



**LUND UNIVERSITY**

Faculty of Social Sciences

**Graduate School**

**Radio Free Europe and the 1989 Fall of Communism in  
Romania**

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*In the memory of my grandfather*

## Summary

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### Research aim and questions:

The aim of this research is to investigate the way Radio Free Europe's Romanian Language Service presented the events of December 1989 in Romania. Since Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty was one of the most important international broadcasting institutions during the Cold War, it is relevant to see what kind of interpretation was assigned to Romania's 1989 political and social crisis and thus get a better understanding of the role media play in social change processes.

### Method and procedure:

For the purpose of this paper we have chosen to work with the general theoretical framework of social constructivist theories. The project was guided towards empirical research with the help of case study methodology and dramaturgical analysis.

The sources of data were the political shows aired on RFE from the 18<sup>th</sup> until the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1989. The findings were then corroborated with information gathered through interviews with four journalists working at that time at the radio station.

### Results and conclusions:

On account of the analysis, it has been found that the RFE broadcasts maintained a balanced voice in reporting about the events in December 1989. In the mean time we could observe a focused, politically oriented approach in the broadcasts. It was found that RFE used the most reliable information available in those circumstances, but the programming was driven by the goal to end Nicolae Ceaușescu's ruling and the demise of communism in Romania. While these goals came as no surprise, we have found several ways in which the media institution pursued the aim of introducing democracy to Romania. Some of the methods were: emphasizing the cruelty of Ceaușescu's dictatorial regime, assuring listeners that the Western world is interested in their struggle, presenting Western experts view on the events or by promoting the political program of the newly emerged power structure, the Council of National Salvation Front.

The research thus provided another opportunity to observe how the media shapes and influences reality.

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## 1. Introduction

“Judge: All rise!

Elena Ceaușescu: No, dear, we won’t rise, we are people...

Judge: The court, in name of the law and of the people, declares [...] that it condemns unanimously the defendants Ceaușescu Nicolae and Ceaușescu Elena to capital punishment and all their property will be impounded for the following offences: genocide as laid down in article 357 [...], undermining state power as laid down in article 162 of the Penal Code, the act of diversion, [...] and undermining of the national economy [...]. The sentence was pronounced in public session, today, 25<sup>th</sup> of December 1989.

Lawyer Teodorescu: Please allow me to talk to the defendants.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: I do not recognize any court.

Lawyer Teodorescu: By not recognizing the court you cannot exercise a stage of appeal. Please acknowledge that the sentence is final in these conditions.

Nicolae Ceaușescu: Who has organized the coup can shoot anyone!

The court adjourns.”<sup>1</sup>

Following the trial the almighty leader of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR), Nicolae Ceaușescu, and his wife were executed in the garrison of Tîrgoviște. And thus the 45 years of communist dictatorship was ended in Romania. The events started in the city of Timișoara, on the 15th of December and then continued until the 27th of December 1989. The number of casualties rose to more than 1100 ( Tismăneanu, 2007, p. 624).

During this period Radio Free Europe, based in München, has broadcasted frequently shows dealing with the course of actions in Romania. Radio Free Europe, established at the beginning of the Cold War by an US anti-communist organization, served the purpose of transmitting news and information behind the Iron Curtain. On their website, [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org), it is stated that Radio Free Europe “played a significant role in the collapse of communism and the rise of democracies in post-communist Europe”.

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<sup>1</sup> The Romanian transcript of the trial can be found at: [http://www.revolutie.ro/stenograma\\_procesului.html](http://www.revolutie.ro/stenograma_procesului.html), while various audiovisual materials of the same trial can be found on-line.

Hence there will be several topics dealt with in this paper, namely the issues of political communication, Cold War narratives and the happenings of December 1989 in Romania.

## 1. 1 Literature Review

There is a large number of books dealing with both Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty and the Romanian revolution. The history of RFE/RL has been presented by such authors as Sig Mickelson (1983), G.R. Urban (1997), Arch Puddington (2003) or Richard Cummings (2009) and some other books appeared in Hungarian (Gyula Borbandi, 1996), Czech (Karel Sedlacek, 1993), or Polish (Jerzy Morawski, 1993). In Romanian we can find the memoirs of Gelu Ionescu (2006), Ioana Măgura-Bernard (2007) or Gabriel Andreescu and Mihnea Berindei (2010). Due to the large numbers of books the list is not exhaustive.

Similarly there have been books on the Romanian revolution of 1989 written by authors such as Andrei Codrescu (1991), Ion Iliescu (1994, 1995), Marius Mioc (1995, 1997, 2004) and in English by Sorin Antohi and Vladimir Tismăneanu (2000), Ruxandra Cesereanu (2004), Peter Siani-Davies (2005). Miodrag Milin (1999) also published a book in which he gathered the news agency telegrams together with the radio and press abstracts and commentaries dealing with the events of Timișoara 1989. Here, again, the list is not all-encompassing.

However most of these books present only a historical account of the RFE/RL or in the case of the Romanian revolution, they try to find different answers and interpretations to what actually happened in 1989. Many of the books written about the events of 1989 in Romania devote a large part to Radio Free Europe's broadcasts and journalists, but there wasn't any media research done on this particular topic. There could be found only one similar research (Macrea-Toma, 2008) on the Romanian department of RFE which dealt with the cultural broadcasts of Monica Lovinescu, one of the most well-known journalists of RFE. The aim of that project was "[...] to provide new insights about a type of cultural liberal advocacy framed by an international context and a local intellectual tradition." (Macrea-Toma, 2008, p. ii)

When it comes to research connected to media framing or how the media presents social or political crisis, we can find a large amount of literature. Only to name a few of these projects: Laurien Alexandre's *Voicing the Gulf. The Voice of America Constructs the Gulf War* (2001), in which the author analyses how the editorials of VOA created the story of the Gulf War; Kothari Ammina's *The Framing of the Darfur Conflict in the New York Times: 2003-2006* (2010), about the role of sources in the frame-building process and the impact of news-making processes in the case of Darfur. Some more studies have been carried out on the Iraqi war and the way media presented this conflict. One projects was the *Whose Views Made the News? Media Coverage and the March to War in Iraq* (2010), carried out by Danny Hayes and Matthew Guardino. They analyzed the news coverage of ABC, CBS, and NBC Iraq-related evening news stories to see "[...] how the news filters the communications of political actors and refracts —rather than merely reflects— the contours of debate." (Hayes, Guardino, 2010, p. 59)

Although these research projects do not deal specifically with RFE/RL, they are very helpful in building up the case of the present paper and they could also help in finding methodological or theoretical solutions to the difficulties that have arose. The way these authors handle the problems of framing, political communication and the means by which media constructs reality can give guidance in handling the problems of the current research.

This present paper aims at filling a gap in the general knowledge in the small amount of work published about Radio Free Europe's Romanian service and it also tries to add new insights to the events of 1989.

The broad research aim is to understand the mass-media's role in time of political and social crisis and the story of the Romanian events of 1989 as depicted by the media. In focus are the broadcasts of the Romanian service of Radio Free Europe. The goal of the research is to see how the changes in Romania were 'framed' and interpreted in the shows of RFE. Since RFE was one of the main institutions of the anticommunist propaganda, it is important to examine how they presented what was happening in a country which was physically sealed for several weeks in the end of 1989.

Therefore the research questions are:

- How did the RFE present the events of December 1989 in Romania?
- What kind of interpretation was given to the happenings in Timișoara and in the rest of the country?
- What was the RFE's role in this specific period and more generally what is the media's role in a time of social and political crisis?

## 1.2 Outline of the Paper

The paper is divided into six chapters. The first one is the introductory part, presenting the background information of this research, the literature that exists on the chosen topic and the research questions. Chapter two is focusing on the theoretical framework of the research and introduces the theories on which the present paper is building its structure and which also represent the macro level of the research. The next chapter introduces the methodological part of the paper: the research methods that were applied, the limitations of the research project and the corresponding ethical considerations. The fourth chapter presents the historical background of the paper, the timeline of the Romanian revolution, the story of Radio Free Europe and the story of the RFE's Romanian language service. This chapter was essential for understanding the context of the RFE's broadcast in the days of December 1989. The next chapter presents the findings of the research, the analysis of the broadcasts and the dilemmas surrounding these results. The last chapter is the conclusion part, in which we give answers to the research questions and the findings are analyzed in the light of the theoretical framework. A more general discussion follows about the role of the mass-media in social, economical and political crisis.



## 2. Theoretical Framework

There is a great number of works on the relation between mass-media and the reality, the importance of media in influencing both governments and public opinion and the role of the journalists in time of crisis. In this paper the general theoretical orientation is the social construction of reality theory (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) and other three theories in strong connection to this overarching one. Each of these theories highlights different features of the general approach. The theoretical background offered thus both an analytic grounding to the project and a framework for generating the present paper.

The selected theories are: the media system dependency theory (Adoni, Mane, 1984), the media framing theory (Tuchman, 1978, Entman, 1993), John B. Thompson's social theory of the media (Thompson, 1995) and, of course, the overarching approach, the theory of social construction of reality. By combining these approaches it is expected to gain a better theoretical understanding on how the broadcasts of RFE/RL were constructed and how these shows in turn influenced the outcome of the uprising. We will combine these theories to demonstrate how the media constructed what was "true" and "real" in the context of the events of 1989 in Romania.

### 2.1 Social Construction of Reality

According to the social construction of reality perspective people create and understand the world and their everyday life based on what they perceive as real. "Social order is a human product or more precisely, an ongoing human production"- according to Berger and Luckmann (1967).

Reality, in the view of the before mentioned Berger and Luckmann (1966), Alfred Schutz (1932/1967; 1962), or Erving Goffman (1974), is understood through a frame of reference which helps people in interpreting events and objects (Wasburn, 1992).

Schutz reckons that people's knowledge *is* their reality:

It is experienced as the objective world existing “out there”, independent of their will and confronting them as fact. The stock of knowledge has a taken-for-granted character and is seldom the object of conscious reflection. It is understood by people in a commonsense fashion as reality itself. Although people can doubt this reality, they very seldom do so- and they cannot do so when they are engaged in their routine activities. (Wasburn, 1992, p. 55)

Put it in a different way, human activity is taking place within structures of meaning. This also means that objects of the everyday world have no universal meaning, but one that is socially created and imposed. Yet people “[...] routinely experience the world in a «taken-for-granted way»; meaning appears to be both inherent and universal.” (Wasburn, 1992, p. 61)

Erving Goffman adds to this view by writing that the social world is essentially ambiguous and not as definite as we would like to believe:

Objects, actors, conditions and events have no inherent meaning. Rather meaning is imposed through human action that organizes, characterizes, and identifies experiences in terms of shared definitions. The meaning that is imposed is limited by, and relative to, the social context in which it is created. (Wasburn, 1992, p. 59)

Goffman uses the term *frame* to define those institutionalized meanings that we use to interpret our everyday experience: “A frame provides an answer to the question, “What is going on?” Any event can be described in terms of a focus that is wide or narrow and close or distant.” (Wasburn, 1992, p. 59)

When we communicate we offer listeners those frames that we have also adopted. And this is even more important when it comes to media since there are instances when a potential listener doesn’t want to accept an offered frame. In this way it provides a different frame which will be in direct competition with the first one. The prize of this game is to convince other participants to choose one of the views offered by the frames. In this situation, when frames “collude”: “[...] the more powerful of two parties in a frame dispute involving public issues is more likely to have access to the means of mass communication through which public framing of the issue can be influenced.” (Wasburn,

1992, p. 60) This is how that media institution which has more access to means will be more likely to win the public's acceptance of a certain frame on events.

Another theory that is closely related to the social construction of reality perspective is the media framing theory (Tuchman 1978, Entman, 1993). It draws on the same elements we have discussed before, emphasizing the fact that "the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning"<sup>2</sup>. The way news stories are presented is a choice made by journalists and editors. By selecting some frames the media organizes social meanings. What is the most important is that "frames influence the perception of the news of the audience, this form of agenda-setting not only tells what to think about, but also how to think about it."<sup>3</sup>

In sum, the social construction of reality perspective's central idea is that every human activity is if not created, then greatly influenced by structures of meaning. The events and the meanings assigned to them in society are not something natural or clear; they are actually ambiguous and built around frames of reference. These authors argue that socially constructed and imposed meanings "[...] reflect the structure of the social-historical contexts in which they were created." (Wasburn, 1992, p. 61)

## 2.2 Media System Dependency Theory

The social construction of reality theory can be connected to empirical research on the media's role through the media system dependency theory. This theory gives a conceptual link that can help in discovering the part media plays in shaping common beliefs about social issues. Because media as a major player in frame-building influences greatly the way people perceive reality and even more when it comes to social objects that are remote and difficult to understand (Adoni, Mane, 1984, p. 327)

Political beliefs are this type of remote social objects and Dan Nimmo and James Combs argued that:

[...] few people learn about politics through direct experience; for most persons political realities are mediated through mass and group communication, a process resulting as much in the creation,

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cw.utwente.nl/theorieenoverzicht/Theory%20clusters/Mass%20Media/Framing.doc/>

<sup>3</sup> Idem.

transmission and adoption of political fantasies as in realistic views of what takes place. (Nimmo, Combs, 1983, xv)

The media system dependency theory also examines the fact that not only the public is dependent on the media, but media has its own dependencies as well. The media institutions depend on many factors, such as economical and political incentives, relationship to governments and civil society and so on. But one of the most basic dependencies is on “the political system for the resources necessary for the attainment of important goals, including their stability and economic welfare.” (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1989, p. 304-305)

This is particularly important in our case for RFE/RL and its dependency on the US government.

