between media systems together with hypotheses on their linkage both historically and structurally up until the generation and further development of political systems. Nevertheless, the authors themselves do not claim to have performed all the listed objectives due to the extreme limitations of the existing data on the matter. Moreover, for the sake of not generalizing across those compared countries along with their history, culture and political culture, with which the authors were not deeply aware of, the study is conducted specially for European and American countries. The predominant reason for not conducting more inclusive study with more regions involved is not only the practical difficulties. As the aim of the study was to come up with a theoretical framework, if not, the minimum goal was to contribute to its further development. Did the study take place on a multinational level many theoretical differences might have stayed unresolved resulting in the least common

divisor. However, the authors claimed that the study could further be broadened and expanded outside the borders by other scholars (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) which has been done by a number of scholars.

A number of critiques were published regarding the applicability of the theoretical framework beyond the Western countries. One of the notes is that while analyzing the media system of a country that is beyond the West, the factor of freedom of press should be central. In regards to the Western European countries, the Freedom of Press is significantly higher than in the third world countries. Another factor that should also be examined for its presence is the ownership of media organizations by foreign countries. (Castro-Herrero et al., 2017) Moreover, in many religious countries the religion should also be taken into consideration within the dimensions. (Brüggemann et al., 2014)

Besides the number of critiques on the applicability of the three media systems, Hallin and Mancini themselves addressed the drawbacks and limitations of their own study. In order to test the applicability, the authors united several scholars who would adopt their method and expand it beyond the West.

### *3.2 Manifestation of Political Parallelism and Role of the State*

Journalism has always played an important role in politics. Often the political journalists worked towards changing public opinion regarding a specific political force. Moreover, the newspapers themselves were often initiated by the political parties (Petrova, 2011). Starting from the late nineties the political journalists started acting as independent reporters of political affairs, not controlled by certain political interests (Bolin, 2014). The development of the commercial press in some way contributed to the independence of the press from political figures, as the latter was financed by the advertisers and not by political subsidies. Another reason was the increase in professionalism of the journalists (Petrova, 2011).

From the historical perspective a major variable pointing to the existence or absence of political parallelism has been the “organizational connections” established between the representatives of the media and political parties and not only, for example the church, trade unions, etc. Especially in the 20th century, many newspapers were financed by such

institutions and thus served towards the interests of the latter. (Milojević & Krstić, 2018)

While such manifestation may be not as common as it was during the previous century, it still may be significantly noticeable in such countries where it was strong at some point. Another crucial tendency yet not very common already at the moment of writing the “Comparing Media Systems” is the active functioning of media personnel in political life, specifically being a part of a political party. A perpetuation of political parallelism is also the tendency of the media personnel to work for such newspapers, which have coinciding political views. On the other hand, many newspapers hire journalists, indeed, to balance the representation of different political opinions. (Lee, 2007) Cases when the political viewpoints build the career paths for journalists are not uncommon. A very significant manifestation of political parallelism is the actual role orientations of the journalist and practices. As noted by Hallin and Mancini in several countries during several time periods journalists have taken the role of the “publicist” while covering political life. (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) The concept of being a publicist indicates the aim of the journalist to actually influence public opinion. The concept of being, on the contrary, a reporter, which has also been successfully practiced in various countries over various time periods differs significantly from the concept of being a “publicist.” Regardless of the journalist’s perception, the framework of being a reporter rather than a publicist involves investigation and examination of an event, person, phenomenon. As defined by Meyer and Lund, the reporter’s task is to discover and scrutinise the abuse of the power and lead to the punishment of those exercising it (2008). The reason behind the difference between the two concepts is the tendency to either analyze and comment, or collect and report the news.

Important indicators of political parallelism are internal and external pluralism, meaning that the degree of political parallelism can be identified based on how the media systems deal with diverse political orientations. Those media systems having external pluralism are classified as systems with high political parallelism as such systems achieve pluralism with the help of the existence of various channels or media outlets. Hence pluralism exists only when the media system is taken as a whole in such cases. Internal pluralism, on the other hand, indicates that each channel or outlet achieved pluralism independently on its own (Heinrich & Pleines, 2018).

To identify the extent of political parallelism while taking into consideration the public broadcasting system, Hallin and Mancini suggest four basic models. The first model is

the governmental model. It describes a scenario when the broadcasting is directly controlled either by the government or the political majority within it. The second model, called the professional model, is the complete opposite of the first one. It suggests that broadcasting should be completely independent from the government and run solely by the professionals in broadcasting. The third model, called the parliamentary or in different words proportional representation model describes a media system where the control over broadcasting is distributed among the existing political parties according to the proportional representation. (Qualter, 1962) The fourth model, in fact, is in a way similar to the third, where the control is divided. However, in this model, which is called “civic” or in other words “corporatist” the control over broadcasting expands beyond political parties and spreads on societal groups that are relevant, for example religious organizations, trade unions, associations (ODIHR, 2014.)

It is worth mentioning that political parallelism and journalistic professionalization often go hand in hand. The most significant indicators of professionalization are the objectivity of the journalistic piece and political neutrality. In such media systems where the journalist often takes the role of the publicist the professionalization is considerably weak. (Swartz, 1983) A media system, where the main aim of the journalist is to serve the public instead of certain interests of particular groups, where journalists work within journalistic standards rather than specific agendas which is an external force and take the role of the providers of information instead of publicly identifying with certain political point of view, the journalistic professionalization is high, while political parallelism, at one time, is low. As Bourdieu and Nice note, professionalization can exist in an environment where the journalist possesses certain autonomy from social fields as well as politics. (1984) Nevertheless, from the empirical perspective, these two concepts should not be classified as synonyms. The extent and manifestation of the role of the state also vary. Nevertheless, the biggest indicator is the degree of state intervention in broadcasting.

Public service broadcasting was the main form of broadcasting in a number of countries as of 2004, and at least was present in each of the analyzed European and American countries, even though commercial broadcasting was in its way towards development (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). While in a few countries the state also owned the telecommunication infrastructure, public broadcasting has for many years been the most common and significant way of state ownership over the media. Moreover, the state often owns news organizations if not directly, then through enterprises owned by the state. Another indicator of the high role of

the state are political subsidies. (Ots & Picard, 2018). Often the state itself, or the above mentioned enterprises are the advertisers. Manifestation of state intervention can be identified if taken into consideration privacy, right-of-reply, libel laws, laws on hate speech, professional secrecy laws that are protecting the source confidentiality, conscience laws, laws limiting the access to information that the government possesses, laws on media ownership and competition, laws on political communication applied during electoral campaigns, laws on broadcast licensing and overall content, the approach towards political pluralism, and language included. While the ownership of the media, funding and regulations are, in fact, very important signifiers of state intervention, the latter can be expressed in other forms as well. For instance an example of state intervention is the state being the primary source of information for the media or even act as its main “definer” (Hall et al. 1978) This can be expressed in the formation of the agenda where the state plays a central role. In this case, the degree of the state being the main “definer” is not necessarily connected to the degree of state intervention in the form of regulations, funding and ownership. Hallin and Mancini also emphasize that it is not denied that the state is to a lesser degree the “definer” exactly in a liberal media system compared with systems with a more emphasized role of the state.

### *3.3 Work conditions of journalists within the political context*

The following chapter is highly relevant when the manifestations of political parallelism and role of the state are discussed. Often the political interference in the journalistic field limits the capacities of the journalists to produce journalism in different forms. The limitations can be in the form of strong censorship both external and internal, harsh media laws preventing the freedom of press, arrests, physical and verbal assaults, even murder, etc (See: Kenny & Gross, 2008; Roudakova, 2008; Becker, 2004). The following chapter will provide information on what work conditions high political parallelism and role of the state can create for journalists

The social-political environment has a significant influence on media content and the practice of journalism. The cultural assumptions created as a result of the environment influence the decisions made by newspapers and the routine of practicing journalism, from the gathering of the news to writing articles. (Avraham, 2002) In a number of cases, where

violence was perpetrated against the media and specifically journalists, the state is the one facilitating the repression and violence against the ones practicing journalism. (Becker, 2004: 110) Moreover, in a number of countries, individuals practicing journalism face economic, political and physical risks daily. Censorship is comprehended as a top-down form of repression which is directly opposing the concept of freedom of speech. (Schimpfössl, 2020) The absence of direct repression does not signify the absence of censorship. (Post, 1998: 2) The distinction between censorship and self-censorship is often blurred. While censorship points to the existence of an external body exercising power, self-censorship indicates the individual agency. (Kenny & Gross, 2008) In a number of countries, journalists define the motives under their practice as for the benefit of either the owner of the newspaper, editorial board, or advertisers. (Schimpfössl, 2020) While measuring the control of the state over the media system of the particular country, the distinction between the definitions of authoritarian and totalitarian media systems should be taken into consideration. With that said, variables such as the degree of autonomy, the level of positive and negative control, the ideological context, level of pluralism, and the structure of the control vary significantly depending on the system. Dividing the media systems into democratic or authoritarian systems prevents capturing the significant nuances. (Coller et al., 1996) Addressing a media system in the context of democratic state, the motivation is to provide public information for the latter to take part in the governance process. (Gunther & Mughan, 2000: 422) The degree of pluralism in such systems should be higher with the press addressing different ideologies. In such a system, the press operates within the absence of state control. (Becker, 2004)