Bennett (1983) draws our attention to yet another feature of media dependency, namely to the fact that media imposes meaning on events and thus it reinforces a process of reification and legitimation. He gives as an example the Western media’s usage of the term Cold War from 1946 to 1989 as if it were a fact of nature,

[...] rather than a convenient, simplifying label for a highly complex set of international relations primarily involving the United States and the Soviet Union. The abstraction ipso facto legitimated much of U.S. political, economic, and military strategy during the period. (Wasburn, 1992, p. 70)

According to Meyrowitz (1985) one limitation of the social construction of reality perspective was its lack of attention on how the media influences people’s perception of reality. The media system dependency theory can fill in that gap and therefore –by combining the two- it can be used in empirical research

## 2.3 Social Theory of the Media

While these previous theories dealt with the construction of reality and more specifically with how the mass media is one of the major actors in shaping reality, John B. Thompson discusses in a more practical way how media change our perception of reality. Thompson (1995) talks about a new kind of ‘action at distance’:

Whereas in earlier societies actions and their consequences were generally restricted to contexts of face-to-face interaction and their immediate environs, today it is common for individuals to orient their actions towards others who do not share the same spatial-temporal locale, or for their actions to have consequences which spill well beyond their immediate locales. (Thompson, 1995, p. 100)

In connection to this ‘action at distance’ Thompson discusses the so-called “struggle for visibility”. The theoretician emphasizes the fact that local concerns need the power of visibility to gain widespread recognition. By achieving visibility, media can start a chain of events that are many times unpredictable and uncontrollable. As he explains:

Media images and messages can tap into deep divisions and feelings of injustice that are experienced by individuals in the course of their day-to-day lives. The media can politicize the everyday by making it visible and observable in ways that previously were not possible, thereby turning everyday events into a catalyst for action that spills well beyond the immediate locales in which these events occurred. (Thompson, 1995, p. 245-248)

As we have seen in the theories before Thompson stresses that media is actively involved in “constituting the social world” (Thompson, 1995, p. 117) According to him this is possible by distributing information all over the world. And therefore: “[...] media shape and influence the course of events and, indeed, create events that would have not existed in their absence.” (Thompson, 1995, p.117)

## 2.4 December 1989 in the Light of Theories

People depend on media to provide information, knowledge and expertise to what is going on in the world. This role is even more emphasized when it comes to rapid social change, which

[...] catches people without an established reality to use in defining and interpreting events going on around them. In the case of rapid social change, we should also expect to

find the media system dominant in people's search for information to make the world interpretable and, therefore, less threatening. (Wasburn, 1992, p. 64)

The events of December 1989 can be considered the perfect example of "rapid social change". As mentioned before John B. Thompson (1995) argues that because of the remoteness and speed of media we can talk about a new kind of "action at distance". By receiving and distributing information and images from all over the world, media has the power to encourage forms of collective action (Thompson, 1995). As he notices:

The revolutionary upheavals in Eastern Europe in 1989 provide another example of the ways in which media messages can stimulate and nourish collective action by individuals located in distant contexts. [...] it seems unlikely that the revolutionary upheavals of 1989 would have occurred as they did- with breathtaking and with similar results in different countries- in the absence of extensive and continuous media coverage. (Thompson, 1995, p. 115)

And here we can reconnect to the media system dependency theory, which explains the fall of communism in the light of media coverage:

Similarly, it seems likely that, surrounded by the collapse of the old order in Eastern Europe in 1989, tens of millions of Czechs, Bulgarians, Romanians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, and others turned to western IRB [International Radio Broadcasting] to provide a framework for understanding what was going on and ways to respond to the revolutionary transformations of the political-economic systems under which they were living. (Walburn, 1992, p.65)

Therefore it is obvious that both people's dependency on media and media's power to encourage forms of collective action influenced the happenings in Romania and elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

By using this complex set of theoretical approaches it is expected to understand more thoroughly how the mass media and the public mutually influenced each other during the events of December 1989 in Romania. The combination of these theories was

essential because of the elaborate relation between the media, its representations and the social world. And even more when we have to analyze media in time of crisis, such as the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe.

### **3. Methodology**

Given the topic of the multifaceted events of 1989, qualitative research methods have been considered as being the most appropriate.

When it comes to qualitative research many researchers talk about the risk of this technique to be considered unscientific because in the positivistic approach social research should be value-free and objective (Esterberg, 2002).

On the other hand we know that human reality is very much complex. Furthermore, “in social research, humans are the researchers as well as the objects of study, which means that pure objectivity is impossible. We have a vested interest in what we study.” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 11) Therefore we need to be reflexive to be able to understand how our own perceptions could influence our explanations and findings.

According to Uwe Flick the essential characteristics of qualitative research are:

[...] the correct choice of appropriate methods and theories; the recognition and analysis of different perspectives; the researchers’ reflections on their research as part of the process of knowledge production; and the variety of approaches and methods. (Flick, 2009, p. 14)

For the qualitative researcher it is important to analyze cases in their local and temporal specificity “[...] and starting from people’s expressions and activities in their local contexts.” (Flick, 2009, p. 21)

Qualitative researchers want to study the different subjective perspectives and viewpoints and the interactions between participants are extremely important for the sake of the studies being carried out. (Flick, 2009)

Another major difference between qualitative and quantitative methods is the way the researchers' subjectivity is seen. While in quantitative research this subjectivity is considered an intervening variable, in qualitative research "[...] methods take the researcher's communication with the field and its members as an explicit part of knowledge." (Flick, 2009, p. 16)

Having all this in mind, to be able to get the best results, qualitative research has been considered as the most appropriate.

### 3.1 Research Methods

The next step was the choice of a framework and the method of case study was the most suitable for this research. Because as Robert K. Yin states:

In contrast, "how" and "why" questions are more explanatory and likely to lead to the use of case studies, histories, and experiments as the preferred research strategies. This is because such questions deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence. (Yin, 1994, p. 6)

And since we are interested in how the radio presented the events of December 1989, the case study method proved to be the best choice.

When it comes to the typology of case studies different researchers use different labels. For instance Robert Yin (1994) classifies case studies in three categories: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory, while Robert Stake (1994) classifies them as intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies.

In combining the two, it is reckoned that this research would classify as descriptive in Yin's terms and intrinsic in Stake's terms.

Descriptive because:



A descriptive theory is not an expression of a cause-effect relationship. Rather, a descriptive theory covers the scope and depth of the object (case) being described. (Yin, 1993, p. 22)

And intrinsic because:

It is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of interest. [...] The purpose is not theory building- though at other times the researcher may do just that. (Stake, 2003, p. 88)

When choosing this method it was important to acknowledge its shortcomings in order to know how to handle those during the research.

One of the major criticisms of the case study method is its lack of generalization by comparison with survey research, for instance. Scholars have discussed several options for solving this major issue. Stake (1994) argues that what we need is a so-called ‘intrinsic case study’ which involves the investigation of particular cases for their own sake, not for the sake of generalizing. The case studies might have such an intrinsic value that they pose enough interest for the readers on their own.

Lincoln and Guba (1989) discuss about the so-called ‘transferability’: they believe that the readers of a case study have the role of deciding whether it is generalizable or not to other cases:

[...] the burden of proof is on the user rather than on the original researcher; though the latter is responsible for providing a description of the case(s) studied that is sufficiently ‘thick’ to allow users to assess the degree of similarity between the case(s) investigated and those to which the findings are to be applied (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p. 241)

Gomm, Hammersley & Foster (2002) challenge both of these approaches and they believe that there are two solutions to this problem: one is to select heterogeneous population for the aim of the case study and a complementary approach is to have a systematic selection of cases. And to obtain this they advise to use several sampling strategies, such as to select a case that is typical in relevant aspects; to select a small sample of cases that cover the extremes of expected relevant heterogeneity (Gomm,

Hammersley & Foster, 2002). The other solution –they argue– is to strive for generalization within the case. This can be reached by stating very clearly the boundaries of the case study.

Another major issue with case studies is closely connected to the previously mentioned problem. Since it is quite difficult to draw statistical conclusions from case study results, critics argue that these findings do not help improving existing theoretical knowledge. But by taking the steps mentioned before, it is believed that case studies can both lead to generalizations and consequently to new theoretical knowledge.

Going further when it comes to ways of collecting evidence in the case study, Yin (1993) enlists several methods. He mentions documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, physical artifacts, but of course the list is not exhaustive. For the purpose of this paper, it is important to see how Yin discusses the relevance of two of these methods, namely archival records and interviews.

Archival records are of great value in Yin's (1993) opinion, yet it is equally important to keep in mind that "[...] most archival records were produced for a specific purpose and a specific audience (other than the case study investigation), and these conditions must be fully appreciated in order to interpret the usefulness of any archival records." (Yin, 1993, p. 84).

Interviews are seen as essential for case studies because in general case studies deal with human affairs and "[...] These human affairs should be reported and interpreted through the eyes of specific interviewees, and well-informed respondents can provide important insights into a situation." (Yin, 1993, p. 85) However researchers have to deal with several problems, such as bias, poor recall or inaccurate articulation, when it comes to interviewing.

This is why it is vital to corroborate different type of data in case studies. Multiple sources of evidence help in building up a strong case and it helps to address a broader range of issues. Another major advantage is the development of converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 1993, p. 92).

There are different ways of working with multiple data. Patton (1987) discusses four ways of triangulation: triangulation of data sources (data triangulation), among

different evaluators (investigator triangulation), of perspectives on the same data set (theory triangulation) and of methods (methodological triangulation).

For the purpose of this paper it has been chosen to work with the first type of triangulation, the combination of data sources.

### 3.2 Empirical data

The data will come from the shows<sup>4</sup> aired on Radio Free Europe, Romanian language service between the 18 and 31 of December 1989 and from semi-standardized interviews with journalists working at that time.

We will analyse the program called “Actualitatea Românească” (Romanian Actuality) and “Studio Special REL” (Special Studio Radio Free Europe). These shows can be found on RFE/RL website<sup>5</sup>. The length of these programs ranges between 35 and 55 minutes and the transcripts found on the website were useful for the purpose of the paper. There are 22 shows in Romanian language that were analyzed from the website.

It is considered relevant to see who were the major actors presented in these shows, wherefrom did the journalists gather their information and in which way did they present the events.

It was also considered important to interview two of the journalists from RFE/RL’s Romanian Service and two American officials who were in decision-making positions at the radio in 1989.

Out of the many possibilities to carry out interviews, we have decided to work with semi-standardized interviews because it gave us the freedom to guide the conversation to a certain degree by the help of the interview guide (see appendix). On the other hand the interviewees had the freedom to express themselves freely by adding their views on the issues in question.

It is important to mention that initially we wanted to interview Emil Hurezeanu and N.C. Munteanu due to the fact that they were the leading journalists of the show.

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<sup>4</sup> The list of the analyzed shows can be found in the appendices of this paper. When referring to a specific show we will indicate the title of the broadcast and the air dates.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.europalibera.org/archive/1989/latest/452/982.html>

Although we tried to contact them by e-mail several times, they have not responded to our request. Their refusal can be considered an answer in itself.

Therefore we contacted two other persons working at RFE/RL at that time, the broadcaster Ioana Măgura-Bernard and the head of the News Service, Liviu Tofan. The two American officials were A. Ross Johnson, the then director of RFE/RL and Robert Gillette, at that time deputy director of RFE/RL. The interviewees helped in understanding how and why the events were presented as they were in 1989.

Three of the interviews have been carried out through Skype, a software application by what users can make voice calls over the Internet. These conversations were then recorded and transcribed. The fourth interview, with A. Ross Johnson, was carried out via e-mail correspondence.

The interviews provided a valuable source of information for the aim of this paper, unobtainable in any other way. While the main data still remain the broadcasts of RFE/RL, the information gathered from the interviews added an extra depth to the analysis.

### 3.2 Limitations of the Research

Although it might seem a cliché to say that every approach and method has its own strengths and weaknesses, it is still important to enlist those limitations that most probably influenced the outcomes of this research.

One of the major challenges was language. Due to the fact that these shows were all broadcasted in Romanian, it was necessary to translate the relevant parts into English. This procedure unfortunately brought along a certain loss of meaning, mainly when it came to trying to translate word games, irony or sarcasm which is culturally embedded. Yet I have tried to overcome this problem not by translating precisely the words said, but by putting more emphasis on the overall meaning of the phrases.

Another limitation was due to the time period which passed since the events of 1989. This was relevant when it came to the interviews. We need to acknowledge the age of the interviewees and the fact that time might have influenced the memories of the journalists. Nevertheless once this bias was considered and the information analyzed correspondingly, the interviewees' contribution to this research was extremely helpful.

The other problem with the interviews – since they were carried out through Skype – was the lack of some essential elements of conversation such as eye contact or body language. Still it was the only way to get the information we needed since it would have been a financial burden to travel to the USA or to Germany in such a short period of time. The same problem was even more increased in the case of the interviewee that answered via e-mail. Yet in both of the cases the participants were asked to offer additional information if some of the data was not clear and all of them agreed to do so. This was the best way to make sure that the information is as accurate as possible.

### 3.3 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with a pronounced ethical awareness. The rules and guidelines of the research follow the Swedish Research Council's recommendations.

Participants in this research were previously informed about the background, the purpose and the voluntariness of this study and they have given their consent to participate in the study. Finally it has been regarded important to do justice to participants in analyzing the data, namely that interpretations were really “grounded in the data”, and not taken out of context. (Flick, 2006, p. 41)

## 4. Historical Background

In this chapter we will present in chronological order the events of 1989, the history of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and more specifically the story of the Romanian department. This chapter is necessary to be able to understand and to contextualize the findings of the research.

### 4.1 Romania, 1989 - As It Happened

Nestor Ratesh (1991) found the perfect metaphor for describing the happenings of December 1989 in Romania: “The entangled Revolution”. Analysts, journalists, politicians and ordinary people have named the events as popular uprising, coup d'état, revolution or foreign agents' setup. After 20 years it is still a riddle, “entangled in a myriad of contradictions, obstacles, intrigues, lies, rivalries, ineptitude, and plain wrongdoing”. (Ratesh, 1991, p. xxiv)

In this next section we will present the timeline of the events, trying to combine the different aspects presented in the vast literature on 1989. Those episodes that are still problematic to unravel will be mentioned as such, giving some idea of the existing hypotheses.

The first day of the revolution was the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1989, when the congregation of a protestant pastor, László Tőkés, from the city of Timișoara decided not to let him get evicted. László Tőkés was known for his outspoken opposition against the communist regime and a defender of the Hungarian minority's rights in Romania. He was ordered to be transferred from Timișoara to the small village of Mineu.

Speaking to his congregation he asked them to help him not to get evicted. From the 10<sup>th</sup> of December until the 15<sup>th</sup> people set up a permanent vigil in front of his house. On the day of the eviction (15<sup>th</sup> of December) a large crowd gathered in front of the building. Among them, there were, of course, the members of the Securitate<sup>6</sup> observing

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<sup>6</sup> Department of State Security, the secret service of communist Romania.

the events from a distance. The priest came to the window and thanked the people for their support. While in the morning there were mainly Hungarian ethnics from the congregation, by the afternoon, the crowd changed:

Every half-hour I was called to the window.[...] The crowd demanded that I lead a service and preach to them. So I spoke briefly several times, in Hungarian and then in Romanian. 'We are one in Christ', I said. 'We speak different languages, but we have the same Bible and the same God. These are unique times...' (Tőkés, 1990, p. 11)

In the night a delegation came to talk to the priest: the mayor of Timișoara and several of his colleagues. The mayor asked Tőkés to disperse the crowd and in return he promised that the pastor won't be evicted. The people couldn't be convinced by this offer and remained to watch over the church during the night.

By the 16<sup>th</sup> of December, the crowd got bigger and was stretching from the pastor's home to the center of Timișoara. And now they were already chanting: "Freedom!", "Down with Ceaușescu!" The Securitate and the militia started to arrest and beat up people. As Tőkés recalls:

From our windows on the main road we could hear the noise of windows breaking and fire stating. We saw the water cannon being brought out. Civil and uniformed militia appeared at the far end of the side street, sweeping people ahead of them into the main road, but the crowds there forced them to retreat. At the time we heard no shooting. (Tőkés, 1990, p. 160)

During the night the pastor and his family were attacked and taken into custody by the security forces. As it turned out, they were taken to the village Mineu, but first to the Securitate headquarters. The last thing the pastor saw of Timișoara were the dead bodies in the courtyard of the Securitate:

People were standing in isolated groups; some were weeping. At the front of the building [Securitate headquarters], partly covered, was a row of dead bodies. Dead bodies were everywhere. (Tőkés, 1990, p. 167)

The 17<sup>th</sup> of December was to become the bloodiest day in the history of Timișoara. Troops formed by the army and the Securitate were patrolling the city, arresting and harassing the people who were out on the streets. The crowd marched towards the Communist Party headquarters and seized the building. But then special units armed with rifles attacked the crowd, severely beating up those that could be caught.

Meanwhile in Bucharest the ruling couple blamed the Minister of Defense, Vasile Milea, and the Minister of the Interior, Tudor Postelnicu, for not handling correctly the situation and not arming the troops with live ammunition<sup>7</sup>. Intense fighting took place in many of the important squares in Timișoara and in the working-class neighborhoods.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of December, the country's borders were closed. Ceaușescu, after leaving his wife, Elena in command, together with Manea Manescu - a close collaborator of the regime- went for a three-day visit to Iran. Meantime the killings were continuing in Timișoara, but the bodies were removed from the hospital mortuary in Timișoara and taken to Bucharest for incineration (Rady, 1992).

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of December the fights were still continuing, but on a lower scale because of the violent repression of the previous days.

The next day Ceaușescu returned from Teheran and took full charge of the government. He delivered a speech on Bucharest radio in which he called the demonstrators of Timișoara "hooligans" who tried to undermine the socialist state, "in close connection with reactionary, imperialist, irredentist, chauvinist circles, and foreign espionage services in various foreign countries." (Rady, 1992, p. 97)

By the 21<sup>st</sup> of December the news about Timișoara spread all over the country. Romanians took the streets of such cities as Cluj-Napoca, Tirgu Mures or Constanta. But the biggest step was Bucharest. Ceaușescu decided to have a major demonstration of power. Workers were gathered in front of the Central Committee Building to chant for Ceaușescu. The ruler started his usual speech about the glory of the socialist country, but at a certain point shouts were heard coming from the crowd: "Timișoara! Timișoara! Down with Ceaușescu!" The dictator perplexed by what was happening, interrupted his speech and looked amazed at his wife. After some minutes he ended his speech by promising a raise in wages and allowances. Within hours crowds were taking over the

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<sup>7</sup> The transcript of the discussion has been published by the national newspaper, *România Liberă*, on January 10, 1990.



streets of Bucharest, bookshops were broken into; the people were taking out the dictator's books and set them on fire. Throughout the night, battles were fought between the people, the army and the Securitate's units.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December the protesters gathered again in front of the Central Committee Building in Bucharest and they tried to force the entrance. The ruling couple briefly appeared on the balcony, but soon retreated. A helicopter landed on the roof of the building and the Ceaușescu departed from Bucharest. Over the next few hours speakers came out to address the crowd, denouncing Ceaușescu and talking about freedom and democracy. After breaking into the radio and television headquarters, events from Bucharest were reported throughout the country. That was the first time a name was mentioned several times: Ion Iliescu. A former party member himself, but demoted by Ceaușescu as a possible opponent, he was going to become the leader of the Council of the National Salvation Front that took over the power. From this day on, everything that was happening in Bucharest was filmed and transmitted all over the world. Thus the tele-revolution was born.

With the escape of the Ceaușescus a new type of fighting took place around the Ministry of National Defense, at the television station, at the Otopeni airport and in the Ghencea cemetery. At first they were called "securisti" [members of the secret police], "criminals" and eventually "terrorists". The week that followed December 22 was full of confused fighting, gunfire and killings.

In the meantime the Ceaușescu couple tried to escape to the city of Pitești, then to Târgoviște, but they were captured and held captive at Târgoviște garrison's military compound. They were put on trial on Christmas day (December 25) and after a trial of about three hours they were sentenced to death. The couple was taken out into the courtyard and executed by a firing squad. After this "a heavily edited video of the trial of the Ceaușescus was broadcast continuously on Romanian Television on the 26 December." (Rady, 1991, p. 119)

From then on, the National Front of Salvation (NSF) was in power. The governing body of this organization consisted of mainly former communists, which led to the critique that the NSF hijacked the revolution from the people. Although initially

stating that they are not interested in politics, the NSF decided to take part in the election, which they eventually won.

On May 20, 1990, the Romanians elected Ion Iliescu, the leader of NSF as president with 85 percent of the vote. The National Salvation Front, now a party, thus was given 66 percent of the seats in the Assembly of Deputies and 67 percent of those in the Senate (Verdery, Kligman, 1992, p. 122).

The only bloody revolution of Eastern Europe had ended with 1,104 deaths out of which 942 in the fighting that occurred after the NSF seized the power. The number of wounded was 3,352, out of which 2,245 after Ceaușescu's flee<sup>8</sup>.

The lack of evidence and information that still prevails today's Romania regarding such topics as the so-called "terrorists", the NSF, or the dead bodies that were never found, makes the process of understanding difficult. Yet many people feel that they have fought for their liberty and democracy. As one author has found:

[...] Many of those who were out in the streets speak of an unprecedented feeling of almost religious grace in the crowd, of purity and unity like they had never felt before.  
(Pusca, 2008, p. 127)

Even now there is no agreement on what really happened in December 1989. Some Romanian and Western researchers argue that it was only a coup, others, like Katherine Verdery and Gail Klingman, argue that for the overturn of the regime some form of popular uprising was necessary (Verdery, Klingman, 1992). On the other hand, Juliana Geran Pilon states that a coup "hijacked" the revolution (Geran Pilon, 1992). Romanians themselves question the idea of the revolution. In a 1996 survey it was found that only 50% of the respondents believed that the events can be called a revolution, while 30% thought it was a coup and 24% maintained that the events were orchestrated by foreigners. (Campeanu, 1996, p. 7)

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<sup>8</sup> <http://Timișoara.com/Timișoara/revoluti.htm>

## 4.2 History of Radio Free Europe

### *Free Media in Unfree Societies*<sup>9</sup>

Radio Free Europe, the “most influential politically oriented international radio station in history” (Puddington, 2000, p. ix) had as a main goal not only to inform the listeners from Soviet-dominated countries but also to bring about “the peaceful demise of the Communist system and the liberation of what were known as satellite nations.” (Puddington, 2000, p.ix)

The history of Radio Free Europe starts on May 1, 1951, in Munich, then Federal Republic of Germany. RFE was created and sustained in the beginning by the National Committee for a Free Europe (NCFE), an US anti-communist organization. The NCFE’s aims were to support refugees, publications about the developments in the communist world and the so-called “freedom radio”, Radio Free Europe.

The programs of RFE eventually were formed around five Communist countries- Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Poland and Hungary. The Radios were to fulfill the role of a surrogate, domestic radios<sup>10</sup> for their audiences, broadcasting to the countries of Eastern Europe in their respective languages. According to the RFE/RL Professional Code:

In contrast to the Voice of America, whose primary mission is to present U.S. policy and to project U.S. society and institutions, RFE/RL seeks to identify with the interests of its listeners, devoting particular attention to matters directly affecting the peoples of Eastern Europe and U.S.S.R.”<sup>11</sup>

Although later on in its history RFE struggled for a non-polemical tone, “during the early 1950s the station was committed to a muscular brand of political warfare.” (Puddington, 2000, p. 14)

The radios provided news, editorials and features about the events happening inside and outside the Eastern bloc, but they broadcasted cultural and musical shows as well. “RFE and RL also gave a voice to dissidents and opposition movements that, in the

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.rferl.org/info/about/176.html>

<sup>10</sup> The term “surrogate radio” refers here to the stated aim of RFE/RL to replace the role of uncensored national media.

<sup>11</sup> Board for International Broadcasting, The RFE/RL Professional Code, 1987.

late 1980s and early 1990s, would emerge as leaders of the new post-communist democracies.”<sup>12</sup>

For several years the radios had to deal with such issues as jamming, bombings or espionage carried out by the secret services of the communist regimes. Some internal issues affected the image of RFE/RL during the years, such as the involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) in the radios’ funding or the RFE’s Hungarian service that was accused of precipitating the 1956 Hungarian revolution (Puddington, 2000, p. 101).

In the end of the 1980’s with the glasnost of Mikhail Gorbachev more and more dissidents from Eastern Europe began to challenge the communist systems. The RFE/RL provided a space where these dissidents could reach their co-citizens. According to RFE/RL website, the leader of the Polish opposition, Lech Wałęsa, “[...] told an audience in 1989 that the role played by the Radios in Poland's struggle for freedom «cannot even be described. Would there be earth without the sun»?”<sup>13</sup>

During the events in 1989 RFE/RL’s broadcasts were “[...] nonpolemical, but hardly nonpartisan” (Puddington, 2000, p. 300). Eventually with the execution of Ceaușescu and the failed coup against Mikhail Gorbachev the huge Socialist empire ceased to exist. The radios stopped broadcasting in recent years to all the former satellite countries.