Mexico, as one of the most dangerous countries for the practice of journalism, records 92 deaths of journalists between 2000 and 2016, the disappearance of 23 journalists between 2003 and 2016. (Hughes et al., 2017) The car of a Mexican 59-year-old journalist was firebombed in May of 2020. Marco Antonio, which is the name of the journalist, strongly believes that government officials were the perpetrators of the violence. (Woodman, 2020) According to the studies on Mexican media representatives, the number of journalists with post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety was alarming. The study also revealed that a quarter of the journalists within the analyzed sample quitted the practice of journalism because of their past experience. (Feinstein, 2012)

As of Central Asia, self-censorship appears to be one of the biggest obstacles. Taboo topics include addressing the president negatively, inner circle, or the president's family, the

owners of the media and the editors, any political connections the latter have. The practice of independent journalism in the region has not recorded any positive result after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. (Kenny & Gross, 2008) In such countries where the power is heavily concentrated within the sole executive branch, with weak legal institutions that are unable to serve their role of the watchdog, the opinion of the ruler or those associated with him is of the most importance. (Shevtsova, 2001) As stated based on the Latin America example, at least minimal operation of institutions is vital for the protection of the press from the perpetuation of violence. (Fox & Waisbord, 2002: 107) De jure, censorship is absent in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, de facto, a number of systems have held power over the press. (Miquel, 1972) Criticism of the ruling party should have been avoided. (Roudakova, 2017: 51) The countries adopted the professional and ethical norms of the existing systems of the US, the UK, the West, and Nordic countries. (Kunczik, 2001) The turbulent economic situation made many outlets not survive or be instrumentalized due to the political and economic situation. Thus, the pressure of the market has also been a variable in the process of shaping the media landscape. (Schimpfössl & Yablokov, 2020) With the withdrawal of international investors, the legal regulations became harsher. At the same time, the oligarchy and the government gained more control, dominating the press with oligarch-state ownership. (Roudakova, 2008) The concern that Russian opposition politicians express is their lack of access to such television networks that have a big reach. (Belin, 2002) As a country with a neo-authoritarian media system, Russia, under the rule of Putin, tolerates pluralism with limits, specifically on the topics related to the regime, elections, and national security. Violence towards the opposition journalists is perpetuated as a form of repression with the motive of increasing self-censorship among the journalists. (Becker, 2004) Nevertheless, a democratic media system does not ensure the unproblematic practice of journalism. Taking the West as an example, the amount of soft news has significantly increased, degrading objectivity. Moreover, journalism is over-reliant on official sources of information and comprises large amounts of cynicism. (Bennett, 2002)

# Method

## *4.1 Comparative Analysis*

A comparative analysis shall be carried out in order to identify similarities and differences between the degrees of political parallelism and role of the state in three different countries. The analysis shall be based on the book written by Hallin and Mancini called “Comparing Media Systems” according to the four dimensions proposed by the authors for further classification of the media systems under certain models. The four dimensions are the structure of the media markets, political parallelism, journalistic professionalism and role of the state. This particular analysis shall be carried out with a greater emphasis on the political parallelism and role of the state, with several references to the remaining two dimensions when necessary. The countries that shall be further analyzed are Russia, Belarus and Armenia. The selection of the countries is not accidental. The selected trio are post-Soviet countries having an “ambiguous” relationship between the state and the media.

Even though the book was designed to compare media systems based on the existing literature, conditioned by the shortage of prior research in all the three selected countries, with varying extent based on the country itself, this particular research involved the data collection process as well. While information on the relationship between the state and the press, the form of governance, regulations, investigations on ownership and financing of the media by the government, the ideology of the press and partisanship of the media representatives in Russia is to some extent present due to the prior research, Armenia significantly lacks information. The further research by Hallin and Mancini on the application of the theoretical framework beyond the West resulted in several scholars conducting independent research on the media models of the country. Russia is among those countries. Elena Vartanova, who is a famous Russian journalist and Professor of the Faculty of Journalism carried out the research.

The data collection method varied based on the country conditioned by the amount of existing data. As of Russia and Belarus, historical papers, articles, scholarly articles, and research works have been used which are predominantly in Russian language as well as reports by Reporters without borders and Freedom of Press indexes. The mentioned texts underwent a thorough search with the help of certain keywords which are “media, journalism, political, state, economic, cultural, societal, media system, intervention, censorship, media

law, etc” in Russian or in English language. What regards to Armenia, due to the shortage of academic papers the data was mainly collected from reports done by the Reporters Without Borders, Freedom of Press ranking, Soviet encyclopaedia which encompasses the main portion of the information on the state of the media during the Soviet era as well as up to date articles. The same keywords were used to find appropriate and reliable data in Armenian or in English.

The comparative points were the degree of political parallelism and role of the state measured by the following criteria.

#### Political parallelism

- Political orientation
- Organizational connections
- Role of the journalists

#### Role of the state

- Censorship
- Political subsidies
- Media ownership
- Media laws

In order to ensure and secure sufficient information to base the comparative analysis on, interviews have been conducted with 5 investigative reporters from the selected countries: two from Russia, two from Belarus and one from Armenia. As noticed above only one Armenian investigative reporter was interviewed. It is conditioned by the fact that only one investigative newspaper exists in Armenia which operates online. Each interview is divided into three sections. The first section is about the professional background of the journalist, education and practice of journalism, the second section is about the degree of state intervention and political parallelism they themselves witness as representatives of the media field in a greater framework of how the media system operates in the state, presence and type of censorship in the media system overall. Last but not least the third section is about their own experience, the hardships the investigative journalists themselves witnessed, the manifestations of the two above mentioned dimensions that directly were connected to their

own professional practice of journalism, the possible trauma or consequences that were caused because of the manifestations of the mentioned dimensions.

Asking questions about a trauma can cause a negative response from the side of the interviewee or trigger the memories of the unpleasant event. Several measures have been applied in order to minimise such risks. First of all, despite the issue of distance between the countries where the interviewees were at the time of conducting the interviews, with the help of video meetings measures to create a non-oppressive environment were implemented. The interviewees were warned that in the case of not wanting to answer a certain question they can refrain from answering. Nevertheless, any of the expected issues did not occur during the interviews most probably due to national characteristics. Often as a result of unfamiliarity with possible psychological consequences of an occurred trauma, representatives of the selected countries are more resistant to trauma and its results. Thus none of the interviewees journalists had an issue with sharing their in some cases unpleasant work experience.

The question of anonymity was discussed with the interviewees and the latter gave their consent to have their names openly stated in the research work. Such response was explained by several of the interviewees to be conditioned by the highly activist nature of their work. It means that they use different platforms to communicate messages regarding their experiences openly in order to implement actions against perpetuation of violence towards journalists. All of the interviewees continue practicing journalists and besides solely sharing their experiences were motivated by the idea of spreading awareness about the situation in the three countries. In the case of them changing their minds they were assured the option of anonymity.

Despite the shortage of the data the thesis succeeded in its aim, answered the research question and proved the validity of the majority of the hypotheses. The method of the data collection within the secondary research was successful as it provided necessary information on the comparative points which enabled to carry out a comparative study and come to a conclusion. The missing information was substituted with the help of the interviews.

## *4.2 Limitations and Further Research*

One big limitation in a comparative study is the shortage of the data. In this research, only Russia out of the three countries at least possessed minimal previously conducted research and data on the matter. Due to the little amount of time allocated for the research, and significant portion of it spent on filling in the gap in secondary research, the actual analysis may lack the ideal thoroughness. Nevertheless this research can serve as a basis for further more thorough comparative study of the three selected countries. Moreover, the study can be expanded and prevail along all post-Soviet countries and group them according to the three models of the media systems suggested by Hallin and Mancini and not only.

Another limitation that itself was caused by the shortage of the data is the fact that a significant portion of the analysis was carried out based on not the scholarly articles or studies but on the interviews with journalists. The “deviation” in the analysis may be greater than if based on academic literature and secondary research as the human factor in this method of data collection is much higher. Moreover, as a representative of the media system which, in fact, has a chance of being state controlled or politically parallelized the interviewee could have expressed a biased opinion conditioned by the political orientation of the newsroom he/she works within or, indeed, by many other factors. In order to base the analysis on actual facts and minimize the risk of any biased viewpoint on the role of the state and political parallelism conditioned by high degree of state intervention and political parallelism themselves, the interviews were conducted especially with investigative reporters. The reason lies behind the actual definition of investigative journalism. An aspect uniting all the existing various definitions of investigative reporting is the aim of exposing an issue, explaining its roots, and proposing possible solutions by often scrutinizing those exercising or abusing the power. (Weinberg,1996) In other words one of the main duties of an investigative reporter is fulfilling his/her role of a watchdog. Thus by interviewing investigative journalists the research gained not only the insight of those who have already digged deep into the analyzed issue but are critical of the government instead of serving the latter’s interests.

Comparative study especially in communications can be, indeed, very sophisticated. The generated quantitative data is comparably easier to sort and compare. The same goes with topics such as circulation, subsidies, mapping ownership. In such a comparative study, with a high number of quantitative and qualitative variables, it is difficult to juxtapose. Moreover, it

takes time to find out the variable across all the selected countries, and often, the existing scholarly articles and studies contradict each other based on the author as what is being analyzed in the majority of the cases is not a constant variable. Given the shortage of existing data, this research does not fully fill the existing gap in comparative study of the media systems. In fact it directs towards it by creating a reliable basis.

Another prospective further research by scholars is the analysis of the media systems of such countries whose language the scholar is fluent in. Similar approach was implemented by Hallin and Mancini where the scholars applied the theoretical framework of Hallin and Mancini on the media systems beyond the West based on the language they speak. The initiative can be spread throughout the world eventually having the insight of the media systems in each region.

## **Result**

### *5.1 Armenia*

#### **5.1.1 Historical Background**

From the historical perspective the media system in Armenia can be analyzed as a system operating within a country that had rarely been independent. The first Armenian newspaper was founded in Madras on October 16, 1794. At the moment, Armenia was under the rule of Iran. The administrative districts were named into Khanates up until the very beginning of the 19th century, when during the Russian-Iranian war a considerable portion of Armenia was taken over by the Russians.

The newspaper was named “Azdarar” which literally translates as “announcer.” The founder of "Azdarar" magazine was priest Harutyun Shmavonyan from Shiraz. It operated until March 1796. During that time he published 18 notebooks, each of about 50 pages, with a total volume of 965 pages. With Armenia being under the rule of Iran, the core motive of the creation of Azdarar was neither, in fact, establishing a hierarchy of subordination nor political in any context. It was, indeed, created to help the Armenian public preserve the cultural identity and not lose the unity as a nation while not being independent and spread throughout the world (Encyclopedia, 2007).

The newspaper was founded in India and operated only for a short period of time, more specifically around two years, conditioned by financial difficulties. Published in Old

Armenian (Grabar), partly in Indian-Armenian and New Julfa dialects. The announcer was a scientific, historical, literary, public newspaper, reflecting the life of the Indian-Armenians, referring to the problems of enlightenment of the Armenian people, national self-consciousness, liberation. He also published poems, fables, conversations, stories, educational articles with moral content, and informed about the events taking place in the South Caucasus. The magazine urged the Armenians of the colony to return to their homeland. Some issues of "Azdarar " were published in illustrated, red letters. Shmavonyan received correspondence from Madras, Calcutta, Basra, China, the Philippines, and published materials from Yerevan and Shushi. (Lalvani, 2017).

Up until 1918 Armenia remained under the rule of Russia with no significant record about the existing media. Shortly after the Armenian Genocide, in 1918 the first Armenian Republic was founded which, in fact, did not last long. Nevertheless, due to the creation of the republic the first university officially situated in the territory of the Armenian Republic was founded (Yerevan State University). Moreover, Armenian was finally recognized as the official language (Baghiyan, 2020).

In 1920 Armenia joined the Soviet Union. In Soviet Armenia, 4 newspapers were being published. Only one of the published newspapers was in Armenian. "Soviet Armenia" operated in Armenian, "The Communist" in Russian, "Sovet Ermənistanı" in Azerbaijani, and "Ria Taza" in Kurdish. The only newspaper operating in Armenian language was not very politicized. The saved copies of the newspaper are kept in the museum. The discussed themes are literature, music, theatre, film, and culture overall. The other mentioned newspapers above are of a political character. The Soviet-Armenian press played a significant role in the recovery of the national economy from 1921 to 25. Newspapers and magazines clarified the problems of the new economic policy, fought for its correct application, covered issues of cooperation, irrigation, trade union movement. What is more important, as stated in the Armenian Society Encyclopedia, Soviet-Armenian press "participated in the ideological struggle against anti-party groups." ("Armenian Encyclopedia" Publishing House, 1987: 450) The latter means that Armenian press being highly politicized also played a major role in insuring the monogenic rule of the Soviet Union. During those years, the press bodies of trade unions and cooperatives were established.

One of the remarkable pages of the Soviet-Armenian press is the local press bodies established on the initiative of the Central Committee and provincial committees, whose

target audience were the poor living in villages. The aims of the latter were the awakening of self-consciousness, development of agriculture. Nevertheless, among nearly all the initiatives within the Soviet Union especially regarding the media the central aim was once again strengthening the foundations of Soviet power.

The new stage of “development” of the Soviet-Armenian press was marked in the 1930s. It was connected with the socialist struggle of the national economy, when the primary tasks of the press were socialist propagation and agitation of ways and methods of social industrialization, consolidation of labor efforts to fulfill the tasks planned for the first and second 5 years, and management of social competition. In accordance with these issues, the work of the regular press was restructured, new newspapers and magazines were created. Multi-circulation newspapers were created for the purpose of “communist upbringing.” Newspapers and magazines, criticizing the opposition manifestations, referred to the struggle against kulaks, contributed to the strengthening of the working class-collective farming alliance. During the Great Patriotic War (1941-45) the main topics of the periodical press of the republic were “patriotism, the heroic deeds of the Soviet soldiers.” During this period, the publication of several newspapers was temporarily stopped. In the post-war years, the Soviet-Armenian press focused on the restoration of the national economy, the implementation of five-year plans, and the coverage of the Soviet government's “peace-loving policy” as stated in the Soviet Armenian Encyclopedia. (1987: 453) From 1960 to 70s the mass media, including newspapers and magazines, guided by the decisions of the congresses and plenums, was used as a tool for contributing to their implementation. The press consistently covered the socio-political, socio-economic life of the republic, the multifaceted activities of party, Soviet and economic organizations. The 1980s marked a new page in Soviet history at the same time in Armenian history and media development as well. The social movement called “Perestroika” (reconstruction) aimed to reform the Communist system. In 1986 new issues were brought up to be covered by the press in connection with the course of accelerating the socio-economic development of the country, the introduction of advanced forms of economic management. In the conditions of democratization and expansion of publicity, the priority task of the media was to clarify the revolutionary transformations taking place in the life of the country. The media during this period was used to unite the labor forces for their successful implementation. The press of the Republic, armed with the decisions of the Congresses of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the plenum of the Central

Committee of the Communist Party of the Republic of Armenia in January (1987) not only informed the workers about the ideas of perestroika but through means of persuasion made them to better master them. The press played a central role in the perestroika battle against bureaucracy and conservatism, contributing to the implementation of the party's strategic course, actively defending the ideals and moral values of socialism. Thus, even though social changes were taking place the press still was used by the state as a weapon able to shape opinions. Newspapers and magazines focus on the issues of theoretical understanding of the processes taking place in the country, analysis of the peculiarities of the current stage of social development (Soviet Armenian Encyclopedia, 1987: 458).

### **5.1.2 Political Parallelism in Armenia**

While in some cases the ownership of a certain media organization by political figures is a common knowledge, there are several news agencies not owned by a political figure but instead having close organisational connections with political organisations. The majority of the news agencies are highly politicized often basing their orientation on the ideology of a single political power. Several media agencies are owned or funded by Russian state bodies, private and public organizations, which illustrates the contribution of foreign countries as well. Moreover, Armenian TV broadcasting includes Russian main TV and radio channels. In its turn, Azatutyun media corporation which is one of the biggest in Armenia is fully US-funded (Sargsyan, 2014).