Today RFE/RL has its headquarters in Prague, The Czech Republic, and broadcasts to 21 countries in 28 languages, including Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Georgia or Kyrgyzstan.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.rferl.org/info/history/133.html>

<sup>13</sup> Idem.

### 4.3 History of Radio Free Europe Romanian Department

*There were programs where there was a feeling of good fellowship – like in the Romanian Actuality, in others people were arguing, more often or rarely, usually for trifles. There were many prejudices and intolerance, but many gestures of sympathy as well, a lot of mean intrigues, but friendly solidarity also, and everything was coloured by a fatal predisposition for gossip. (Ionescu, 2006, p. 147)*

Radio Europa Liberă, the RFE in Romanian, was one of the first five services to be founded in 1950. Although it was the second smallest department, Radio Europa Liberă was the most popular and had the biggest audience compared to the other language services. For instance Paul Lendvai's educated guess is that in 1978-1979 in Romania RFE audience made up 55% of the adult population in contrast with Bulgaria (32%), Czechoslovakia (35%), Hungary (49%) or Poland (50%) (Lendvai, 1981, p.158). Both Liviu Tofan and Ioana Măgura-Bernard<sup>14</sup> explain these data with the professionalism and the search for objectivity of the then director of the service, Noel Bernard: "The first objective of Noel was, thus, objectivity. Then he was preoccupied about whether our programs responded the needs of a large number of categories of listeners." (Măgura-Bernard, 2007, p. 17)

Ross Johnson mentioned as a reason for the popularity of Radio Europa Liberă "the atomization of Romanian society and the lack of alternative outside media under Ceaușescu."<sup>15</sup>

Due to the lack of reliable information in the communist regime of Ceaușescu, the vital element of the Romanian department was the news service. Yet another important component of the radio was the political program. Its format had changed over the years. Then another show, "Actualitatea Românească" [Romanian Actuality] was introduced by Preda Bunescu. Initially an only fifteen minutes show, later it was taken over by Emil Georgescu and it was transformed into a self-standing broadcast of 35 minutes (Măgura-Bernard, 2007).

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<sup>14</sup> Interview Ioana Măgura-Bernard, 01.05.10; Interview Liviu Tofan, 15.05.10

<sup>15</sup> Interview A. Ross Johnson, 15.05.10

In December 1989 “Actualitatea Românească” was a talk-show moderated by Neculai Constantin Munteanu and Emil Hurezeanu.. The talk-show dealt with political issues, it presented reports and opinion pieces. Correspondents were reporting from Europe and North America. The hosts discussed about current issues regarding Romania and the Ceaușescu regime. During the upheavals of December 1989 the show was longer than usual, around 55-60 minutes long.

Going further there were also shows directed towards the Romanian youth, shows dealing with pop music which was at that time prohibited by the communist regime.

The cultural programs occupied a very important position in the broadcasts of Radio Europa Liberă, the most famous being Monica Lovinescu’s *Teze si antiteze la Paris* [Theses and Antitheses at Paris] and Virgil Ierunca’s *Povestea vorbei* [The Story of the Word].

The Romanian department of RFE/RL stopped broadcasting in 2008.

## **5. Talking about a Revolution**

*Scripts even in the hands of unpractised players can come to life because life itself is a dramatically enacted thing. All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn’t are not easy to specify. (Goffman, 1990, p. 78)*

Before beginning the analysis of the shows it is important to emphasize that journalistic rules of balance and bias do not apply to opinion pieces. By acknowledging this we also have to state that opinion pieces are still equally crucial in the overall framing of the events which caused the fall of communism and thus relevant for our purposes.

The analysis is divided into two major parts: the first one will deal with shows aired before the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1989, the day when the Ceaușescu couple fled; while the other will focus on the broadcasts aired after this date until the 31st. The reasoning behind this division is the different themes and editorial policies that were leading the

shows before and after this date. Although there will be a holistic approach used in interpreting the broadcasts, it was important to make this demarcation due to the major changes that occurred on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1989.

For the analysis we have used the method of dramaturgical analysis based on Goffman's (1990) theoretical work.

In Goffman's account any social intercourse is made just as a scene is put together, "[...] by the exchange of dramatically inflated actions, counteractions, and terminating replies" (Goffman, 1990, p. 78). He uses terms as *performance*, *actors*, *front* and *backstage*, *role*, *regions* and *regional behavior* to describe what goes on in the social world. He also discusses such topics as falsehood or truth of a performance or how much society influences the role actors take up. His framework proves to be very useful in depicting the social interactions in the media. All of his observations and terms can be channeled towards the performances that take place in the world of the media.

For doing so we have used a model (Figure 1.) of Jarlbro, Jönsson & Windahl (1992), which is drawn from Goffman's main ideas:

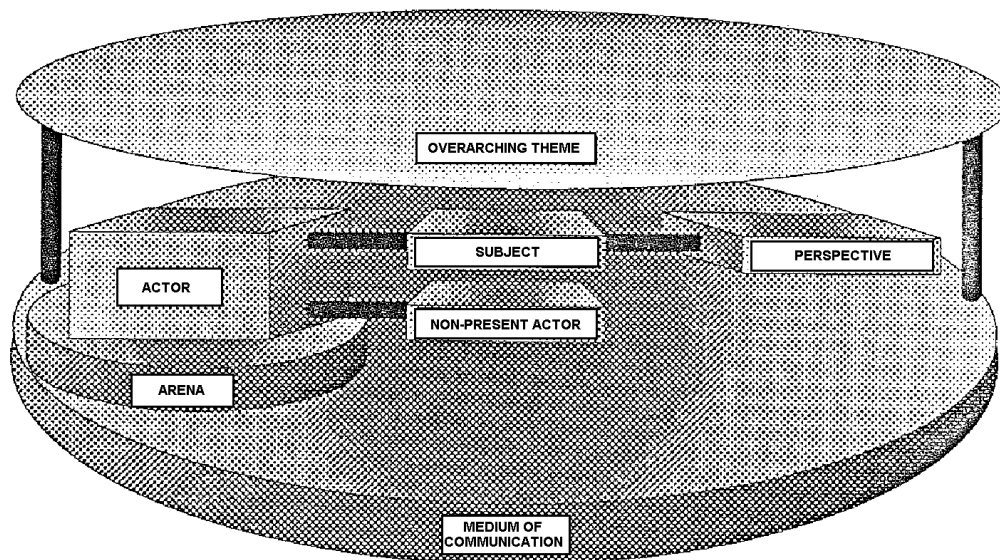


Figure 1. Model of dramaturgical analysis.

In this model we can talk about a stage representation of the mass-media, where the so-called stage is the medium of communication. In our case this is the radio. Then on this medium there is the arena, or the talk-show we are analyzing. In this arena several actors appear, people who are interviewed or who are giving information about a specific topic. Then there are the other types of actors, actors who are not present, but who are talked about. On this stage there are several subjects discussed in different perspectives. And then there is an overarching theme that covers this specific scene.

The analysis took place in three interrelated phases. In the first phase we tried to become as familiar as possible with the shows, listening and reading the transcripts of the shows from the website. Although the transcripts were of great help, it was very important to listen to the shows to capture the tone, the word games or the feelings behind what was said. All shows have been listened to twice. During this phase general themes and motifs were identified.

The next step was to find the most relevant issues, the most important actors and the themes that proved to be overarching.

The final component of the analysis was to corroborate the findings with the information gathered from the interviews. It was essential to give an extra insight to the shows. The different views that were present in the interviews gave a new opportunity to rethink the previous findings.

Although the description of the process might show a linear and clean approach, it was actually an interaction that was going back and forth between the author, the shows and the interviewees. We frequently returned to the texts, to earlier phases and to the existing literature for deciding what the best approach would be.



## 5.1 Findings

### 5.1.1 “There is a start in every ending” – Reporting about Timișoara

With the 18<sup>th</sup> of December, RFE/RL started to broadcast its shows about the upheavals in Timișoara.

Using the before mentioned model we can find two major thematic fields that were overarching during this period: the events of Timișoara and the “supportive movements”-we will call by this name those demonstrations that were held in the Western countries in support of the revolution. The journalists were discussing and dealing with these two major themes and in the following sections we will see how these topics were present on the stage of the show.

The leaders of the talk-show were the moderators, Neculai Constantin Munteanu and Emil Hurezeanu., but other journalists also made an appearance, such as Șerban Orescu, Nicolae Stroescu-Stînișoară, Nestor Ratesh, William Totok and Mircea Carp. They were regular contributors to this show and they became renowned and enjoyed a long-run fame during and after the existence of the Romanian language service of RFE.

In the following we will discuss the main present and non-present actors and the perspectives by which the story was being told.

#### **The actors**

On the stage of the show there were several actors appearing, some of them had only an episodic debut while others can be considered regular performers.

Out of the regular performers during those days we can name the journalist Șerban Orescu as being the most “visible”. Although sometimes performing his regular role of journalist, he was also asked to comment on the happenings of Timișoara. This is a specific case when a ‘story-teller’ becomes an actor himself on the stage of the show.

Șerban Orescu’s commentaries were presented as some sort of conclusions to what has been stated in the discussions before. In the show of the 18<sup>th</sup> of December he

states: “I would like to say that what has happened in Timișoara proves two things: firstly the convergence of interests between Romanians and Hungarians and secondly that Romania today is a barrel of gunpowder.” Similarly in the show of the 19<sup>th</sup> of December Orescu emphasises that the “Romanian people, indifferently from the ethnical background of its citizens, has proven one more time at Timișoara, just as it proved it two years ago at Brașov, that it is united in the opposition against the Ceaușescu regime”. (Special Edition, 19.12.1989)

It seems that Orescu here takes up the role of explaining and giving a frame to what has happened. Although it might be his own views on the events, indirectly it represents the views of RFE/RL as well.

Another important actor was Nicolae Stroescu-Stînișoară, the director of the service in that period. He is invited, just as Orescu, to present his opinions on the subject of matter here. His editorial pieces reflect the same position taken up by Orescu: “[...] his [Ceaușescu’s] speech didn’t demonstrate anything else to what we have known before: the total alienation from reality of the head of the Romanian Communist Party, caught in the self-manufactured armor of self-lie and of others’, of some ideological stencils long incinerated by other communist parties from Eastern Europe and of the obsession of power” (Special Edition I, 21.12.1989). The same ideas come up in the interview conducted by Emil Hurezeanu and in which Nicolae Stroescu-Stînișoară is asked to state a view on the role of youth in the protests, the Romanian society and the leader of the country.

On the other side there were those supporting actors that appeared in some of the shows and gave certain types of information. The most important supporting actors in these first days of the revolution were those people who took part in the events and phoned in to RFE/RL. From the 18<sup>th</sup> on we can speak about some initial sort of collaborative journalism, where people reported and contributed to the news story by phoning in and giving details and views on what had been said in the mainstream media.

One witness even says that he listened to news from Austria and from Germany and “[...] it is very important to make a difference. Actually there were two main events, two big demonstrations.” (Timișoara in Revolution, 18.12.1989) Then he goes on and informs the audience of what he had seen in Timișoara the last couple of days.

Another witness recounts the days during which the army was shooting the people and yet another person calls the events a “pogrom” (Special Edition II, 21.12.1989). In the last show of the 21<sup>st</sup> of December an eye witness speaks about how frightened the people in the streets were. This last account is especially emotional and sensitive.

### **The non-present actors**

There were several actors talked about in these shows and for our purposes, these actors which were not present are of major importance. The following non-present actors could be found on this stage: the president, Nicolae Ceaușescu, “the Romanian people”, “the West” and the Army. Quotations marks were used in the two cases for different reasons: the first one was used as such by the RFE journalists when talking about the people demonstrating in Timișoara and other cities of Romania. The second one is used as a general term to classify actors (dissidents, state men, journalists) outside the Iron Curtain who played a role in the talk-show.

### **Nicolae Ceaușescu**

One of the leading non-present actors was, of course, the communist president of Romania. From the 18th till the end of the year the RFE talk-shows draw a rather dichotomized portrayal of him and his family. Ceaușescu’s brutality against his own people is a topic of many broadcasts, and indeed, it certainly demands condemnation. Yet it is important to see how the RFE presented the man who once obtained the most favored nation status for his country.