### **5.1.3 Role of the State in Armenia**

Shortly after leaving the Soviet Union Armenia gained independence and established the third Republic of Armenia. The emerging presidents were famous for authoritarian forms of governance, illegal ownership of offshore businesses, ownership of media organizations, nepotism, bribes and fake election results. The situation lasted up to the Velvet Revolution

that took place in 2018 and ended with the recognition of the previous leader. The process of the revolution itself was covered differently. The most active of all were newspapers operating on digital platforms. Such newspapers were doing live streams from throughout the significant portion of the day providing the public with the opportunity to watch the raw materials without any comments or explanations. The broadcasting was significantly silent, conditioned by the fact that it had a direct or indirect relationship with the government of that time. The breaking moment during the revolution for the forceful entrance of the current Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan who at that time was leading the protests, to the Republic Radio demanding the administration to give himself a broadcasting time. The social networks more specifically Facebook became a platform uniting all the news organizations and the Prime Minister himself who nearly every evening was doing live streams and communicating with the public. The democratization was promising. Armenia significantly improved its place in the Press Freedom Ranking by going up to the 61st place as of 2020. Nevertheless, the media polarization was not reduced. The owners are either political or business elites who set up regulations and editorial policies of the broadcast media according to their interests. The press transparency is diminished by state interventions. During the Nagorno-Karabakh war declared on September 27, 2020, on 10 November the building of one of the most prominent Armenian digital newspapers was attacked. The fight against the journalists who express opposing opinions often takes place in the form of judicial proceedings. Legislations are often adopted without considering the opinion that civil society or journalists may hold. As of 2021 Armenia recorded a downgrade in the ranking by two places. Reporters Without Borders, nevertheless, emphasize the development of investigative journalism that operates only online. (Reporters Without Borders, 2021)

#### **5.1.4 Findings from the Interviews**

*Edik Baghdasaryan*

Baghdasaryan, who is the Editor in chief of the only investigative newspaper that operates online called “Hetq” does not only focus on the local enlightenment of investigations but also has a prominent experience in international cooperation. The biggest ones are the cooperation with Panama Papers and Troika Dialog. Several cross-border collaborations are currently in the process. The collaboration with Panama Papers required access to information on offshore business entities in Armenia, challenging the investigative newspaper to work

within limited Freedom of Information, concealed facts, and refusals to provide access by the officials. Several investigations have been temporarily ceased due to the control over the information by certain public figures. As stated by Edik Baghdasaryan the Velvet Revolution in 2018 worsened the conditions for investigative journalists despite the rapid increase in the Freedom of the Press. Baghdasaryan filed an FOI request and received the response only six months later due to the new government employees' unfamiliarity with the databases. Baghdasaryan believes that the poor level of investigative journalism is not only considered by high political parallelism and role of the state but also is the result of the economic conditions of the country and will improve only due to the demolition of the first two factors and the development of the economy.

Baghdasaryan denies any possibility of internal censorship in “Hetq” as its editor in chief. He ensures the independent practice of journalism in his newsroom. Nevertheless, he accepts that the overwhelming majority of the Armenian newsrooms have strict internal censorship with frequent editorial meetings and strong supervision by the heads.

Baghdasaryan was subjected to a violent attack on November 17, 2008, proven to be connected with his professional activity. The mine businesses of the former Minister of Nature Protection and at that time current parliamentarian Vardan Ayvazyan were being investigated by Baghdasaryan. He was then attacked and beaten by the latter's bodyguard and two others, Ayvazyan's bodyguard was later arrested. They hit Baghdasaryan's head with a large, heavy object, as a result of which he fainted. The attackers continued assaulting the journalist by taking off his clothes, leaving him lying on the ground half-naked.

Although Baghdasaryan received numerous threats throughout his career, nowadays, due to the limited number of topics covered the number of the threads has decreased as well. Nevertheless, individuals often contact Baghdasaryan, demanding to stop the investigation on a certain topic. The messages sometimes involve threats to kill if the investigation is not stopped, as in the example when in 2006 Baghdasaryan received a death threat urging to stop investigating the ownership of offshore entities by Armenian parliamentarian Gagik Tsarukyan.

The main area of focus at the beginning of 2021 is the Nagorno-Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Investigations are being carried out to find out the concealed information about the course of the war and its outcome. The limited access to information and deliberate concealment by the government officials has restricted the topics

related to the war that could have been investigated. The state intervention is overwhelming in topics related to Government and the Ruling political party, which may lead to a dissatisfaction among the public related to the governance drawbacks

## 5.2 *Belarus*

### 5.2.1 **Historical Background**

The history of Belarus goes hand in hand with Russian history as for the most significant part of its existence Belarus has been under the rule of Russia. From the 9th to 11th centuries the territory of the country was part of Kievan Russia, in the 14th century it was part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Later those lands became known as "Belaya Rus" (White Russia). In 1918, the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic was formed, which in 1922 became part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The available records on the existence of Belarusian newspapers are from the creation of the Soviet Union. One of the most prominent newspapers of the time operates consistently up until today. "Soviet Belarus Today" is a Belarusian socio-political newspaper. The newspaper has been published since August 1927. It was and continues being published 5 times a week. The founders are the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus and the Editorial Board. As of April 2019, the circulation is 190 thousand copies. "Soviet Belarus Today" is the largest print media in the country. At the same time, many media outlets have repeatedly reported on the existence of forceful subscription to some state- related publications, and first of all, to "Soviet Belarus today. " Published from August 9, 1927 the newspaper until 1937 had the name "Worker". Since 1943 it has been published in Belarusian and Russian languages. In 1964 the newspaper was awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labor. It has been published in color since 2000. In 2013, it was merged with the publications "Narodnaya Gazeta" (National Newspaper", "Respublika" (Republic), "Selskaya Gazeta" (Agricultural Newspaper) and "Znamya Yunosti" (Banner of Youth) into a single holding. In September 2018, it changed its name to "Belarus Today." (Nasha Niva, 2019)

### **5.2.2 Political Parallelism in Belarus**

Sociologist Sergei Nikolyuk believes that “Over the past 15 years, a social contract has been maintained in Belarus: loyalty in exchange for income growth. Last year, in his New Year's address, the president actually announced the cancellation of this Brezhnev contract, returning it to the Stalinist era: loyalty in exchange for life - we have peace and we are alive, and if so, what difference does it make what our salary is. If you do not know the context, you might think that bombs are already falling on Minsk. " There is opposition, it obviously exists, but it does not have access neither to the TV nor to any broadcast media. Those who disagree can even publicly gather for a protest. Nevertheless, shortly after the Belarusian police will diminish all the footprints of the short-lasting protest by implementing various manifestations of physical violence. In their kitchens, people actively discuss politics and tell jokes about the head of state, but publicly expressing displeasure may well be worth a career. The intelligentsia speaks openly about the regime and also criticizes the authorities, but when answering the question “Is your position presented in the media?” he/she smiles shyly. “You can lecture, talk about your ideas, write articles, but if a person begins to split society, he will be very strongly asked not to do this,” says the deputy Valeriy Borodnya. Economist Boltochko is more categorical: "There is no public policy here - you can simply fit into the power machine." (Tokarev, 2016)

Philologist Larisa Kokhanovskaya describes modern Belarusian history as follows: “This is what the USSR could become. This is the post-Soviet Soviet Union. " Belarus remains Soviet not only because of its intact symbolic legacy, such as monuments to communist leaders and the preservation of stars, sickles and hammers throughout the country. Deeper layers: the functioning of the ideological vertical, a non-competitive party system, the absence of competitive elections, an economic model with the broadest influence of the state, selective narrow privatization, the dependence of career trajectories on the "correctness" of ideological views - all this makes the country an incarnation of the USSR 2.0 (Tokarev, 2016).

### **5.2.3 Role of the State in Belarus**

The official ideological vertical permeates all levels of power. Coordination is carried out by the main ideological department of the presidential administration. The appointment of

chief editors of state media and deputy heads for ideology at state-owned enterprises, in higher and secondary specialized educational institutions is obligatory agreed with him. The main broadcasters in Belarus are owned by the state, including the official radio station which operates the whole day and five main TV channels. One of the five TV channels licenced to broadcast the programs shown by Russian prominent TV channel NTV and is used solely for that purpose. The internet is provided by Beltelecom which is the Belarusian telecommunication company that is owned by the state. Hence the internet is also controlled by the state. The constitution of the newly established Belarus after the fall of the Soviet Union includes a significant portion guaranteeing the freedom of opinion and attitudes to the public along with freedom of depression. The constitution and the media laws are, indeed, contradicting. While the constitution ensures the freedom of press by prohibiting media censorship the laws actually promote it. New media outlets cannot be opened without the approval of the government, which of course is able to not give its permission. The government is able to take away the journalist's licence, check their cameras, issue warnings for articles not supporting the government and arrest journalists. The coverage of foreign media is available on the radio only partly when it refers to the state. The content is controlled, and regulations are established by the Ministry of Information. As of 2014, nearly one third of all the print media is published by organizations that are under the control of the state. Seven out of nine national news agencies are private. The Freedom House, which is a non-governmental organization, claims that there is a high possibility that the KGB uses Trojan virus for stealing the passwords of certain editors. (Makhovsky , 2018)

TUT.BY is the largest Belarusian Internet news portal. The online edition TUT.BY was registered in January 2019, before that, since its foundation in 2000, the portal worked without the status of a media outlet.

In December 2020, TUT.BY was deprived of its media status at the request of the Ministry of Information. Earlier warnings issued by the Ministry of Information became the basis. The department expressed complaints about the materials on the elections, the activities of the State Control Committee, Belarusian customs and the case opened against the daughter of one of the portal's editors.

In Belarus, after the presidential elections on August 9, 2020, for more than six months, mass protests continued against the election results, the winner of which was declared Alexander Lukashenko, who has held this post since 1994. The opposition

considered the election results to be falsified. The protesters demanded the resignation of Lukashenka, the release of political prisoners and the holding of new elections. (Radio Liberty, 2020) Recently, the actions have practically stopped due to their brutal suppression by the Belarusian security forces; now they are of an episodic and local nature.

On May 18, the TUT.BY portal was blocked for publishing information prohibited by law; FDI employees came to the company's office. Later, the department reported that a case was initiated against officials of TUT BAY MEDIA LLC for tax evasion on an especially large scale. Earlier, 15 employees detained in the TUT.BY case (including director general Lyudmila Chekina and editor-in-chief Marina Zolotova) were recognized as political prisoners by human rights defenders. (Euronews, 2021)

As of 2021 Belarus is considered the most dangerous place in Europe for practice of journalism by the Reporters Without Borders and ranks 158th in the Press Freedom Ranking. What is promising, nevertheless, is the continuous attempts of the journalists to try to cover the ongoing affairs and protests even under the threats, violence and fines. (Reporters Without Border, 2021)

#### **5.2.4 Findings from the Interviews**

*Alina Yanchur*

Alina Yanchur herself worked in TUT.BY by writing articles and photo reporting. She specialized in covering such topics as city life, social issues, facilities for disabled people, social adaptation conditions for orphans, the homeless people and education opportunities.

Yanchur is extremely critical of Belarusian media laws stating that the latter exist solely for the purpose of suppressing the free press. Nevertheless, she believes exactly the aggregation of factors prevents the practice of independent, unbiased high-quality practice of journalism. As three major sources of influence preventing the practice of journalism to its fullest, she states the government, financing, and self-education of journalists. She emphasizes the fact that journalists are often unable to operate without sources of financing, hence accept subsidies from political or business elites which means the end of their independence and transparency. In such newsrooms the internal censorship is at its highest as the editorial board has to operate so that it pleases the needs of their financiers. Even if the

newsroom is completely unbiased, operates on its own and is independent from the government without internal censorship, the amount of external censorship is so high that articles that have been approved internally get deleted after being published on behalf of the Ministry of Information.

TUT.BY as states Yanchur plays an irreplaceable role in Belarusian media. The independent media TUT.BY had the biggest audience as it reflected the anti-governmental ideology that the overwhelming majority of the public possesses. However, conditioned by exactly their anti-governmental approach, the portal was blocked in May 2021 by the state with many journalists and all the editors getting arrested. Needless to say, that makes it extremely hard for the Belarusian journalists to perform their role of the watchdog and carry out investigations.

From her personal experience Yanchur recalls encountering threats from ex-editors of governmental media organizations for her practice of journalism, more specifically touching upon certain topics and figures. It caused a trauma and further thought on leaving her profession. Nevertheless, she tries to cope with taking into consideration the harsh work conditions for Belarus today and possible bright future which will be impossible to reach without the proper functioning of the media and motivated journalists who do not give up on their country. Obviously, the amount of freedom that the journalist has while making decisions on what aspects he/she wants to emphasize is conditioned by the fact whether the media functions independently from the state or not. In the great majority of the cases with state media the journalist has almost no freedom at all to make any decisions. Fortunately, the independent newspapers guarantee the freedom for journalists to touch upon the topics they consider significant as stated by Yanchur. "Sometimes, the external censorship goes beyond any boundaries if such exist," says Yanchur. She recalled an instance of her writing a simple harmless blogpost about three love stories dedicated to the 14<sup>th</sup> of February. The article was deleted shortly after because one of the stories involved a celebrity who once criticized Lukashenko. Besides working at one of the most independent newsrooms of Belarus, Yanchur has experience of working in state media as well which gives her a basis to compare fundamentally different working conditions. She says a ban on interviewing certain persons existed in the state media organisation. The list of such people was composed of those who expressed their critical opinions on authorities. The journalists of the newsroom were

prohibited to write articles about them and refer to them in the stories at all. Besides the ban on certain people, a ban to touch upon the decline in the amount of the salaries, the decrease of the GDP or decline of the gold reserves established. It was also banned to write about the anti-government protests and the opposition. Nevertheless, most importantly it was prohibited to write about the growth of COVID-19 cases and number of deaths.

She also recalled an instance which happened with her colleague. The latter experienced a 50% cut of the salary as a result of publishing a not edited photo of the president Lukashenko which he did not like.

Most important of all, she noted the example of the Belarusian journalist Roman Protasevich. He hosted a Telegram channel which focused on the lack of the legal foundation within the activities of the law enforcement officers. He was later declared a theorist and was arrested. As of 2021 his court case is current. He may face a death penalty. Protasevich's Ryanair flight from Athens to Vilnius was forcefully landed to detain the journalist.

### *Stas Ivashkevich*

Stas Ivashkevich is an investigative reporter at Belarusian Belsat TV channel. As he notes since the beginning of the protests, the pressure on the media has been twofold. On the one hand, the authorities tried to show that the journalists were not touched, therefore there were cases when journalists passed the security forces without hindrance. But at the same time, when the security forces thought that they were not being filmed, they tried to beat the journalists, intimidate or shoot them with a rubber bullet. Since they did it in secret, they showed much more cruelty. Now the situation has changed, the authorities have thrown off this mask and announced that Belarusian journalists work for the special services of different countries of the world in order to ignite a civil war in Belarus. Now journalists are openly persecuted. Police usually grab journalists from the crowd before attacking demonstrators.

After the very first round of violence, there was a thaw for several weeks, when all journalists worked without hindrance, then a new wave of repression began, and gradually media workers began to remove the identification marks, because they realized that they were exposing themselves to many times greater risks than if they got the opportunity to the need to simply mingle with the crowd. Ivashkevich thinks that the authorities see that they are losing the information confrontation, at least on the Internet, devastatingly. There are state media

outlets that issue propaganda without hiding it. There are opposition media outlets that also use elements of propaganda, not hiding the fact that they are also participating in the information war. And between them there is a large field of independent objective journalism, which the authorities want to remove to bring the struggle to the level of propaganda against propaganda that is customary for them.

On the one hand, it shows that the authorities are afraid of information from the media, which holds credit of trust among the general population. On the other hand, it plays into the hands, because it removes professionally submitted information that arouses more confidence in those who have not decided on their political views. Ivashkevich notes that of course, he expected this amount of repression, especially since the Belsat TV channel was regularly persecuted even before the elections. Nevertheless, he was shocked by the cases of violence against women. He did not expect that. The fact that a security officer approaches a group of journalists and simply shoots a girl-reporter in the knee was devastating for the journalist. A female journalist is being regularly beaten in prison, and after that she ends up in the hospital with bruises of internal injuries of organs. In principle, we can say that the repressions against journalists are now unprecedented.

Ivashkevich himself underwent the manifestations of violence and repression towards journalists. Investigative journalist and presenter of the Belsat TV channel Ivashkevich disappeared on 9 August. He covered events at one of the polling stations in Minsk. After the closure of the site, riot police drove up to the building. Stanislav, along with four other people, was randomly snatched from the crowd by riot police and taken away. They were taken to the Center for Isolation of Offenders for Administrative Detainees. There they saw a bleeding man lying on the ground. Near him were two medics. Once they took him out into the yard and beat him with sticks. The journalist and the group of people he was taken away with were given only a loaf of bread throughout two days.

“There was another cell for six in front of them. There were over 40 people in it. And they were suffocating there,” remembers Ivashkevich. Needless to say, the journalist was not only physically abused but also mentally. He developed trauma; however, he finds speaking up and raising awareness more important than the trauma.