The frames utilized to present a possible overthrow of the communist regime involved producing the image of the ‘enemy’. As Sam Keen states in Kellner (1992), when it comes to political communication it is interesting to see how “In the beginning, we create the enemy. Before the weapon comes the image.” (Kellner, 1992, p. 62)

According to the journalists Nicolae Ceaușescu was a “tyrannosaur” who didn’t see the needs of his people and that “[...] the image of the Ceaușescu regime appears once more as an incompatible image with today’s Europe.”(Timișoara in Revolution, 18.12.1989)

The fact that the ruler left for Teheran during the upheavals in Timișoara seems to be a hot topic for the journalists. But Emil Hurezeanu thinks that this is not something unusual for the dictator since “He [referring to Ceaușescu] goes out to the public squares or makes contact with the so-called working people who are usually the securisti [members of the secret police] who were recruited hastily in the factories, when he feels – at least psychologically– threatened.” (Timișoara in Revolution, 18.12.1989) In a sequent show, the visit to Iran is again in the focus. And Emil Hurezeanu comments once more that while on “every continent” there are demonstrations against the repressions in Timișoara, Ceaușescu, “the tyrant”, is “taking a walk in Iran” (Special Edition, 19.12.1989). And he adds:

This is the leader of Romania, a person who was destined by history to make pilgrimages to the grave of a bloody ayatollah [...] while a whole country, a whole nation have to face an hour of cruel persecution, of terrible reality. (Special Edition, 19.12.1989)

Another commentator further comments that while Ceaușescu ordered the repression and

“[...] at Timișoara people are demonstrating, there are shootings, arrests, young people, women, children, and men are being killed, the Romanian ruler is putting flowers on the tomb of the one of the most cruel state leaders in the modern epoch, the ayatollah Khomeini.” (Timișoara and the Responsibility of the Ceaușescu Regime, 20.12.1989)

Neculai Constantin Munteanu in reference to the visit to Teheran concludes: “The apprentice wizard is rendering homage to his master.”(Timișoara and the Responsibility of the Ceaușescu Regime, 20.12.1989)

Another important moment in portraying Ceaușescu was after his speech on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 1989. The communist leader gave a speech on the Romanian Television in which he talked about the events of Timișoara. He spoke about an “interference of

foreign forces in Romania's internal affairs” and an “external aggression on Romania's sovereignty”. The next day the journalists gave their reflections on the speech.

Nicolae Stroești-Stănișoară, the director of the service, uses quite strong terms when he calls the speech not a chain of contradictions, but “an amorphous mass of contradictions”. In their accounts Ceaușescu seems to be lost in “an auto manufactured armor of lie” (Special Edition I, 21.12.1989), he doesn't know what actually happened or he lies – “a man who broke the record in lying” – about the events from Timișoara. The journalist uses biting irony and calls the president “the supreme leader” who “didn't bother to say a word about the victims of the repressions from Timișoara” (Special Edition I, 21.12.1989).

In the same tone Șerban Orescu blames Ceaușescu for the economic failure of the country. The fact that Ceaușescu called the demonstrating people “hooligans”, is a sign of Stalinism in Orescu's reading and in his opinion Ceaușescu's statements can give no other choice but direct actions against the system.

Thus we can discover another example of the Cold War discourse's dichotomy. Nicolae Ceaușescu was portrayed as a villain, a “tyrant who suppressed the democratic wishes of his people” (Special Edition II, 21.12.1989). A contributor goes as far as calling him a leader that has “always hated his own people” (Special Edition III, 21.12.1989) and therefore he must be “judged” by the people.

## **The West**

In each of the shows there was a considerable amount of information about how the Western world –or some parts of it- was reacting to the events in Romania. The editors were constantly reminding and reassuring the listeners that ‘the world’ cares about the happenings and repressions in Timișoara. We can observe here a representation of the so-called bandwagon effect: people often do or believe things because many other people do or believe the same things. By telling audiences that “the West” is strongly supporting their movement, those people who weren't participating in the struggle might have been convinced to support the movement.

Correspondents were reporting from Munchen, New York, Budapest, Paris, Rome and messages were sent in and broadcasted from as far as Australia. They were providing information not only about protests of solidarity, but also about politicians or statesmen condemning the events of Timișoara.

Famous dissidents' or popular figures' thoughts were broadcasted during those days. Such notables could be heard as the former sovereign of Romania, King Michael saying that: "Weapons cannot destroy the souls, they cannot destroy ideals. Don't provoke them, be peaceful, but dignified! Go with God ahead!" (Timișoara in Revolution, 18.12.1989)

Another famous figure's, Eugène Ionesco's,<sup>16</sup> message was aired on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December: "[...] It's not possible that Gorbachev's heart won't melt and that America's heart won't warm and of the heart of the statesmen of Europe. Live long...I'm with you!"

The message that gets through these reports is that Romanians have the support of the world outside the Iron Curtain (and even inside of it). We can find here another representation of the Cold War opposition between the "free" and the dictatorial regimes. By presenting the Western countries as states that pay attention and give importance to what is happening in Romania, the journalists are trying to build up an inner resistance against the regime.

## **The Romanian People**

"The people of Timișoara went on the streets to remind the Romanians and the public opinion that there is need in Romania too for the radical changes that happened in the other communist countries." (Timișoara in Revolution, 18.12.1989) This was the first phrase that opened the series of shows dealing with the events of Timișoara. There are several questions that come up in connection with this topic, mainly: Why were the people on the streets? What did the people actually want? Who were the "Romanian people"?

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<sup>16</sup> Romanian playwright and dramatist, living in France.

When it comes to who the people were and what they wanted another author, Peter Siani-Davies (2005) identifies three organizational forms:

The first demonstrators were almost entirely drawn from the ranks of his [László Tőkés'] congregation. Secondly, a number of observers have drawn parallels between the behavior of the protesters on the streets of Timișoara and elsewhere, and that of a soccer crowd, noting that, barring the slogans shouted, their conduct was virtually identical. [...] and in Timișoara, on November 15, 1989, in a virtual dress rehearsal for the revolution, Romania's victory over Denmark in the World Cup qualifying competition brought jubilant supporters flooding onto the streets of the city chanting slogans such as "Down with Ceaușescu".[...] The last and most important organizational forum was the factory. [...] Thus, with some irony, it can be said that Ceaușescu was toppled by mass protests that stemmed from an organizational form, the factory, that communism had elevated to be both the actual and also the mythical heart of the state." (Siani-Davies, 2005, p. 44)

It is interesting to note that the journalists are emphasizing that there were accounts of similar demonstrations in other cities in Romania, not only in Timișoara, right from the second day of protests (naming Arad as one of those cities).

In the special edition from the 19<sup>th</sup> of December Emil Hurezeanu notes that: "The demonstrations, and unfortunately, it seems that the serious incidents are also continuing in Timișoara, but in other cities of the country as well. The whole Romania is under a state of general alarm, [it is] extremely serious and troubling." (Special Edition, 19.12.1989)

It is also important to note that the journalists refer sometimes to the demonstrators with the general term of Romanians and one journalist also says that "There is not only the opposition of those who have the honor [sic!] to be under house arrest, but we can say, there is the [opposition] of the huge majority of the Romanian people." (Special Edition, 19.12.1989)

And eventually Șerban Orescu draws the conclusion: "But the Romanians, as well, it seems, have been driven to extremity. Because there is a factor that the Ceausescus only now learn to take into consideration: the Romanian people." (Timișoara and the Responsibility of the Ceaușescu Regime, 20.12.1989)

This idea comes up also in the special show of the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1989 when one of the journalists comments: “What we have in Romania is a grass roots revolution, we have here an alliance between the social classes.”(Round Table, 31.12.1989)

An interesting aspect is that in a show from the 19<sup>th</sup> of December a letter sent from the group called Solidarity, from Bucharest is read. The aim of the letter is to convince the Romanian people that they need to be united:

We address these lines to those undecided who continue to believe that we can't do anything here that we, the Romanians are cowards. Or to those who are still questioning what we can do. Are we, Romanians, truly cowards? Definitely not!

Although undeniably a huge number of people took part in the protests, it is still important to emphasize, as Peter Siani-Davies does, that:

[...] according to the opinion poll [...], less than a quarter of the population aged seventeen or over actually took part in some action in support of the revolution, defined at its widest extent. Although this still means around four million people did participate, the inescapable conclusion is that for most Romanians the revolution was essentially a passive event.” (Siani-Davies, 2005, p. 101)

The other major question in connection to this major actor is: What did the people want? And today there is still a heated debate on whether the people were fighting for democracy or for a more humane communism. Because as Verdery and Kligman (1992) argue:

The December events were first and foremost an anti-Ceaușescu revolution. Being anti-Ceaușescu may have meant being anti-communist for some (hence the slogan “Down with communism!”) but not necessarily for everyone. Although the Front immediately declared the end of Communist rule, its leadership remained full of reform Communists. Thus, when it later announced its candidacy for the May elections, many Romanians felt betrayed and outraged. The Front's reversal signified to them a return to the old pattern of lies and suggested that Communists were trying to “steal” the revolution. With this, public action hitherto rooted in anti-Ceaușescu sentiment was transformed into anti-Communist activism.” (Verdery, Kligman, 1992, p. 126)



One of the main proofs of what the people were fighting for were the slogans chanted first on the streets of Timișoara and then in other cities, including the capital, Bucharest. According to one actor (an eyewitness interviewed over the phone) people were shouting “Down with Ceaușescu! Down with the dictator! Freedom, freedom! Romanians are united people! Romanians are united people!” (Timișoara in Revolution, 18.12.1989)

The same actor tells that

“[...] the mass of people before reaching to confrontation, the mass of demonstrators shouted: Without violence, without violence! Seeing the soldiers that were waiting for them, the mass was shouting: We are the people! Who are you defending? We are the people! Who are you defending? And then another slogan that was chanted was: Today in Timișoara, tomorrow in the whole country!

Then another eyewitness tells that on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December people were “chanting slogans, they were asking for food, they were asking for freedom, they were asking for what they hear everyday in the radio, but they are nothing but huge lies.”( Timișoara and the Responsibility of the Ceaușescu Regime, 20.12.1989)

Then on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December, Neculai Constantin Munteanu comments on the happenings and says ironically that he wants to remind

[...] the most beloved son of the people who turned out to be so cruel to his people that the slogans chanted at Timișoara were: «Down with Ceaușescu! We want freedom! Workers, come with us! Romanians, come with us! Don’t be scared, the Army might be with us! We want bread! We want to become free! Today in Timișoara, tomorrow in the whole country! » and they sang «Wake up, Romanian! [At that time it was the unofficial Romanian anthem] » (Special Edition I, 21.12.1989)

On the same day, Șerban Orescu affirms that

The immediate resignation of Nicolae Ceaușescu and to call to account those who are responsible for the disaster of the country and crimes against humanity, this is what the Romanian people is asking for in this moment, after the massacre of Timișoara, the blooming city transformed by Ceaușescu’s people into the new Beirut. (Special Edition I, 21.12.1989)

In the last show of the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1989, this topic comes up again and the journalists comment:

It is clear. The revolution is, it was lead against the Ceașescu, against the Securitate, but I would name this revolution essentially an anti-communist revolution and I would compare it to the great Hungarian revolution of 1956. Because even if the Communist Party wasn't directly connected, the emanations of the Ceașescu and of the Securitate, it was obvious, isn't it so, were constituting clearly the objective of the revolutionary actions. (Round Table, 31.12.1989)

In this context it is relevant to examine the difference of meaning in the usage of the word “democracy” in the communist and non-communist regimes. Wasburn (2000) talks about how redefining concepts can alter reality: “[...] «democracy» consistently was defined in terms of the presence of free elections. This is an understanding of the concept that is common in the United States where voting is viewed as the key mechanism of consensus (Lipset, 1981, p. 12) [...] While on Radio Havana Cuba [...] the word democracy consistently was used in a broader context to include opposition to imperialism and support for revolution.”(Wasburn, 2000, p.87)

It is thus questionable whether people were really out on the streets to fight for the end of the communism as one commentator said when giving a comment on Ceașescu's televised speech: “We can believe that Romanians had enough. Even if they didn't show it explicitly in Timișoara, [they had enough] of socialism as well.” (Special Edition I, 21.12.1989)

It is more likely – as most of the historical accounts suggest – that people were fighting for more humane conditions, basic needs and consequently, against the Ceușescu ruling. But it is not so certain, as some journalists put it, that they were fighting for democracy and the end of the communist regime.

## The Army

The army appears here as a major non-present actor, but the involvement (or non-involvement) of the Romanian Army is an overarching theme in the shows during the whole period of the Revolution.

The first reference to the army was in the testimony of an eyewitness from Timișoara on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 1989. He tells the story of the protests and the way the army tried to stop the demonstration. In his account the eyewitness frequently interchanges the terms “the army”, “the Securitate”, “the militia”:

Then the army came, the Securitate, with bayonets, but I didn't see them hitting the people with the bayonets. Between two soldiers there was always a militia man, I mean in militia uniform with those bayonets, those shovel sticks. And those were hitting. They were hitting everyone, old people, children, everybody who was running was hit. (Timișoara in Revolution, 18.12.1989)

In a show from the 20<sup>th</sup> of December, another eyewitness recalls the events from the 17<sup>th</sup> when the army

[...] became aggressive. They started [...] attacking the people with the bayonets and the rifle butts. [...] It was a revolutionary atmosphere like in our history books. The army stopped the column; they asked them to retreat, because if they wouldn't retreat, they will have to shoot. Nobody believed them. They were shouting: How can you shoot the people? The army is for the enemy!” [...] From a second to another the rifles and the machine guns started to rattle. In a few seconds I've seen at least 30-40 wounded and dead people.” (Timișoara and the Responsibility of the Ceaușescu Regime, 20.12.1989)

Some more dramatic accounts also tell about frightened people who were shouting: “And they said: be ware, be ware because the army will kill you too! This is not our army. It is impossible that this is the army of our people, this is not our army!” (Special Edition III, 21.12.1989)

During this period a high number of messages were sent to RFE, mainly from Western Europe at the beginning and in the show of the 20<sup>th</sup> of December two messages

were presented. These are extremely important when we discuss the topic of the army. One was coming from an Association of Former Romanian Political Prisoners from Paris and the other one from a group of German writers, natives of Romania. Both of the messages have the same aim:

To the army, to the Militia, to the Securitate! You are shooting the people. Why are you still in the service of this murderer and his family? You are also part of this nation and your obligation is to defend the nation not the criminal.” (Timișoara and the Responsibility of the Ceaușescu Regime, 20.12.1989)

These types of messages are aired during the next days as well.

Then from the 21<sup>st</sup> of December some other types of news seem to surface which state that “[...] the Romanian Army didn’t take part in the action against the demonstrators” (Special Edition I, 21.12.1989), according to the military attaché from Budapest. The same attaché says that the Securitate troops have the same uniforms as the Romanian Army.

Emil Hurezeanu also comments that there are numerous accounts in which soldiers fraternized with the protesters. He is the one who reads on air the law by which the army is organized and which states that the army has a responsibility towards the future of the nation. Then in a discussion between the two journalists, Emil Hurezeanu and Neculai Constantin Munteanu, they talk about the history of military intervention in Eastern Europe. They reach the conclusion that what was happening in Timișoara (“the massacre”) cannot be compared to any other intervention before in any of the countries of the communist bloc (Special Edition I, 21.12.1989).

It is thus obvious that there was a strong pressure put on the Army not to fight against the demonstrators and to oppose the orders: “Because the refusal of executing a criminal command at Timișoara, for which soldiers and officers were, apparently, executed, it becomes a patriotic act, a supreme one, with the same dimensions of martyrdom as the sacrifice of the demonstrators.” (Special Edition I, 21.12.1989)

Referring to this issue Ross Johnson comments:

RFE directed special programs to the Romanian military and security forces, reminding them of their professional duty not to turn their weapons against civilians and noting the

positive examples of other armies during the peaceful revolutions that had unfolded earlier that year in the region. This was a case of purposeful, focused political programming. The information was objective and balanced, but it was selected and broadcast for a specific purpose in specific circumstances. While there is no way to judge the full impact, RFE received reports of soldiers listening to these broadcasts, and many Romanians credit RFE with helping to avert even more violent reactions from the police and military.<sup>17</sup>

Robert Gillette makes the same point:

Another effect, I'm sure, I know now, that the Army was listening and probably took to heart lessons of their Warsaw pact colleagues: Stay in the barracks! Do the right thing! Preserve your status as a respected, national institution in this revolution.<sup>18</sup>

Here we have a strong proof of how the media tries to influence the course of events in time of crisis, and not only. The relationship between the army and the Securitate troops is going to be discussed in the second part of the analysis because, as mentioned before, there too the army was one of the most important actors, but now in a new context.

## **The perspectives**

It is relevant to discuss about the perspectives used in reporting about state of affairs and even more when it comes to such events as the Romanian revolution because we need to recognize that "[...] by obscuring recognition that news accounts inherently embody some perspective that supports political interests, the professional ideology of Western media organizations denies that they in fact have an identifiable perspective." (Wasburn, 1992, p. 48)

Philo Wasburn argues that there is an undeniable congruency between the ideology of media organizations and the perspective of their governments. Therefore

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<sup>17</sup> Interview Ross Johnson, 15.05.10. The selected passage will appear in a forthcoming book edited by Vladimir Tismaneanu: "No One is Afraid to Talk to Us Anymore"; Radio Free Europe in 1989 Revised Paper for the Woodrow Wilson Center 1989 Conference Version: March 17, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Interview Robert Gillette, 12.06.10

[...] Western governments tend not to censor, not because they are inhibited by cultural norms or by the legal provisions of charters from interfering in the affairs of organizations that broadcast the «truth» to the world, but because they seldom have any real need to do so. (Wasburn, 1992, p. 48)

In the following we will try to see what kinds of perspectives were being used on the stage of the show in these first couple of days.

The actors we have talked about were also presented in different ways, depending on the intentions and the context of the discussions. In the shows between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 22<sup>nd</sup> we could differentiate between juridical, political, social and human rights perspective.

During these first days of reporting about Timișoara the predominant perspective was the human rights and the political perspective. The events were presented in the light of how the regime was denying important human rights from the Romanian people, such as the right to life, to security or the right to freedom of opinion and of expression (references were made in the shows from the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 1989).

Although human rights issues are part of more general social issues, in this situation we have chosen to put them in two different groups of perspectives. The reasoning behind this choice is that the human rights perspective was so strong during these days that other social issues – although present – were outweighed by the former.

A social perspective was nonetheless present and it came through in many of the interventions that Romanians have to struggle with poverty, the banning of religion or that they can't enjoy adequate standards of living (Timișoara and the Responsibility of the Ceaușescu Regime, 20.12.1989).

The political perspective was dominant all through the discussions about the communist regime and here we can find elements of the Cold War discourse, the so-called polarity built up by the Iron Curtain.

The juridical perspective was important during the discussions about the Hungarians struggle for minority rights and the role of the army in the repressions (in the shows of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> of December). The journalists and some of the actors were emphasizing the relevance of the army also in connection with the country's laws.

### 5.1.2 “The first free report from a free Romania for a radio station that is called Free Europe”- Reporting from a liberated country

After the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1989 “[...] the whole editorial policies were changed because of the high speed of the processes. We started broadcasting live, without scripts.”<sup>19</sup> With the escape of the ruling couple, the demonstrators took over the TV and the radio stations and the events took an unexpected turn.

Using the stage model, as in the previous part, we can detect one major thematic field that is overarching and namely: the future of the country. From the 22<sup>nd</sup> until the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1989 the journalists, the interviewed experts, the people sending in messages are all dealing with the future of Romania. There are different issues connected to this overarching theme such as the political gap after the escape of the ruling couple, the economical situation of the country or the help and assistance that is needed in the country. Yet there is one more theme that appears several times which is connected to the idea of the future. This theme stands out because of the significance assigned to it and its peculiarity: religion.

With the collapse of the communist regime that forbid religious practices, more and more people (including the journalists) were mentioning the name of God, the celebration of Christmas and a religious service was broadcasted on air on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December.

On the show of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December Nicolae Stroescu-Stînișoară says:

Look! Romania, on which he [referring to Ceaușescu] wanted to put a shroud of radical and militant atheism, in the moment that it regains its free breath, it pronounces the name of God at Bucharest, at Radio Bucharest, which is no longer the tyrant's. (The Fall of Ceaușescu Commented by the Editors of Radio Europa Liberă, 22.12.1989)

Adding to these, when talking about the forthcoming changes the journalists also recommend – besides the reform of the economical and educational system – establishing legal religious holidays.

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<sup>19</sup> Interview Liviu Tofan, 15.05.2010

Hence religion becomes a major theme in the shows. Although it stands out from the other political and social issues discussed it is still considered part of the overarching idea of the future: how life will change for the Romanians, what things will change, what are the novelties that have to be dealt with. One development was the freedom of practicing religion.

It is interesting to note here that although the decision to place the Ceaușescu couple on trial “was made on the evening of December 24” (Siani-Davies, 2005, p.136) and the execution actually took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December, from the 22<sup>nd</sup> on the journalists were already talking about the end of the regime, about “the day of the victory”, “the fall of the bloody hangman” (The Fall of Ceaușescu Commented by the Editors of Radio Europa Libera, 22.12.1989) and the future of Romania.

In the next section we will thus discuss about the most important actors on the stage as well as about the relevance of the non-present actors when it comes to the frame of events. Finally we will present the perspectives which are used to introduce the events after the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1989.

## **The actors**

In comparison to the editions before the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December, we cannot say that any specific journalist became an important actor on the stage of the show. And another different feature was that there was a much bigger number of journalists present on the show. This can be explained by the live coverage that the radio started to broadcast in order to keep up with the speed of the events. To name some of the journalists who were presenting the story of the revolution: N.C. Munteanu, Șerban Orescu, Gelu Ionescu, Mircea Carp, Emil Hurezeanu, Luiza Cunea or Max Bănuș. They were all contributing one way or another to what was said on the radio, by presenting the latest information or commenting on what has happened.

But while none of the journalists became major actors, there were several supporting actors that made a relevant input to the play. Most of these were people interviewed by RFE/RL journalists in connection to the events in Romania. We will



discuss about three of these supporting actors. Although there were several participants in these shows, these three actors were selected because of the importance given to them by the editors of the show and because of their specific backgrounds. We will discuss about Liviu Cangeopol, a dissident writer living in the USA, Sergiu Verona, an expert on soviet politics from Johns Hopkins University and the professor Horia Stoica. Obviously their opinions and expertise was relevant enough to enrich the content of the shows. To present a diverse selection of voices was one of the demands in RFE/RL's Professional Code as well: "By contrast with official media, RFE/RL provides full and honest information, a *broader* [italics added] perspective, and a lively forum for a diversity of views."<sup>20</sup>

When it comes to the first two actors they were asked about their views on what had happened in Romania and what was going to be the future of this country. Both of them discuss about the situation as if it was something certain that Ceaușescu won't regain his power. Verona, as an answer to the question "Is there any chance that the forces of the Securitate that are opposing a change will succeed?", says:

Practically, no. And no because of a number of reasons. Firstly, in an objective way. The outbreak against the Ceaușescu regime that had taken place was a national phenomenon, a large, all-inclusive phenomenon. [...] And I doubt that these forces will stay loyal to Ceaușescu. And thirdly, clearly, Ceaușescu is not in power in these moments. To reinstate him by force, in these conditions, I don't think it would be neither possible nor realistic. Because this could lead to a civil war. (Special Morning Studio, 23.12.1989)

While Cangeopol is asked about the role of the intellectuals in the future -as he was a writer- Verona is questioned about the role of the "former" Communists in the political life of the country.

Both interviewees add a different coloring to the shows, given their outsider position and the relevance of their interpretations. By talking about the change and the future without Ceaușescu with experts and intellectuals from the USA, it is somewhat implied that the listeners can take their opinions as something taken for granted.

The last actor here was not interviewed but he sent in a message and by this message he entered the stage of the show. Mircea Stoica, university professor of law, and

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<sup>20</sup> Board for International Broadcasting, The RFE/RL Professional Code, 1987.

leader of the group named “Frontul Eliberării Naționale” [Front of the National Liberation] calls Ceaușescu “the little genial Fuhrer” of whose “imbecile slogans we have escaped forever”. Again, this was happening in a show on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 1989.

He also believes that the leader should not abscond from “the judgment of the people”:

“The whole clan [...] should be judged with severity by a court of the people which, I propose, should be constituted urgently.” (The Second Day of Freedom, 23.12.1989)

As stated before there were several more participants due to the large number of messages broadcasted those days. By presenting these three performers we tried to give a glance on the role of supporting actors. Yet it is essential to note that although the goal was to present a diversity of voices on the broadcasts – as it was suggested in the professional code also– these actors were all presenting the same stance, and namely an anti-Ceaușescu standpoint.

### **The non-present actors**

As in the first part of the analysis, we can talk about several actors that were talked about in the shows from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December on. The following non-present actors could be found on this stage: “the terrorists”, the army, the new provisional government and Radio Bucharest<sup>21</sup>.

It is quite difficult to define what “terrorist” meant during the events of 1989 and in the shows of RFE/RL and Radio Bucharest. Some were saying that they were part of special and “well-equipped elite” (Siani-Davies, 2005, p. 149), as a division of the Securitate. Others yet were talking about Arab, Palestinian or Israeli troops that were protecting the communist regime. They “[...] were few in number and according to Iliescu, they were practically indivisible from the general population. It is therefore hardly surprising that they have proved to be invisible.” (Siani-Davies, 2005, p. 149) We will deal with this issue later on in this section.

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<sup>21</sup> Throughout this paper we will use the denomination of Radio Bucharest as it is used in the shows of RFE. The official name of the radio station was Radio Romania.

The new provisional government was made of the Council of the National Salvation Front, a body made of those who got hold of power after the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1989.

It might seem odd to add Radio Bucharest here as a talked about actor and not as a source. But due to the attention given to its broadcasts, the polemics surrounding its shows and the relationship between these initially adversary media institutions, we have decided to add the radio to the group of non-present actors.

### **“The terrorists” and the Army**

The army – one of the major non-present actors in the first couple of shows – has a major role in the days after the escape of the ruling couple as well. The army’s position after the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December can be understood in the light of the role of the so-called “terrorists”. The days that followed were full of confusion, killings, misinterpretations and myths of secret labyrinths and well-trained mercenaries.