## *5.3 Russia*

### **5.3.1 Historical Background**

The contradicting features that Russia is composed of, having, in fact irregular culture, have significant influence on the Russian media system. (Kangaspuro, 1999) More specifically the media system is influenced by sociocultural developments, political and economic evolution. To understand the connection and causal links it is essential to understand the drastic transition that Russia made during only two centuries. The society used to be agrarian ruled by imperial monarchy in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The ruler called “tsar” in Russian was authoritarian. Up until World War 1 a rapid increase of capitalism and growing number of different political parties was recorded. The state indeed lived a short period of democracy in 1917. The beginning of the twentieth century drastically changed the model of the country. With the murder of the last “tsar” and his family, the social revolution, the monopoly of the emerged Communist Party, the “mature socialist democracy” eventually lead to the regression of the state economy and completely transitioned the political communication into solely a propaganda. In the 1980s the social movement called “perestroika” (literal translation- reconstruction) widely associated with Mikhail Gorbachev was initiated by the Communist Party. It aimed to literally reconstruct the norms and regulations established within the USSR. It allowed much more independence from the governmental bodies. It eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The independent Russia which was born after the collapse of the Soviet Union, its political system and the market economy was highly inspired by the “Western” democratic model. (Vartanova, 2012) Not only Hallin and Mancini, but many other scholars do consider the civil society, the state and the media market as central figures creating a certain media model. (Nordenstreng & Paasilinna, 2002) With the evolution of technology, some scholars believe that, indeed, politics, economy and technology shape the media system. (McQuail, 2005) Culture, including the traditions, society and overall public opinion are also considered as an important

variable by some scholars. (See Curran & Seaton, 1997: 326) As mentioned, independent Russia was inspired by the Western democratic model. However, if apply political or economic rules which perform successfully in the Western countries, for example eastern European countries or Third World countries, as a result the rule may not perform as successfully as in the West. “Privatization is not a panacea” (North, 1994: 366) neither when referred to politics nor economy. The borrowed aspects from the Western democratic model were the end of censorship and entrance of such concepts as freedom of press, legislations ensuring the latter, media privatization, a significant increase of the objectivity in reporting and opportunity for the journalists and editorial boards themselves to control their professional activities. Even though it may sound as a quite liberal media model, the model failed to take into consideration the features of the post-Soviet society which was, indeed, very complex and differing from Western societies. The differences were conditioned by a number of informal rules and practices. (Vartanova, 2012) The development of Eastern European media models were also characterized as imitations (Splichal, 2001) that suggested completely misleading or superficial similarities. (Gross, 2003: 112)

Important to note that the manifestations of state intervention in Russia also significantly differs from manifestations inherent to Europe. (Ivanitsky, 2009: 114) As stated by Vartanova, the analysis of the Russian media system should be mainly based on the relationship between such institutions as political parties, state agencies, market economy, journalism and the state as a cultural concept. (2012)

The transformation of the Russian media system along with the radical transition of Russia, moreover in other post-Soviet states, is described as a “democratic civic masquerade” by Gross. (2004: 113) It is conditioned by the fact that while the institutions were undergoing modifications many cultural practices remained the same. The political elite that emerged only recently failed to distribute the wealth and power. Even though new regulations were adopted that should have ensured the freedom of the press along with public declarations, the old practices, specifically the relationship among the press representatives, media owners, the audience and finally the politicians themselves remained the same. (McCormack, 1999)

### 5.3.2 Political Parallelism in Russia

The roots of political parallelism in Russia reach the 18th century. The very first Russian newspaper called “Vedomosti” was founded in 1703 by the political elites that used the periodical in order to realize social management through it. It was in fact founded by the Tsar Peter the Great following his trip to Europe after he realized that a periodical can be a powerful tool for communication. During the following centuries the Russian governance system was a top-down bureaucracy excluding a variety of political parties. The political alternatives, in fact, emerged only due to the Social Democratic movement initiated by the working class. (Zassoursky & Esin, 2003) Vladimir Lenin who was the leader of the Bolsheviks, openly considered initiation of a political newspaper as the cornerstone of the political party claiming the “All-Russian political newspaper” was the first step in the creation of the organization that he desired. (Lenin, 1987) Agitation, organization and propaganda were the main purposes of the existence of the political newspaper. A subordination was established a long time ago, placing the journalist below the political elite in the hierarchical relationship between the two. Even though the country went through several months of democracy from February to October of 1917, the period was not sufficient for building a reliable basis for the further independent function of the multipart press as the democracy was soon ended with the start of October revolution by the Communist party. The internal debates were permitted for the press, nevertheless it only created the illusion of press freedom, which in fact only displayed different opinions within one ideology and not several ideologies. The Communist monopoly was, indeed, accompanied by an economic growth, which completely vanished the idea of possible multipart press.

In the beginning of 1990, along with the fall of the Soviet Union, the press and Russian media system overall gained more independence by undergoing a crucial social change. The ideological monopoly was ended by the emergence of different political parties thus finally promoting political pluralism. With the social changes the form of political parallelism has also changed but did not disappear. The Russian model of political parallelism is drastically different. The emerged political and business elites were the central figures in the field of media. The latter were using the media for competition motives for the purpose of either making their reputation better, winning in elections, or the two versions together. The relationship between the media and politics was political clientelism. The relationship was not

durable thus showing the commercial motives of the journalists rather than political or ideological. (Roudakova, 2008: 43, 44)

Ironically, scholars note that the role that political parties were playing in pre-electoral periods was taken over by the TV. The frequency and amount of electorate mobilization was much higher by the two of the major Russian television channels ORT and NTV than by political bodies. Moreover, even the term “broadcast party” was brought up by a Russian journalist in order to describe the role of Russian media in the election process. The political propaganda by the broadcast media reached its peak during the elections in 1996, 2000, 2004 because of which the public became critical about what role actually the media plays informative or persuasive. The attempts of manipulating the public opinion during the elections was called “information wars.” (Vartanova, 2012) What happened as a result of the propaganda was the increasing fame of the less accountable parties and candidates to manipulating the public opinion which caused Russia parties and candidates that were in fact accountable. (Oates, 2006: 66) The national broadcaster which was called “Ostankino” stopped being public and was transferred into a private organization and later converted into ORT. The motive of ORT was to promote the political elite and make the most of the advertising profit. Out of the described models of political parallelism by Hallin and Mancini the direct governmental control and by political majority are the most suitable characterizations for the Russian media model. (Vartanova & Zassoursky, 2003: 98)

While the role of the political parties in the formation of the Russian media was crucial, the opposite effect the relationship did not record. Moreover, even though the media itself played the most significant role in the success of the political parties it did not have a role in their formation. And although both political and media systems underwent a major change still the newly emerging political parties failed to survive as the power already belonged to the established state.

### **5.3.3 Role of the State in Russia**

The concept of state intervention is also different within the framework of the Russian media system. In order to understand the relationship between the state and the media it is important to also analyze the relationship between the state and the public established in

Russia. The Russian public, a significant part of Russian history, showed subordination to the state. Such a mentality is already deeply rooted in the state-public relationship character. Many freedoms were considered a privilege that could be hardly earned but easily taken. One of such privileges was the ability of a person to address the public. (Trachtenberg, 2014) The Russian public itself did not consider themselves autonomous from the state as the rulers were positioned as the sacral insurance of the existence of the country and the public believed it. The concepts adopted by the Western systems completely disfunction in the Russian model as the public ignores the established rules for the media and so does the state. Even though the main motives in the social changes that the media system underwent after the collapse of the Soviet Union was to give independence to the media, the state failed to withdraw itself from the media. Shortly after the collapse of the USSR many private newsrooms were created across all the means of media from the press to audiovisual production. With the rule of the first president of the Russian Republic Boris Yeltsin the power was distributed among oligarchs, industrial groups, state administrations. Because of the scattered sources of control the actual control over the media failed to succeed. This does not mean the media was not used for the sake of personal interests of political and business elites. The relationship could be described as a barter. For the facilities of the press to shape a favorable image of the political elites controlled, in fact, by the newly emerging business elites was highly appreciated by the press and awarded not only economically but also by increasing their reputation. Unfortunately both political and business elite in Russia saw the media as a weapon that could not only build a favorable reputation, bring votes during the elections but also help earn a significant capital. The state, in fact, benefited from the “barter” between itself and the business elites by borrowing the media time for better results in elections, for the return creating better conditions for the business elites. Such an example is NTV, one of the major broadcasters in Russia. It used to debut the independence broadcasting, nevertheless joined the prospective president of the time Boris Yeltsin supporting him during his electoral campaign in 1994-1996. The TV channel benefited significantly as instead of the previous limited broadcasting time which was only after 6 pm the TV channel was finally allowed to broadcast the whole day. Moreover, a subsidy of one million dollars was granted to the NTV by Gazprom which was a state company (Novaya Gozeta, 2008).

The start of Putin's presidency also brought a considerable change in the Russian political and of course the media system as well. The aim of Putin was to minimise the conflict taking place internally, hence working towards the autonomy of the ethnic groups, terrorism. In addition to that Putin also aimed to sharpen the hierarchy by increasing the subordination of other governmental bodies and agencies to him including the Parliament. The established political parties were only existing for the illusion of political plurality. What refers to the changes in the media system, the presidency of Putin resulted in the majority, more specifically 70% of digital newsrooms and media organizations being taken over by the state agencies along with the 80% of the press operating regionally, and 20% of the press operating nationally. (Khvostunova, 2013) Besides the obvious political agitation and manipulation into a vertical system of control the media was used for the creation of common values among the Russian public with the motive of unity.

The state realized that the TV could not be fully filled with political propaganda and there was a need for making it less politically oriented. This is when advertisement and entertainment content entered Russian broadcasting. The depoliticization of the Russian media was beneficial to only for the good reputation of the state and political majority but also for the business elite as the latter quickly used the favorable conditions for gaining a capital by determining the media content on commerce.

The state was not unified just because state bodies individually used the media as a means of satisfying their own needs. Thus the goal of the individuals that the state was actually composed of was not long term, rather was embodied in their personal need which could be satisfied and solved due to their political position. (Koltsova, 2006: 227) The Russian press was not independent in its actions and decisions as well. The private news organizations were managers as well who should ensure the approval of the state of the content.

The most frequent manifestations of state intervention to the Russian media system are: The failure of the state to equally sanction those institutions which violate rules. Such example happened to the famous Russian broadcaster NTV in the early 2000s which showed that out of many functioning institutions that fail to preserve the established rules only the media is being sanctioned for not showing the desired degree of loyalty to the state. Another major signifier of the high role of the state is the limited or even denied access to information in general. In the Russian media model, besides the ban on accessing government

information, very often the media was banned from participation in the state- organized press conferences. Many times the Russian media organizations faced lawsuits planned by the state which were in many of the cases result of slander and rumours. Another major form of pressure against the media by the state is the ownership of the media organizations by the state bodies and local authorities, which are further financed to become the actual offices of the authorities. In many cases the state intervention takes place not in a form of pressure but instead of some kind of a privilege. The privilege can take the form of a financial and reputational award. At the same time the privileged media organization can gain access to the private or hidden sources of information, of course, for the benefit of the state as well.

The pressure against the Russian press has significantly risen starting from the start of the protests in 2012 and 2012 the aim of which were overthrowing the ruling powers. As of 2020 the media laws are extremely strict which allow blocking of the web-sites. Frequently, the Internet is shut down in order to calm the rising protests and prevent the demonstrators from means of communication. The emergence of Aleksei Navalny only escalated the role of the state in the Russian media system. The independent press is eager to cover the affairs related to the protests organized by Navalny or his frequent arrests which are conditioned by his disobedience. Such journalists often face violent responses from the state in various forms. Meantime, the broadcast media continues presenting the solely positive image of the government by proving the interference of the state in the activities of the latter. The media laws and regulations are selective aiming to prevent the anti-government ideas of the journalists and bloggers. Newsrooms supporting democratic ideas that oppose those of the government are labeled as “foreign agents” to decrease their credibility. Besides frequent arrests, journalists not satisfying the needs of the state are often obliged to pay high fines. There are specific spots in Russia that are nowadays called “black holes.” Such regions are Chechnya and Crimea that publish very limited news. Crimes against those practising journalism such as murder, phisical assault and more remain unpunished. (Reporters Without Borders, 2021)

### **5.3.3 Findings from the Interviews**

*Ivan Golunov*

One of the interviewed investigative journalists is Ivan Golunov. The Russian journalist gained his fame for not only his eye-opening investigations but also his social

activism as well. As a major obstacle preventing the successful completion of his investigations Golunov notes exactly the media laws and regulations that exist in Russia. Many crucial investigations regarding the illegal ownership of businesses by public figures have been frozen and were not published. The reason is the modifications in Russian media law standardizing the concealment of information. One of such laws is the secrecy of the information on the law enforcement even though the latter are exclusive of the right to own businesses.

"Meduza," where Golunov works as a freelance journalist, received a prescription from the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media for publishing uncoordinated information. Meduza published an article on Channel One Russia (ORT) covering the upcoming action with flashlights, a flash mob in support of Aleksei Navalny. The Channel One coverage involved the exact time and place of the flash mob and the screenshot from the announcement made by Leonid Volkov, a Russian politician who was encouraging the public to participate in the flash mob. Meanwhile the coverage of Meduza did not involve any specific information on the planned event. Nevertheless, the prescription was based on the warning of Russia's attorney general that the participation in the action with flashlights was illegal. This form of political intervention is not only manifested through the regulations limiting the activities of the journalists but also the privilege given to the news organization that has a history of close relationship with the state as opposed to an investigative newsroom which tries to fulfill its role of the watchdog.

Golunov also denies the existence of internal censorship within the newsroom that he as of 2021 works in as the newsroom operates totally independently. The external censorship is however high and frequent attempts to prevent certain investigations do happen.

Golunov was arrested on June 6, 2019 in the center of Moscow, at around 2:30 pm on suspicion of attempted drug trafficking, and his apartment on Veshnyakovsky Street was searched. According to human rights activists, the journalistic community and many public figures, the arrest process and subsequent operative actions against Golunov were carried out in gross violation of the law, and the "Golunov case" is completely fabricated, which aims to hinder the journalist's further professional activities. On the day of his arrest, Golunov managed to pass on the funeral business investigation report to his Meduza colleagues. In early 2018, Golunov started an investigation on the funeral business in Russia. On August 14, 2018, Medusa published "A coffin, a cemetery and hundreds of billions of rubles: An

organization scheming to take over Russia's funeral industry has ties to officialdom and neo-Nazis." In February 2019, Golunov restarted the second part of the investigation into the situation in Moscow. after his release on July 1, 2019. The investigation, which Ivan Golunov considered the reason for his criminal prosecution, interested about 15 publishing houses. His detention was decided to be extended to 72 hours.

Golunov was nevertheless taken to the 71st hospital. According to ambulance doctors, Golunov was found to have injuries on the scalp and neck, multiple scratches on the front and back of the chest, damage to the ribs 10-11. He was also assumed to have a closed craniocerebral injury and concussion.

On the evening of June 8, Golunov was put under house arrest until August 7. The journalist was released after additional investigative actions.

A court-case was filed against those accused of fabricating Golunov's arrest. Besides the arrest, Golunov frequently receives threats connected to his professional activities. Before the arrest, he used to take the threats as a joke. He explains it with the difference in how a Russian and European journalist would perceive an assault. Journalists in Russia are observed as a danger to society's well being, state welfare, entrepreneurship and are used to frequent assaults. The arrest made Golunov realize the possible hazards of the profession. Nevertheless, after deep reflections, he still decided to continue the journalistic career path, as he always has the urge to share the information he possessed for the public good.

### *Roman Anin*

Roman Anin is a Russian investigative journalist who has revealed cases of corruption by Russian authorities across the country and beyond. Russian police officials ransacked the home of prominent investigative journalist Roman Anin and brought him in for questioning, which is believed to be related to his coverage of one of Russia's most influential people.

He himself supposes that the search could be related to the case initiated in 2016, when Anin published the article "The Secret of Princess Olga" in Novaya Gazeta. He asked a question about how the head of Rosneft (Petroleum refineries company) Igor Sechin was connected with one of the most luxurious yachts in the world? The yacht was worth 100 million dollars, which was used by Sechin's wife Olga.

The case is ongoing and Anin is a witness. Nevertheless, from the types of the questions asked he assumes that his situation may worsen. He believes everything leads to him being eventually accused of revealing facts about the private life of Sechina. According to the law he may receive a statement of up to four years.

About the risks of his profession Anin notes that he would probably think a thousand times before doing an investigation about the authorities of the Chechen Republic for example. In fact, “Novaya Gozeta” is not often openly threatened. But in those cases when this happens, the staff does not rely heavily on law enforcement.

As he notes they have a sad experience of total reluctance and fear of law enforcement to investigate the murders of their colleagues. As he says they can rely on the police when both sides understand that the threats come from some small and not influential hooligans. Then the police are not afraid to work. And when the slightest hint of politics appears, fear paralyzes them. Four of the employees of “Novaya Gazeta” died because of telling people the truth that the authorities were hiding.

Anin often experienced the consequences of not pleasing the authorities. As he says the authorities, if they want, will slap the fines on any independent media the next day if the latter does not work towards satisfying their needs.