In the first days after the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1989, it was said that these “terrorists” are actually members of the Securitate’s best teams and are killing people to protect the regime of the Ceaușescus. Then this position changed somewhat when “[...] Oliviu Tocaciu, a member of the CNSF [Council of the National Salvation Front], provided a legal definition of terrorists in an official communiqué of the front:

“Are considered terrorists and declared as such, persons who carry about themselves firearms and other offensive weapons, ammunition, explosives or any other types of weapons of destruction, or broadcasting apparatus, which...struggle against the National Salvation Front and the victors of Free Romania [...]” (Siani-Davies, 2005, p. 148)

It is interesting to note that the terrorists were now all those who fought against the new regime, the CNSF, and not only those that were protecting the Ceaușescus.

There was a strong antagonism between the army and the Securitate during the whole Ceaușescu period mainly because of the dictator’s preference for the latter one. There were undoubtedly deep dissatisfactions within the ranks of the army and the Ministry of the Interior that became even stronger after the overthrow of Ceaușescu.

These views appear in many of the shows of Radio Europa Liberă. The information received from Radio Bucharest and inherently their view on the events was taken almost integrally.

Thus we can see in the image portrayed by RFE/RL an army fighting for the Romanian people against the Securitate troops, against “the terrorists” who wanted to protect the presidential couple and, as we have seen before, whom also wanted to “steal” the revolution from the people.

In a show from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December, the journalists say:

“[...] we have never mistaken the Romanian army with the forces of the Securitate or with those wanderers maybe from the army who have become in the last days of the tyrant instruments of oppression against the Romanian people.” (The Fall of Ceaușescu Commented by the Editors of Radio Europa Libera, 22.12.1989)

Similarly on the 23<sup>rd</sup> by presenting information from Radio Bucharest they state: “[...] at Sibiu, in Brașov there are heavy fights between the army and the forces loyal to Ceaușescu” (Messages from Romanians from Everywhere, 23.12.1989). On the 25<sup>th</sup> it is said that “there are heavy fights between the army and the insane troops of Ceaușescu.” (First Christmas in Freedom, 25.12.1989)

In contrast with the army who was now on the side of the people, the media was reporting about the cruelty and insaneness of the “terrorists”. In the show of the 24<sup>th</sup> of December the journalists were saying that “Ceaușescu has formed a parallel army for himself”, the terrorists were “mercenaries”, “It was an ultra-secret activity of the Securitate”, “There were fields and schools for terrorists from the Arab countries [...] This is what is happening now, with ramifications in every important city of the country.” They went as far as saying that there were terrorists parachuted in Timișoara and that terrorists were dressed in white smocks and killed people in the hospitals. (Third Day of Freedom, 24.12.1989)

Similarly, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December a journalist stated:

Today we can see clearly that these units are, have been extraordinarily well trained. They produced people like the ones we have seen at Timișoara on the TV. Whom although were taken prisoners, said: “He will return and we will return as well. You’ll see what will happen! (Christmas Messages to Romania, 25.12.1989)

On the commentaries they top the previous descriptions, and state, as it has been told on the Romanian media as well, that Ceaușescu's secret army was made of orphans who "were taken from fragile infancy and instructed just like some robots. This is why they got to commit these hideous crimes of which we hear today. [...] It is a form of organized hatred."(Switzerland is mobilizing for Romanians, 25.12.1989)

Peter Siani-Davies sees this dichotomy between the army and the Securitate forces as a personal combat out of which the army gained the most. Because the army:

[...] had a vested interest in painting the war against the terrorists in the strongest possible light. The heroic posture it adopted during the second phase of the revolution allowed it to consolidate its position as the guardian of the nation and effectively gain absolution from the sins incurred during the brutal suppression of the first street demonstrations. (Siani-Davies, 2005, p. 286)

And the army obviously succeeded if we take into account the opinions presented in the show of the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1989: "Here they fraternized with the army because the army was seen as an emanation of the national interests in a moment of extreme danger." (Round Table, 31.12.1989)

Another actor that was interested in sustaining the idea of the terrorists was the newly organized CNSF:

It may be that by dwelling on the insecurity while they consolidated their hold on power the new leaders sought to slough off their communist past and cement their newly found identification with the people. (Siani-Davies, 2005, p. 285)

Katherine Verdery and Gail Kligman see the antagonisms between the army and the Securitate forces as a "battle over the revolution as symbol" (Banac, 1992, p. 122) The winner, in their account, was obviously the army who "[...] despite its having in fact fired on crowds in December, was more successful in this battle than the Securitate, owing in part to widespread hatred of the latter, long regarded as the incarnation of evil." (Banac, 1992, p.122)

Whether ‘the terrorists’ really existed or not and who they actually were it is still an enigma, but the Radio Free Europe broadcasts strengthened the frame that was proposed by the new regime and the Romanian media after the downfall of Ceaușescu.

### **The new government**

Unlike in many of the former communist Eastern European countries in Romania there wasn’t a truly organized dissidence movement. There was no personality similar to Václav Havel or Lech Wałęsa to be in charge of a new power structure. “Instead, the reins of power were taken by a group of apparatchiks, many of whom has previously held high political office” (Siani-Davies, 2005, p. 270). Those figures – like Ion Iliescu, Alexandru Bârlădeanu or Silviu Brucan – had a very special insider-outsider position which allowed them to get hold of power. Although they could name some dissident action<sup>22</sup> they have done in the previous years and the fact that they have been ousted by Ceaușescu, it is still true that they were long-term members of the Romanian Communist Party.

Initially in the council there was also an important minority of dissident intellectuals including Ana Blandiana, Mircea Dinescu, Doina Cornea or Radu Filipescu who were well-known in the West and “[...] when doubts were cast about the political orientation of the Front they increasingly became the voice heard in the Western media” (Siani-Davies, 2005, p. 193).

When it comes to the broadcasts of RFE/RL we can say that the radio station was obviously promoting the idea of democracy and political, religious and cultural pluralism as the only alternative for Romania’s future.

Yet it is interesting to note that while in the show from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December Șerban Orescu states:

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<sup>22</sup> Silviu Brucan, Alexandru Bârlădeanu and Corneliu Manescu were signatories of the so-called “Letter of the Six”, an open letter of protest that was addressed to the dictator on March 10, 1989 and published in the West. Ion Iliescu, although a party member since 1944, was starting to be marginalized by Ceaușescu since 1971, and eventually excluded from the Central Committee in 1984.

[...] as long as there is a communist Marxist-Leninist party, there is the danger that Ceausism, under a different form, will rise again. [...] For the Communist Party there is no alternative, in my opinion, other than to auto-dissolve. [...] In my opinion it is normal that in this void of power, which has to be ended... the old nomenclature should not profit from this void of power, which in this moment, of course, is trying to regroup to put instead of Ceaușescu a different kind of Ceaușescu, more moderated, more liberal, but in which our people, who has the experience of this last dictatorship, cannot have faith.

A different approach can be observed later on.

In contrast, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December already in a message sent in from Iasi, Romania to RFE/RL and broadcasted on the show, it is said in connection to Ion Iliescu that “[...] it would be good if the people’s attention would turn to such dignified people as him.” (The Second Day of Freedom, 23.12.1989) And then in a sequent show in a report sent in from Bucharest, a journalist from Bucharest says: “I had the great joy of seeing my friend Ion Iliescu with his well-known calm and logic.” (Messages from Romanians from Everywhere, 23.12.1989) On the same show the political program of the Council of the National Salvation is read on air. The same program is read again on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December at the Round Table as well.

By the 25<sup>th</sup> of December the journalists comment: “But we are thrilled that a whole world recognizes the new leadership of Romania [...] We have this thing confirmed from all the angles of the globe.” (Christmas in Freedom, 25.12.1989) The same information comes up the next day when it is stated that: “Meanwhile the new government has been recognized by a whole series of countries; among those the United States, Poland, Bulgaria, who have established diplomatic relations.” (After the Execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu, 26.12.1989)

One major step in the consolidation of the power was the execution of the Ceaușescu couple. This execution is the topic of the editorial piece signed by Nicolae Stroescu-Stinisoara:

I am convinced that the Council of the National Salvation Front would have liked to hold a public trial in which all of Ceaușescu’s crimes could have been shown and examined. [...] As far as we can see it the wave of the atrocities committed by the terrorists of Ceaușescu as well as some other circumstances which are about to be revealed, have

precipitated the course of events, culminating in the execution of the two. (After the Execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu, 26.12.1989)

This was also the official explanation given by the CNSF<sup>23</sup>. Although later on Stroescu-Stînișoară emphasizes that he hopes that “the procedure of the summary trial applied to Ceaușescu it is the last one of this sort in a country that has started to go on the road of its Romanian and European rebirth” (After the Execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu, 26.12.1989), it is still questionable how the RFE/RL accepted and replicated this argument.

Siani-Davies argues that this explanation is not so acceptable in hindsight given the relative peaceful situation in Bucharest and elsewhere in the country. He argues though that the major reason of this choice was perhaps the new leaders’ doubts about the loyalty of their senior military commanders. (Siani-Davies, 2005, p. 137)

It seems that the broadcasters although skeptical at the beginning, they eventually turn to support the new government. Robert Gillette admits that:

One of the problems that we had however from the onset, as I recall, was the need for a reflexive criticism of the National Salvation Front and Iliescu. And we perfectly knew who these people were, they were communists just communists wearing a different suit and very little benefit of doubt was given to the National Salvation Front first. [...] But journalistically you cannot reflexively criticize the Front, you have to give them a chance to present themselves.<sup>24</sup>

It is though important to add to this that while there was some sort of backing for the new government, the journalists also emphasized several times that democracy and democratic institutions are the only possible way out and that after the elections from April 1990, “Romania won’t be a communist country anymore”.(Round Table, 31.12.1989)

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<sup>23</sup> See BBC EE/0658, B/12:22, January 10, 1990.

<sup>24</sup> Interview Robert Gillette, 12.06.10



## **Radio Bucharest**

The relationship between Radio Europa Liberă and Radio București seems to be fairly troublesome if we take into consideration the change in the attitude towards the newly “freed” radio station.

We have decided to include the radio here as a talked about actor because of its very important role and presence in the shows after the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1989. Although it might have been considered as a source, its relevance goes further than that.

While before the 22<sup>nd</sup> Radio Bucharest was considered an instrument of the regime that didn't inform properly and it was just part of the communist arsenal of propaganda, after this date more and more information is taken from them. This change of attitude is understandable taking into consideration the development of the events and that the radio became a significant spot of the revolution. Yet it is a turning point in the play of the revolution and thus it is essential to analyze it.

As mentioned before, Radio Bucharest was frequently criticized for its inconsistency and bias. In the show on the 20<sup>th</sup> N. C. Munteanu blames Radio Bucharest saying that:

While on every bandwidth and on every frequency, at every hour they were talking about Timișoara and the massacre, condemned everywhere and by everybody, at Radio Bucharest they spoke, almost as a mockery, about the sun of socialism, the glorious party, the brilliant man, stating that in Romania: «Never the democracy, in its most authentic and noble sense of the word, has lifted so generously and so wholly the masses, as the true maker of history in the lead of the community and of their destinies.» At Timișoara they shot exactly those masses that have gone on the streets to ask for bread and liberty, making a history of their own, a history drown in blood.

In the same show it is stated that “The Romanian press and radio don't say a word about the great unrest of the country. The lie grown like a plague from years now still sprawls on the bloody body of the country.”(Timișoara and the Responsibility of the Ceaușescu Regime, 20.12.1989)

Yet, starting with the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December Radio Bucharest is constantly part of the shows. When asked about this change, Liviu Tofan answered:

It was clear that the local media freed from censorship and political control would play an important part in the developments in Romania. Our attitude was meant to signal support for Radio Bucharest and strengthen its potentially positive role.<sup>25</sup>

Their guess proved to be right since both the TVR (Romanian Television) and Radio Bucharest occupied a central role in the course of events, mostly because the “terrorists” attacked these vital points of social-political life and the crowds were asked several times to gather around these buildings to defend the new regime. This request –as we will see– was broadcasted on RFE/RL as well.

During these days RFE/RL journalists were reporting about what was said on Radio Bucharest, who were speaking on the radio and what were the messages people were sending on the airwaves of the Romanian radio:

With some minutes before one o'clock at Radio Bucharest the writer Mircea Dinescu addressed a message to the people, exclaiming: “We won! We won!” Also on Radio Bucharest an unidentified person shouted: “Brothers, with the help of God we succeeded to enter this radio station with the help of the tanks, the army and the thousands of demonstrators.” (The Fall of Ceaușescu Commented by the Editors of Radio Europa Libera, 22.12.1989)

As the “terrorists” appeared and more and more broadcasts of Radio Bucharest were speaking of the shootings and killings, RFE/RL also presented this information:

We are listening, we could hear right now from Radio Bucharest that terrorists’ groups are heading for the center of the city of Brasov. The population is advised to do everything to stop their plans.” (The Second Day of Freedom, 23.12.1989)

Or:

Radio Bucharest thanks those self-sacrificing citizens who gathered around the TV [station] and the radio, stopping this way those few fanatics who still fight for the Ceaușescu clan, fighting against those forces that try to establish democracy in our

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<sup>25</sup> Interview Liviu Tofan, 15.05.10

country. Radio Bucharest asks the citizens who are around the building to stay on positions. (The Second Day of Freedom, 23.12.1989)

This very comment points back to what Siani-Davies (2005) gives as an explanation for the dwelling of the new regime on the idea of the terrorists as a means of holding on to the power.

These and similar information are broadcasted continuously on RFE/RL programs and even more, one journalist emphasizes:

As we try to keep updated those listeners that are hearing our show about what we find out from Radio București, I would like to ask them to announce that we went on air on this great day earlier than ever and to establish *that bridge that has always existed, by the way* [italics added]. (The Fall of Ceaușescu Commented by the Editors of Radio Europa Libera, 22.12.1989)

The good relations and the reliance on Radio Bucharest start to deteriorate from the 25th of December on when the journalists from RFE/RL mention the existing wooden language<sup>26</sup> in the shows of the Romanian radio and the need to “stop the wooden language from appearing in front of the microphones”. (Second Day of Christmas, 26.12.1989). The same attitude towards the radio starts to become stronger once with the execution of the Ceaușescus. The following comment was broadcasted after realizing that there was no reporting on Radio București about a demonstration in which people were asking to see the dead bodies of the Ceaușescu couple:

“The glasnost of the press from Bucharest, of the radio and of the television is not...is not functioning on its maximum transparency.” (Second Day of Christmas, 26.12.1989)

Yet in the next days messages and news were still reported from Radio București.

Radio Bucharest became thus one of the leading non-present actors in the shows of RFE/RL and it strongly influenced the views and the attitudes towards what was happening in the country. By replicating the information gathered from Radio București, RFE/RL framed the events in the light of the Romanian radio station's approach.

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<sup>26</sup> From the French expression *langue de bois*; it refers to using vague and ambiguous words. It was predominantly used in newspaper articles and political speeches under communist rule.

## **The perspectives**

These actors we have discussed about have been presented in different perspectives. The main perspectives were: the human rights perspective, the political perspective, the social perspective and in contrast to the previous part, we could find a religious perspective as well.

Out of all these modes of looking at the events the strongest were the social and the human rights perspective due to the fact that after the 22<sup>nd</sup> the number of shootings and killings rose dramatically. Many of the shows were dealing with the cruelty of the so-called “terrorists” and with the fights taking place in the major cities of Romania (in the shows from the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> of December). Adding to these, the human rights and the social perspective was dominant in the messages sent in by people inside and outside of Romania and then broadcasted on air. These messages were emphasizing the Romanian people’s increasing need of food, medicines, clothing and money (December 24, 25).

The political perspective was again quite pertinent during these days with such topics discussed as: the new regime, democratic institutions, and the importance of free elections or freedom of expression. The evolution of the events was reported according to the Western way of understanding democracy and liberty (December 23, 25, 31).

And lastly the religious perspective was present in the first couple of days of broadcast, after the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December, even more because it was Christmas time. Although it was mentioned before as a present theme, we need to acknowledge that this was also like lenses by which the events were presented, at least initially. In many of the messages broadcasted and the journalists themselves state it several times that by the help of God the revolution succeeded and that “We need to pray to God” (Messages from Romanians from Everywhere, 23.12.1989) for what has happened then in Romania.

## 6. Conclusions

*Helping people to maintain free space in their minds for such events over two generations that was the biggest contribution, I think.*<sup>27</sup>

The fall of communism in Eastern Europe was an incredible moment in recent history, full of both expected and unexpected elements in the entire former Soviet bloc. Romania proved to be the most unpredictable country in the region, with its change of regime that demanded the highest number of victims and the lives of the dictatorial couple.

In the following we will not present separate answers to our research questions since these are highly interrelated. Instead we will provide general conclusions to form a comprehensive view on the events of 1989 and RFE.

In the previous chapters we have looked into the manner in which the RFE/RL Romanian department's broadcasts provided a specific narrative on the events that ultimately influenced the future of Romania. Since Radio Free Europe was one of the main media institutions of the Cold War their approach to the events shed a different light on Romania's December 1989 in comparison with the state-owned media.

By using a model based on Goffman's dramaturgical analysis we tried to find answers to our research questions and to sketch the happenings as they were presented in the "Romanian Actuality" and "Special Studio REL" starting from the 18<sup>th</sup> of December until the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1989. To add extra depth to these findings we interviewed four journalists working at that time at RFE/RL.

We have focused on how the media acted in these extraordinary circumstances, how their policies changed as the communist regime was crumbling and which elements influenced their framing. By discovering the major themes, present and non-present actors and perspectives we could draw the picture of the revolution as heard in the broadcasts of RFE/RL. The findings were then put into context with the help of those authors who tried to decipher the meaning behind the actions of the most relevant actors.

The results are yet another proof of how the media constructs social reality. To reconnect our findings to the theoretical framework of this present research, we tried to

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<sup>27</sup> Interview Robert Gillette, 12.06.10

prove that the social world we are living is indeed a human product, as Berger and Luckmann (1967) point it out. By using Goffman's approach, we have seen how the RFE imposed a certain frame on events, namely the fight for democracy as a general interpretation of the happenings in 1989. Thus we cannot talk about regular journalism when analyzing the broadcasts of those days. It was a specific type of journalism with a specific aim: the ending of the communist regime.

The selection of specific news items (e.g. the recording of shootings in Timisoara), the Western experts who were interviewed, or the perspectives chosen to interpret the events influenced the way people perceived and understood reality.

When it comes to the media-system dependency theory, it is obvious that the RFE/RL was highly dependent on the US government's policies and its economical and political incentives. Therefore a certain view was reified and legitimized during the shows. One of such approaches was the term "Cold War" and its usage to explain happenings in the dichotomy of "us-them", an oversimplified version of a complex reality.

In the interview with Robert Gillette, he emphasized the importance of cross-reporting, to broadcast information about the changes in the other former communist states. This observation follows the line of Thompson's (1995) social theory of the media in which he argues for the media's power to stimulate collective action even at a distance.

It is clear –as Wasburn observes also– that the broadcasts of RFE offered a certain way of looking at the events, but they also provided modes to respond to the revolutionary transformations. The incentive broadcasted towards the Army to stay in the barracks can be one of such examples.

If we take a holistic approach we can see that the results of the analysis attest once again the legitimacy of the social construction of reality theory. The results also reflect the importance media has in time of social and political crisis.

Turning our attention to the micro level of analysis, we have found a relatively calm tone of the shows and an avoidance of exaggeration when it came to such issues as the number of deaths or the involvement of the army in the repressions. The coverage of

the Romanian events was more balanced and emotionalism was not as strong as it had been for instance in the broadcasts of the 1956 Hungarian revolution<sup>28</sup>.

Although RFE/RL had as stated aim to be a surrogate radio for listeners, the results show that in many broadcasts we can find purposeful, focused political communication. We cannot measure exactly the influence of RFE/RL in the events of 1989, but it was undoubtedly one of the key players in the demise of the communism in Romania. Firstly by its 45 years of broadcast and promotion of Western understanding of such concepts as “democracy” and “liberty” and then by its specific role in December 1989. In the first days of the revolution RFE/RL’s coverage was a support for the people protesting in Timișoara by transmitting messages of encouragement from “the West” and condemning the dictator’s deeds.

Yet another interesting element was the interpretation given to the reasons why people were demonstrating. It was undoubtedly a popular uprising against the cruelty of the regime and the lack of basic necessities, but it is arguable whether Romanians were protesting for democracy and democratic institutions- as it was presented in the shows of RFE.

After the escape of the Ceaușescu couple RFE became “[...] a communications center between listeners and the emerging post-Ceaușescu National Salvation Front.”<sup>29</sup> Though not supporting straightforwardly, but by presenting actors such as Ion Iliescu or by reading the NSF program several times on air, the RFE clearly was sending a message of approval of the new government. While some would criticize the RFE for its attitude towards the former communist who took over the power and for providing information for the NSF regarding the Securitate hideouts, Ross Johnson explains: “[...] we were the only available middleman who could play that role. [It was] one of those judgments one makes” in exceptional circumstances.<sup>30</sup>

Another interesting feature of the programming after the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December was the collaboration with Radio Bucharest. RFE showed an immense support to the newly “liberated” radio station. But by doing this they were accepting the frames of Radio

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<sup>28</sup> Interview A. Ross Johnson, 15.05.10

<sup>29</sup> Idem.

<sup>30</sup> “Radio Free Europe Adjusts to a Freer Europe,” by Mathew C. Vita, Cox Newspapers, January 28, 1990. Details in RFE/RL memorandum by Robert Gillette [RFE deputy director], January 10, 1990; editorial, *Wall Street Journal* (European edition), January 11, 1990.

Bucharest and thus RFE became part of Radio Bucharest's construction of reality. Although some criticism appeared later on regarding the Radio București's use of wooden language and censoring, this radio station became a major source of information for RFE.

In conclusion the broadcasts of Radio Free Europe occupied a center place on the stage of the Romanian revolution in 1989 and afterwards. By its balanced, but yet focused broadcasting the RFE succeeded to provide support from outside the Iron Curtain towards a country lacking the basic right to information.

Our findings show that RFE made use of its journalistic tools to end the play of the revolution with the demise of communism, and did all it can to "...make sure Ceaușescu would not return..."<sup>31</sup>

The present analysis tried to fill a gap in the general knowledge about the events of 1989 in Romania. By choosing to examine the way RFE presented the revolution we wanted to emphasize the role of the media in time of crisis and to add new information to the riddle that still prevails in story of the only bloody revolution of Eastern Europe. As stated before the results proved the hypotheses of the theoretical level of this research and they provided a different insight to the events of 1989.

If we extrapolate more freely on the present analysis we can find some other similar topics that would be interesting to explore. For instance it would be highly relevant to do a similar research on the broadcasts of Radio Bucharest and then compare the findings with the results of this paper. In the same line one could analyze other international radio's broadcast during the upheavals in the Soviet Bloc.

Then to connect the research to the present we could ask other questions: If and how has radio's role changed over these twenty years in Romania? Has the radio's importance shrunk when it comes to rapid social changes? Can the Internet and new media replace the role of classical media to provide frames of reference to the events surrounding us? These directions might be a starting point for a new, related research built around the same theoretical framework.

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<sup>31</sup> Idem



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Radio Free Europe, Romanian Language Service Shows

1. 18 December 1989 – Romanian Actuality: Timișoara in Revolution
2. 19 December 1989 – Romanian Actuality: Timișoara, Repression and International Solidarity with the Victims
3. 19 December 1989 - Romanian Actuality: Special Edition
4. 20 December 1989 - Romanian Actuality: Timișoara and the Responsibility of the Ceaușescu Regime
5. 21 December 1989 - Romanian Actuality: Special Edition I: State of Emergency at Timișoara
6. 21 December 1989 - Romanian Actuality: Special Edition II: International Reactions to the Events in Romania
7. 21 December 1989 - Romanian Actuality: Special Edition III: Testimonies and Echoes to the Events of Timișoara
8. 22 December 1989 - Romanian Actuality: The Fall of Ceaușescu Commented by the Editors of Radio Europa Libera
9. 23 December 1989 - Romanian Actuality: Special Morning Studio: Interviews and Messages
10. 23 December 1989 – Special Studio REL II: The Second Day of Freedom
11. 23 December 1989 – Special Studio REL III: Messages from Romanians from Everywhere
12. 24 December 1989 – Special Studio REL: Third Day of Freedom/ Christmas Eve
13. 24 December 1989 - Special Studio REL II: Third Day of Freedom/ Christmas Eve
14. 25 December 1989 - Special Studio REL: First Christmas in Freedom
15. 25 December 1989 - Special Studio REL II: Christmas Messages to Romania
16. 25 December 1989 - Special Studio REL III: Switzerland is mobilizing for Romanians
17. 26 December 1989 - Special Studio REL I: After the Execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu

18. 26 December 1989 - Special Studio REL II: Second Day of Christmas
19. 28 December 1989 – Romanian Actuality: Messages from and towards Romania
20. 29 December 1989 - Romanian Actuality: Special Live Edition I: Messages, Commentaries, Point of Views
21. 29 December 1989 - Romanian Actuality: Special Live Edition II: Politics and Culture
22. 31 December 1989 – Round Table: The revolution in Romania: Present and Future

## **Appendix 2      Interview Guide**

1. Please state the position you were in December 1989 at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.
2. According to authors such as Arch Puddington and Mick Sigelson the Romanian department had the biggest audience. How do you explain the popularity of Radio Europa Libera?
3. According to the same authors the Romanian political commentary was different than that of other departments and it was a source of tension between Radio Free Europe and the State department. Could you give your opinion on this statement?
4. Let's focus now on the days of the Revolution. What can you tell me about the editorial policies in those days? I'm thinking of such issues as reporting the number of deaths or the involvement of the army.
5. After the flee of the Ceaușescu couple, Radio Bucharest was regularly cited. How come you decided to collaborate with them?
6. On the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty website it is stated that RFE/RL "played a significant role in the collapse of communism and the rise of democracies in post-communist Europe." By what actions would you say that RFE/RL played a significant role in the collapse of the Ceaușescu regime?