Nevertheless, Anin is happy that “Novaya Gazeta” operates independently without no one sponsoring it but the readers themselves. The reader can become a member and financially support the newspaper. At its least, such independence ensures the lack of internal censorship.

## Discussion

The conducted interviews together with the analysis of the existing data revealed that the media systems of the three selected countries have many features in common and be classified as one media model. However, the three countries fall under the same media system model that differs from those proposed by Hallin and Mancini.

Nevertheless, if compared according to the initially proposed types of media systems, the three countries fall under the Polarized Pluralist model considering the high level of political parallelism, heavy political orientation of the newsrooms, and significant state intervention. Factors such as low journalistic professionalisation and low rates of newspaper circulation have been also taken into consideration while classifying the media systems.

Authoritarian traditions of the Soviet Union are central in the development of exactly this media system model in all of the three countries. Not only were the ideologies similar among the three post-Soviet countries during the Soviet era, but also the economic situation and lifestyles. Such factors, the intentions of the Soviet government contributed to the creation of a shared media system. Even though the USSR fell in 1991 the model of media and politics relations was inherited by the newly established independent states as well.

One of the shared characteristics of the three countries' media systems or similarities is the dangerous conditions of the journalists under which they operate. All the interviewed journalists have experienced some form of threats or even physical assault. Several of the interviewees recall such cases that happened to their colleagues or even death of the latter. Another similarity is the heavy censorship of the government. In the significant portion of news agencies in all of the three countries not only the source of the censorship is external in the great majority of the cases the government. In such agencies the censorship is also internal. With that said the content is being highly monitored by the editorial board. Nevertheless, in all of the three countries there are independent news agencies which do not rely on the strict regulations of the editorial boards. Nevertheless, those are still being

oppressed by the strict censorship of the government manifested in different ways. Another similarity present in all the discussed countries is the high level of ownership of media organisations by political figures or business elites. The latter use the owned media organisations so that the agencies serve their personal or political needs. In all the three countries, in the majority of the cases exactly the broadcast media belongs to political figures. There are also several cases where along with the digitalization of the news, those broadcast media outlets expanded on digital platforms.

Besides the vivid similarities, the media models of the three analyzed countries also have differences. One of them is the ownership of local media organizations by foreign powers. Such cases are present in Belarus and Armenia. Unlike the two countries, Russian media is locally centralized and not controlled from overseas. Remarkably, in the significant portion of the cases those Armenian and Belarusian news agencies which operate under the control of foreign powers are often owned by Russia. This phenomenon has its roots back from Soviet times, when Soviet Russia was highly enclosed and not available for foreign involvement. Meanwhile, those nations operating under the rule of Soviet Russia such as Armenia and Belarus were highly influenced by Soviet Russia.

Another difference in the media systems of the three countries is the degree in which the media system is commercialized. With rapid changes happening in the field of media, it has and continues to become more and more commercialized around the world (Udris et al., 2015). Even though Armenian and Russian media systems are heavily controlled by the state, they are independent enough to not be solely dependent on the politics but also rely on the market and proceed by working with their new commercialized media logic. In the majority of the cases in Armenia and Russia such media approach is conditioned by financial motives, meaning the profit orientation. By becoming more commercialized, the media creates a more competitive platform for politicians, as the latter seek for the most favorable conditions for earning public attention. Thus in such a case the media system is still being highly politically oriented, nevertheless, in a way changes the established hierarchical relations making the politics dependent on the media and creating more favorable and beneficial conditions for the media so that the latter benefits from media-politics relations as well. In the Belarusian media system such a phenomenon exists, nevertheless, in a completely different form. In Belarus, the media is still the dependent variable despite the spreading phenomenon of commercialisation of media. In Russia and Armenia the editorial boards have the opportunity

to choose their orientations based on how much they may benefit from which orientation, surely excluding those news organisations which were apriori owned by government officials. Meanwhile the Belarusian newspapers forcefully accept subsidies in order to survive and not be shot down.

More journalists are killed in Russia, but there is less general repression against them. The reason behind is political. It happens possibly due to the fact that the ratings of the Russian authorities are higher and more stable than those of the Belarusian authorities. Because, despite the general situation with corruption and poverty in Russia, the authorities have an ideology that they sell to the population in exchange for their deprivation. This is a great power ideology that appeals to many Russians. Lukashenko has no clear idea that would justify those disadvantages of his rule, which the Belarusians are unhappy with. The common conditions are hopelessness, lack of rights and worsening of the economic situation. Therefore, the Lukashenka regime is forced to resort to more explicit repression than Putin's. As a result of the analysis of the existing literature and conducted interviews with the investigative reporters, Russian media system was classified as Statist Commercialized Model with the main difference from Hallin and Manini's proposed models of having consciously or subconsciously legitimized hierarchical authoritarian politics-media relationship operating within the framework of commercialized media logic. (Vartanova, 2012) Armenian and Belarussian media models, with slight differences, also fall under the same category as a result of the rooted traditional politics-media relationship which has been inherited from the times of the Soviet era.

## *Conclusion*

The phenomenon of the shared cultural features between the post-Soviet countries plays a significant role in identifying and especially comparing the media systems of such countries. The shared history, economic patterns have deep roots going back to the history of Eurasian Empires. Even though the research still lacks in-depth studies of how the geopolitical features can affect the formation of a certain media system, the latter surely does as proved by this particular research. The research proved that the media systems of post-Soviet countries have many features in common with Russia which is correlated to the shared

history under the roof of the USSR. Even though the phenomena of political interference in the media field, links between the media and business or political elites have been addressed by Hallin and Mancini while describing the Polarized Pluralist or in other words Mediterranean model, those phenomena are not that vividly evident in Western societies as they are in post-Soviet authoritarian or hybrid states. One of the reasons is the tolerating approach of the media organizations, while another reason is the tolerance of exactly the public which over time became used to the rooted hierarchical relationship between the politics and the media.

The findings of the thesis are strongly related to the previously conducted research on the matter when regards to Russia. In the case of Armenia and Belarus, the findings of this academic work establish a basis for further analysis and research in the two countries leaning on the theoretical framework and existing research for Russia and the West. To be put in other words, the research uses the existing research on Russia in order to link the latter to Armenia and Belarus as well in order to fill in the gap in the academic research of the two mentioned countries.

The results of the questioned hypotheses are the following:

H1. The similarities among the media systems of the three countries are conditioned by the shared past.

The conducted research proved the shared past, more specifically the Soviet era has highly influenced the current state of the media in all the three countries.

H2. The three countries can be classified under a single media system model.

Due to a number of similarities in the media systems of the analyzed countries the latter can be classified under a one media system model.

H3. The model(s) that the three countries are closer to differ(s) from those proposed by Hallin and Mancini.

Due to the cultural, economic, societal and political differences, the media system model the three countries belong to varies from the media system models proposed by Hallin and Mancini.

H4. The media system that has the highest role of the state and political parallelism is Belarusian.

While in Armenian and Russian media systems the newsrooms have the opportunity to choose their orientation, the Belarusian newsrooms are deprived of the opportunity. Even though the oppression of the journalists in Russia is relatively to a lesser degree compared to Belarus, more journalists are being killed in Russia. Thus the country with the highest level of political parallelism and role of the state is Russian.

H5. From the three media system models proposed by Hallin and Mancini the three countries are the closest to the Mediterranean Polarized Pluralist model.

Due to the high levels of political parallelism and role of the state in all of the three analyzed countries, the media model system proposed by Hallin and Mancini they are the closest to is Mediterranean Polarized Pluralist model.

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# Appendix

## *Appendix 1: Interview Questions*

### **Introductory questions**

- The Education of the interviewee
- Current position of the interviewee
- Period of practice of journalism
- Most prominent investigation related to politics

### **Work conditions of the country**

- Assess how developed journalism is in your country.
- What are the frequent risks and obstacles?
- Assess the role of the state in the country.
- Assess the level of political parallelism in the country.
- Assess the degree of danger of the profession in your country.
- What is your opinion on the operating media laws?
- List 3 dominant sources of influence.
- List the most insignificant 3 sources of influence.
- Assess the level of censorship in the newsrooms.
- What type of censorship is more widespread? (censorship or self-censorship)
- What are the taboo topics in journalism?
- Assess the degree of pluralism.
- Assess the diversity in the newsroom
- What newspapers have the biggest reach? (opposition or pro-government)
- Assess your personal trust towards the following institutions a. Government b. Political parties (ruling vs opposition)

### **Personal experience**

- Measure your success in fulfilling the role of the watchdog.
- Have you ever experienced threats and physical assaults as a result of practicing journalism?
- Do you have a trauma as a result of practicing journalism?

- Have you had thoughts on leaving your profession?
- How much freedom do you personally have in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized?