The 1989 Revolution and Transformation in Slovak Public-Service Radio

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ABSTRACT

Media, newsrooms and journalists themselves changed dramatically after 1989 in Czechoslovakia. The media policy of the communist regime was replaced by the media policy of an emerging democracy. This study is an attempt to understand how this radical change of political regime and the relationship between media and power has affected the national, public service broadcaster Slovak Radio [Slovenský rozhlas]. This study is a description of the events of the 1989 Revolution in the Czechoslovak Radio in Slovakia and its immediate aftermath. It focuses on the news, because the process of news-making changed radically, including major personal changes. Qualitative in-depth interviews with five leading personalities from the public service radio broadcaster, who played an important part in these changes, describe the revolution from the Slovak Radio employees' point of view and demonstrate the practical impact of the transformation on everyday work in media during the revolution and transformation. As the research is methodologically based on oral history, the respondents describe the most important processes in newsrooms during the change of regime, as well as the most important impact of this paradigmatic change in the Slovak Radio.

KEYWORDS

Slovak Radio – oral history – transformation – the Velvet Revolution

1. Introduction

The media in Czechoslovakia were an important part of the change of the political system both during and after the "Velvet Revolution" in 1989. As part of a broader research into these changes, this article focuses specifically on the Revolution events and its consequences for journalists in the then state-controlled Slovak Radio [Slovenský rozhlas], which, today, is a primary public service radio broadcaster in Bratislava, Slovakia. The researchers are interested in the viewpoints of the journalists working in this radio institution before 1989, during the Revolution and also during the transformation. This paper is based on the direct experiences of the reporters, who not only observed the changes, but who took part in the process, who had to pick sides, react to the Revolution and adapt to a new situation in society and specifically in the media.

The topic of the research is the revolution process from the viewpoint of Slovak Radio employees, notably journalists. How did a totalitarian propaganda radio institution become a trustworthy institution with influential news in just a few months? This text covers the events that changed Slovak Radio from the late 1980s, just before the Revolution, until the first half of 1990, when the newly established main radio news programme Rádiožurnál became a big success.

Sub-topics that interested the researchers are the personal changes in the newsrooms: Why did some members of the Communist party among the reporters and editors have to leave while others could stay? Have there been more categories of the involvement with the regime and the ideology and have the media been "cleansed" from the individuals who were more involved? Who decided who was to be fired and who could stay, and based on what criteria?

2. Theory and history of Socialist/Communist journalism

2.1 Before the Revolution

Slovak Radio was part of Czechoslovak Radio and since the so-called "normalisation" in the 1970s, it was – along with other areas of public life – under the political control of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ). The party had only just excluded the reformists after the Prague Spring movement and Soviet-led intervention in 1968. The KSČ had to secure the predictability of media, banning several periodicals, appointing new editors to the media, calling for "voluntary discipline" (self-censorship) of journalists: "After a period of not knowing what might be published tomorrow (…), in an ideal normalised setting, from the point of view of the rulers, all outcomes are intended, desirable, and certain." (Williams, 1997, pp. 41, 227) In other words, the society that attempted democratisation in 1968 was "normalised" into totalitarian communism.

The state policy towards media was a part of the totalitarian rule of ideology among every aspect of society, covering all vital aspects of men's existence to which everyone is supposed to adhere, at least passively. (Gleason, 1995, p. 124). The central group (the party) establishes the limits of permitted knowledge – the party has high-ranked officials responsible for decisions regarding publication of the most significant daily news items and instructions to editors in chief, telling them what news they have to make public, and how they are to comment on it. (Kaplan, 1987, p. 161)

In totalitarian regimes following the Soviet model, the specific role of media in society was defined. The state had a monopoly on broadcasting; newspapers were published by institutions approved by the regime (unions etc.), and no private media were allowed. In the contemporary theory, also taught at universities preparing future journalists, the media were addressed as "means of mass information and propaganda" and they had the task to serve the socialistic political elites and were controlled by a state office (under the communist party) who dictated the content of the media (Serafínová & Vatrál, 2005, p. 146). "Socialist journalism" had to rely on ideas of Marxism-Leninism and actively support the fulfilling of aims which are set for all people by the communist party. (Majchrák, 1975, p. 15–16). Similarly, the contemporary theory of radio news in the communist regime, drawing on Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's views of broadcasting, claims that the function of radio broadcasting is not just to inform, but also to agitate and organise – and reporters have to be "educated in Marxist worldview." (Sand, 1985, p. 3, 14, 46).

In such a regime, the power group and its apparatus considered journalists, producers of culture and social scientists as “their” subordinate employees and the institutions they worked for as their directly instructed detachments. The heads of mass media were responsible for maintaining the party line, becoming thus self-censors. (Kaplan, 1987, p. 160-161)

The elites of the communist party instructed the editors of the major media on a weekly basis what they have to, can or cannot inform about. Even the extent of the publicity of certain events was prescribed, and then controlled, by the state office, with possible sanctions to the editors in instances of not following these instructions. (Končelík, Večeřa & Orság, 2010, p. 210)

The communist party had institutional control over all of the media, and the regime even made censorship legal again by suspending the previous abolishment of censorship. (Drgonec, 2008, p. 37) The official censorship offices were first called the Central Publication Office, later the Slovak Office for the Press and Information and Czech Office for the Press and Information, and since 1980 the Federal Office for the Press and Information. The party used the media for extensive propaganda campaigns – covering and constantly repeating the party congress resolutions and stressing their historical significance. (Kaplan, 1987, p. 21)

After the Soviet-led military intervention in 1968, the state-owned Czechoslovak Radio, which the Slovak Radio was a part of, was “cleansed” by the pro-Soviet regime of more than one third of its employees (more than 800 people) politically unreliable for the conservative communists who took over power, and broadcasting was extensively used for propaganda of the Marxism-Leninism policy of the communist party and also propaganda against the opposition in exile. (Končelík, Večeřa & Orság, 2010, p. 235-236) Moreover,

some employees and reporters emigrated. There are records of this happening in the Radio, from which 37 people “escaped across the border.” (Jenča, 2009, p. 135)

Radio had to promote the policy of normalisation. There were programmes defending the military intervention trying to persuade the general public and even later on, when the propaganda was less intense, radio broadcasting still defended the policy of the communist party. (Draxler, 1996, p. 8) Even Ján Riško, the communist politician and the director of the Czechoslovak Radio in 1970–1989, was very open about this in a publication on the 60th anniversary of radio broadcasting:

> Nowadays radio broadcasting is a people’s democratic institution. It is a radio for the working masses. For the last 35 years, the radio has been existentially connected to socialism. The radio, which started in February 1948, stood on the positions of socialism, on the side of the people and the working class, and under the control of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia as a significant part of the socialistic construction of Czechoslovakia, a part of its formation and the education of the new socialist man, of cultural revolution.
>
> (Riško, undated, p. 198)

By the end of the 1980s, people were no longer afraid of mass terror and, thus, there finally came a general assault on all government power. (Courtois, 1999, p. 450) The solidarity movement in Poland, Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika, and eventually the fall of the Berlin Wall created a context for the political changes also in other Central- and East-European countries ruled by pro-Soviet communists.

Literature on the Slovak media does not describe the situation during the Revolution inside the media. Serafínová and Vatrál (2005) overview only the basic facts of the transformation, but not offer more detailed information about how the revolution and its aftermath looked like in the media. Czech literature about the Czechoslovak Radio says that, due to a different extent of independence, some media informed of the Revolution from an early stage, while others hadn't reacted until a few days later.

The state-owned broadcasting media started to inform the public about the events of the 17 November only on 20 November, when the employees of the radio were already protesting against disinformation (Bednařík, Jirák & Köpplová, p. 367) The Revolution itself in the Czechoslovak Radio in Slovakia (hereinafter only as the Slovak Radio) is not described in relevant literature on Slovak media. Some remarks have been made by Imrich Jenča, a long-time radio employee and an academic. He claims that information on the first demonstrations appeared on the 18 November, but it was ideological and reported the event as anti-socialist, and proclaimed just the high number of the arrested people. The employees of the radio supported the general strike on 22 November, when the Coordination Committee of the VPN (*Verejnosť proti násiliu*, i.e. *People Against Violence* – the main revolutionary movement in Slovakia) in the Slovak Radio in Bratislava organised a protest meeting. (Jenča, 2009, p. 144) The research part of this article is bringing some more new information about this meeting.

2.2 After the Revolution

The end of the communist rule was followed by rapid efforts to re-create democratic political life, re-pluralise politics, and to reorient the style of work of existing institutions and to shift to a market economy. (Wolchik, 1997, p. 208-209)

The media underwent the same processes. The revolution weakened the dependency of the media on the state and the communist party lost its influence and the censorship was avoided.

Two entirely different systems had encountered. Journalists – raised and educated in totalitarian communism and trained to serve the party by spreading ideology – found themselves in a system without a ruling party and without a single truth or a narrative approved by an authority. They had suddenly gained independence. Several authors indicated that immediately after the fall of the totalitarian regime and before new leaders could impose any new order, there was a moment of absolute freedom. A study from Södertörn University College in Sweden applied the theory of German "Die Wende" (the period of change as a journalistic vacuum without any control from a party or owners) on six journalists from Eastern Germany. The authors of the study concluded that this era represents a unique part of mass-media history when journalists experienced a euphoric situation without any regulations and the researchers drew it as the more democratic form of organisation in media; the "third way" in between state-regulated and market-regulated media systems. (Andersson & Westin, 2009, p. 39 – 41). This partially inspired one of the questions in our research: Was in the Slovak radio a moment without any regulations after the Revolution?

Naturally, there was an explosion in publishing after the abolition of censorship, as multiplicity of viewpoints began to emerge. (Courtois, 1999, p. 451) The main trends of the transformation in the early 1990s in Slovakia may be described as privatisation, emancipation, politicisation, commercialisation, concentration, internationalisation and tabloidization. (Brečka, Ondrášik, & Keklak, 2010, p. 9) These seven trends are connected to private media mostly, but none of them is specific and typical for public service radio (although emancipation, history of politicisation and tabloidization may be applicable).

One important moment for the transformation process in whole society and subsequently in media as well was the cleansing of the communists:

> When one wishes to set up democracy and the rule of law, what can be done with the previous leaders and their assistants, particularly when they were so numerous and the state apparatus was so vast?
> (Courtois, 1999, p. 450)

Questions like these had no simple answers. However, the media in transition had to deal with them very quickly. Even in Slovak Radio, the communist editors and managers were dismissed as early as in 1989. Nevertheless, not all of the party members had to leave; on the contrary, some of them became new editors or managers and had substantial influence on the transformation. This article documents some of these changes.

The Slovak Radio underwent a change in the programme structure: propaganda broadcasting was abolished, new discussion programmes were introduced and the new main news programme Rádiožurnál replaced the old Rozhlasové noviny (Radio News). (Jenča, 2009, p. 145)

According to Hallin & Mancini criteria (2008, p. 97), the Slovak media system followed the liberal (North-Atlantic) model that is described by domination of the market (minimal state regulation), strong professionalisation of journalism with self-regulation and neutral commercial media with information-oriented journalism (in contrast to opinion-oriented journalism in different models).

Nevertheless, in Slovakia the public-service radio broadcaster remained strong for many years after the first commercial radios entered the market. The strong position of public service broadcasting is typical for another model of media systems: the democratic-corporatist model, geographically described as North-Central European. This model is also closer to Czech and Slovak media historically as until 1938 we had been part of the region with a democratic-corporatist tradition, together with Austria. (Trampota & Jirák, in Hallin & Mancini, 2008, p. 15) The question of which Hallin and Mancini model Slovakia transformed into is complicated even more with the 1990s era of "wild deregulation" and the rule of Vladimír Mečiar governments.

This article is trying to shed a light on thoughts and values that – immediately after the "Velvet Revolution" in November and December of 1989 and in the early 1990s – inspired the people who started the transformation of Slovak Radio.

3. Method

This research is a part of larger research using the method of oral history to describe the Revolution of 1989 and following transformation of the media in former Czechoslovakia. This paper is a partial result, not the final outcome of the whole research project; there will be more people interviewed, not just from the radio, but also from the press and television for the final outcomes. For this text, we conducted 5 interviews, inspired by the method of oral history and analysed the qualitative data by using a phenomenological analysis, typical for qualitative in-depth interviews. The reasons for this specific combination of methods are the following.

Oral history is a qualitative research method used by contemporary historians and researchers of cultural studies scholars which can help researchers to understand major social shifts, by examining how new experiences are interpreted by individuals. The researcher can get close to the experiences and the views of respondents about their life stories or an event in which they took part. (Roberts, 2002, cited in Batty 2009, p. 110) Alessandro Portelli, one of the founders of oral history, notes that such a history approach is interested not merely in 'facts' but in the participant's perception of what is true (Portelli, 1981, cited in Roberts, 2002, p. 105). According to Portelli, "oral sources are credible, oral sources are not objective." This of course applies to every source." (Portelli, 1998, p. 68) The most important part of this method is the respondent's memory and their point of view on historical events.

The main criticism of oral history is focused on the actual reliability of memory. According to Hobsbawm, interviewees have tendency to exaggerate and misremember events. (Hobsbawm, 1997, p. 206) Historian Paul Thompson claims that the memory process depends on the personal interest in the subject, not only on individual comprehension. Memory is therefore much more accurate when it matches an individual's social interest and need (Thomson, 2000, cited in Batty 2009, p. 111)

As it is typical for oral-history, the interviews were not structured and the questions were not prepared in advance, enabling the participants to speak freely on the topic.

Each participant was interviewed in a session lasting on average 90 minutes. We did not stop the narrator's speech often intending to let them tell us everything they remembered. The founder of Czech oral history Miroslav Vaněk and his colleague claim that it is important to ask open questions (e.g. why? how? etc.) as this could encourage their memory and they should start to explain their side of the story. (Vaněk & Műcke, 2015, p.167)

We conducted all the interviews in person, recorded the audio part of the interview and transcribed it. Though the plan is to conduct two interviews with each participant, in this study, we focus on the first interviews only since the second interviews might be focused on specific issues which are not covered by this paper. For this reason, we did not apply methods of analysing data typical for oral historians (such as grounded theory). Instead, the interviews were analysed using the phenomenological approach, which is suitable for inquiries into the individuals' personal experiences and their own views on a specific phenomenon or event. And the information is collected by long in-depth interviews with a small number of participants (typically fewer than 10), who experienced the event directly (not just observed it from a distance). (Cresswell, 1998, p. 54-55, 86, 122) In the phenomenological analysis, the role of the researcher is to identify significant statements, deduce themes from them, and then to write a narrative-descriptional text about these topics, focused on what and how the participants experienced, and to identify the essence and meaning of these experiences. (Cresswell, 1998, p. 207, 223) This method of data analysis – more extensively described in previous work of one of the authors of this study (Hanák, 2016, p. 254-255) – was applied on the in-depth interviews. The themes that emerged from the interviews are chronologically displayed as titles of chapters and subchapters. Significant statements are quoted in the text. A common essence of these experiences is identified in the conclusion, as well as the researchers' interpretations of their meaning.

The limits of these methods are linked with its clear and admitted subjectivity on several levels; the subjectivity of the views of the participants and the possible subjectivity of the researchers analysis. Some of the participants were members of the communist party, some were active in the opposition movement VPN, and they can have a tendency to emphasise or downplay actions by the political movements, or ideologically misinterpret (or even misremember) certain meanings. Our response to this risk is a balance between members and non-members among the participants.

3.1. Participants

We interviewed journalists who were – before the revolution – members of the communist party and journalists that refused to become members; and journalists staying – during and after the revolution – apolitical as well as those who took part in the VPN revolutionary movement. One of the sampling criteria was the period of their journalistic career: we interviewed journalists who served in the Slovak Radio before 1989, during the revolution and after 1989 during the transformation process and, therefore, had to have complex experience of the examined period, being thus able to compare the previous regime with the new one. The specialisation of the interviewed journalists is divergent: the sample includes journalists covering politics, foreign news, science, and also an author of broadcasting related to automobile journalism and literary genres.

- **Viliam Roth** (born in 1941) had been an employee of the Czechoslovak Radio since 1967. He worked as a foreign policy reporter and commentator. He was also a member of the Bureau of the Czechoslovak Union of Journalists. In December 1989, he became a minister without a portfolio in the short-lived first Czechoslovak government. In 1990, he was the first director of the Czechoslovak Radio after the revolution. He was not a member of the communist party.
- **Michal Tvarožek** (born in 1942) had been a radio journalist since 1968. Until 1989, he was specialised in science and technology. In 1990, he co-founded, and later led the main public-service radio news programme Rádiožurnál. He was a founder and host of several radio discussion programmes, and he also

worked in the main public-service radio station, the Slovak Radio, until April 2016. First, he was apolitical, but later he joined the communist party, because it was a requirement for becoming an editor.
- **Ľuboš Machaj** (born in 1954) worked at the Slovak Radio as a journalist in the programme Pozor, zákruta! (Attention, corner!) and in the literary newsroom, working on radio dramas. In 1989, he was a member of VPN in Slovak Radio. In 2003, he served as the Radio Programme Director of the Slovak Radio.
- **Ivan Mjartan** (born in 1958) worked as a reporter at the foreign desk, covering Gorbachev's policies and the relations between the USSR and the USA. After the revolution, he was appointed as the first editor in chief of Rádiožurnál, the new main news programme. He was also responsible for the selection of reporters in this programme. He was a member of the communist party.
- **Michal Berko** was an employee of Czechoslovak Radio since 1971; he was a member of the newsroom. In 1989, he became a member of VPN and after personnel changes he was deputy director of Slovak Radio. In March 1990, he founded the new programme Rádiožurnál, and was responsible for the whole concept.

4. The 1989 Revolution in the Slovak Radio

The change from a totalitarian propagandist radio institution into one which was pro-democratic happened very quickly at the Slovak Radio. However, the institution did not change itself. The people, the employees of the radio, had to step out of the long-lived routine and act. The following chapter describes the revolutionary events and the necessary context.

4.1. Before the Revolution: Party-membership, Self-censorship, Feeling the Change Coming

In the late 1980s, many of the Slovak Radio employees were members of the communist party. Viliam Roth, not a party member, estimates that about sixty percentof all employees were communists. According to Roth, only the party members were allowed to be promoted to editors or managers. “We could work, create, but not become a chief. I have never been a chief of anything.”

Michal Tvarožek, who started working at the Radio just before the invasion in 1968, confirms that. First, he was not a communist, and he claims he was avoiding membership until 1983 or 1984 as lot of his relatives were imprisoned as opponents of communism. But then, he was about to become an editor of the science and technology newsroom and so he was told to join the party. He claims he felt ashamed among his family members for being a communist.

Ivan Mjartan studied in Moscow and, according to his words, the party offered membership to every Czechoslovak student in the USSR. He stayed in the party until 1989. However, he does not think he had any kind of privilege compared to those who were not members. “I had a colleague who was not a member and the only disadvantage he had was that probably more of his journeys abroad were not approved. But there was no other advantage or disadvantage.”

Luboš Machaj, one of the founders of the VPN movement within the Slovak Radio in 1989, says that there was pressure on those people who were on-air to become members of the communist party. "They tried to force me and I tried to avoid it in many ways."

Michal Berko was not a member of the communist party. He became a member of VPN in 1989. The Slovak Radio also published some works by journalists who were excluded from the profession during normalisation; the so-called generation of '68. They were not allowed to publish anything under their real names. Ľuboš Machaj says that he knew that some of these former journalists were writing radio dramas under pseudonyms.

Viliam Roth says that, in comparison to other media, in the Slovak Radio there was a quite "relaxed" atmosphere. He claims that members and non-members of the communist party had to co-operate as professional relations mattered more than the party-membership at the Slovak Radio. "Those party members in charge were dependent on non-members, who were often more talented reporters. When they sent us a new, politically suitable editor, but he wasn't skilled professionally at all. If he didn't want to fail, he had to let everybody work. He could give orders, but in cultivated way with not that much ideology."

4.1.1. Censorship and Self-censorship

The older interviewees remember the strict censorship regime following the invasion in 1968. Michal Tvarožek:

> "Every moment of excitement, when I felt the need to let it out, was absorbed by – not exactly self-censorship – but something similar coming from the upper floors. We knew how it should be done, that certain barriers exist and that it's non-crossable. Of course, I would not directly write that the resolution of the party is just nonsense, but even if I would attack it a little in some other way, the programme would never be broadcast, because it had to be approved before that, and moreover I would be under pressure for doing so."

Michal Tvarožek, working in the radio since 1968, remembers that during the start of normalisation, the censorship had two stages and it could not be avoided. The first stage was an editor, the second was a deputy editor-in-chief, and, if necessary, there was also an editor-in-chief reading the text or listening to the programme recording before broadcasting. In the early 1970s, the first stage, according to Michal Tvarožek, was a political censor, appointed by the official state censorship office, controlled by the communist party. "He had a huge office, he called me in and I had to read him what I wrote. He said – this sentence again; no, this is not going to be there, cut it out. When he was in a mood for reading, I got my text back marked red and I had to change it accordingly."

Those who started their careers in the late 1970s or 1980s remember mostly self-censorship, or control from the more experienced reporters responsible for the ideology. The respondents agree that self-censorship worked, because in case it would not, there was the real censorship. "It was still the regime of one political party, everything was read in advance and censored," Viliam Roth says.

Moreover, the pressures of the censorship depended also on the personality of the censor.

Ľuboš Machaj:

> "We had an editor-in-chief who had to approve everything and he did not only check the professional standards. Fortunately, our chief Vlado Brychta focused more on the profession, but of course there were also ideological issues – this is sensitive, we could have problems with that. So we had built self-censorship – everybody knew how far we could go. Direct criticism was not possible, especially not of the ideology. We could afford small criticism – in our programme it was for instance holes in the roads. But not if it could lead to the party apparatus."

Ivan Mjartan also recalls an editor who had to approve every piece of content before its broadcast. "An intelligent person could sense where was the line of what we are allowed to do. But we could say something in between the lines."

Several journalists claim that they were able to express opinions or inform of something that was not "ideologically correct" when it was done indirectly, "in between the lines" or by quoting an official. For example, in science news, they could inform about Western inventions if they created a fictional quote from a Soviet newspaper. "We said that in Western Germany they invented this and this, as a Soviet newspaper already informed. We made it up, but the censor was blinded by this," Michal Tvarožek remarks. Also Ivan Mjartan used this strategy, quoting the highest authority that could not be questioned – the leader of Soviet communists: "I was lucky because I covered a good topic. Russian-American relations were getting better, Gorbachev gave me legitimacy and I could not imagine being sanctioned for reproducing his words."

Viliam Roth explains the "in between the lines" strategy on an example: the nuclear catastrophe in Chernobyl, about which media in the pro-Soviet bloc could not inform. "We told the listeners in allegories, through other words, that maybe our nuclear agency will inform about some kind of accident tomorrow. At least we did not keep it secret. We could not – people already knew of it from foreign radio broadcasts from Vienna."

4.1.2 Feeling the Change Coming

All of the interviewed agreed that they knew the change was going to come soon and that the rule of the communist party was going to be over soon. They described the atmosphere of Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika. Ivan Mjartan was a Russian-speaking reporter at the foreign desk, covering Gorbachev's policies and the relationship between the USSR and the USA. He notes that journalists at foreign desk had all the information on the events in Moscow and it even lead to the undermining the self-censorship. He was also allowed to travel to cover the Gorbachev–Reagan summits, and in 1988, the Slovak Radio sent him for a one-month exchange to Morocco.

"As foreign journalists, we were giving lectures on the relationship between the West and the East. I was young and excited about the change in Russia. I gave a lecture at the Ministry of Finance. I started using Gorbachev's words, such as the desire for change or freedom. People clapped, but a man in a red tie came to tell me to not even come back to the radio. When I showed up, right at the door there was message for me: the director is expecting you." Mjartan says that he was sanctioned and he thinks that this excluded him from a list of candidates for the position of a correspondent in Paris. But he adds that in the broadcasting by the end of the 1980s, "I was free to broadcast whatever I wanted, thanks to Gorbachev." Michal Berko claims that members of party were also dissatisfied with the situation before 1989. "Everyone was complaining, everyone wanted some kind of change and somehow the regime had to find some way how to be more open…"

Viliam Roth could travel abroad thanks to his position of senior reporter at the foreign desk. He was in Warsaw in September 1989 and he witnessed dissidents at an official meeting claiming publicly that the post-war bipolar division of Europe was not fair and that it has come to an end. "So yes, I saw it coming, definitely." Similarly Ľuboš Machaj noticed the change coming because of the events abroad. "When the regime was falling in Hungary, the Berlin wall fell, we knew it was coming."

Michal Tvarožek says that even when the regimes were falling apart in the other states, the censorship in radio still functioned, and the atmosphere of glasnost and perestroika did not liberalise it. "Everybody will tell you that they felt the change coming. The political elites put even more pressure on censorship and insisted on strict party-line broadcasting."

4.2. Disinformation, Protests and Revolutionary Activities

As literature documented, the radio was not broadcasting the news from the revolutionary events from the start (Suk, 2003, p. 39). According to Ľuboš Machaj, who joined VPN and became radio-revolutionary, "it was not easy to broadcast the truth about the events because there were all the old structures."

Michal Berko says the atmosphere in the society had changed, and the demonstrations started, but in the Slovak Radio, "there was dead silence. People spoke on corridors, but the main newsroom was absolutely political. Maybe 88 percent of them were communists."

When it became obvious that the revolution had started, the management did not even allow information on these events to be broadcasted, so employees organised an opposition movement within the Slovak Radio. As VPN was founded, people started to establish VPN cells in their institutions, including the Slovak Radio. "I can tell that the most important people of VPN in the Slovak Radio were artists. Stano Radič, Ľuboš Machaj and some others... two or three directors. But some communists, too." Michal Berko also remembers the main newsroom and also the propaganda editors did not know about the VPN collective forming inside the radio building. According to him, they were too political. He also claims that he was the only one from the Slovak Radio's main newsroom who became a member of VPN. He was a spokesman and had the first official conversations with the radio director.

Ľuboš Machaj knew authors and actors from the radio drama department.

"They asked who is going to be in VPN. Communists? Not really. I was not a communist, and I had contacts with artists in dissent, so that is why I happened to be in VPN." Ľuboš Machaj does not describe VPN as a stable political force or a party. "VPN was just about a meeting of people who wanted some kind of change." But for a while, during the revolution, VPN was making important decisions – even personal decisions regarding management.

In the first days of the revolution there was an information blockade, especially in television and radio. The media informed on the events only in very limited way. The interviewed Slovak Radio employees remember a protest against disinformation achieving true broadcasting from the general protests.

The memories of those interviewed differ. One of the VPN members, Ľuboš Machaj, does not remember the exact date, only the meeting itself. "We organised a big meeting with people where we told them that we are on the side of the revolution."

Michal Tvarožek says that some people were about to meet with actors (representing the revolutionary forces) in a pub just next to the radio building: "The old radio management said that whoever will go there will be fired. But we went there and listened." Michal Tvarožek thinks that nobody lost their job because the radio management did not have time to do it as it was forced to resign just several days later. During the protest, another VPN member Michal Berko had discussions with the management of Slovak Radio:

> "Meanwhile, Stano Radič and others had organised an alarming, big protest meeting of radio workers… everybody went out with flags and protested against the radio management that did not allow us to inform on what is going on in Prague. They wanted to change things. We as radio workers could not hide what was going on in this country."

Not everybody attended the protest. Ivan Mjartan: "I did not take part in this protest, although I knew about it. It was not a concern of the reporters at foreign desk, it was about those within the domestic news; they needed the chief of domestic news to be changed, and that is what happened. We did not take part personally, but I think ninety nine percent of the radio employees supported this; to broadcast the truth." However, Ivan Mjartan does not think that the broadcasting of the truth resulted from the protest. "The whole society created massive pressure. It was like a tsunami and I cannot imagine the editor standing against it. Accept that this is what people want, or just quit your job." He claims that people in the Slovak Radio were "living the revolution"; they were among the first institutions that joined the general strike – much sooner than the more ideological television newsrooms.

According to Michal Tvarožek, some employees reacted and tried to set up VPN broadcasting to broadcast the meetings live. "I am not sure whether the first attempt worked, I think they only recorded it. But then they did long live broadcastings of the meetings and also discussions." Michal Tvarožek estimates that this happened one week after 17 November.

4.2.1. Conflict with the People's Militia

According to witnesses, the transformation process in the Slovak Radio was peaceful. Michal Berko remembers one moment of conflict with members of the communist People's Militia, also called "the armed fist of the working class." The Slovak Radio building, the inverted pyramid, was one of the centres of their organisation. Ľuboš Machaj remembers: "We knew there were militias, there was a storage place for weapons in the radio building. We knew that they were ready to act." Luboš Machaj was later told by his colleagues, militia ex-members, about details. "They told me that they had orders to be ready to grab weapons and capture the radio building. They even showed me the machine gun positions."

According to Michal Berko, who was spokesman of VPN, the militias were ready to arrest revolutionary-minded employees:

> "There was information that a special force unit has to destroy VPN, including the people in radio and television. So I went to see those colleagues that were members of the militia and then I found out that they were in the basement where they held weapons, dressed in militia uniforms. All of them were sitting in that room wearing these uniforms and their commander told me: We are going to arrest you."

Ivan Mjartan, who was member of the communist party, claims that he was not part of the People's Militia. "I only know they had funny uniforms with funny hats. I have never been in the militia, I do not know who was and I do not care. If I would have known in 1989 that somebody took part in this militia activity, I would be very vulgar to this person. I think these people got rid of the uniforms very soon and pretended this never happened."

In the end, the militia did not arrest anyone and on 22 November the leaders of the communist party withdrew the armed forces of the People's Militia.

4.3. A Quick Cleansing: Changing the Editors and Management

All those interviewed remembered one important event: that the employees of the Slovak Radio organised a referendum; a vote on their management. After the protest in front of the radio building, the VPN members and their supporters wanted to force the communists in the radio management to step down. "We said: no violence, no blood. It had to work in a democratic way, so we voted on them. We made the voting lists; around ten names; director Bejda, chief of propaganda, Daniel, chief of the economic section, Milý, chief of news section etc. And there was a question: Do you trust these people or not? This vote made the true revolution at Slovak Radio. They all failed." Michal Berko also remembers how the VPN went to announce the result to their chiefs. According to him, nobody from the news departments, neither foreign, nor domestic, dared to do it. Only VPN "artists" – people from the radio drama department – Stanislav Radič, Ľuboš Machaj and others did it.

Not everybody took part in the vote. Ivan Mjartan strongly disagreed with excluding his colleagues. "I am an opponent to the collective guilt principle. We all lived in a certain period, we all tried to live in the system. Nobody was satisfied with it.

Somebody showed it just between the lines, some openly, some were a dissident and suffered a lot, but I don't judge people just because the positions they had. If you cannot prove that a person hurt people or destroyed somebody´s life then for me the person is a normal inhabitant of this country." According to Ivan Mjartan, the vote drew on "unhealthy revolutionary euphoria" and he would have liked to have seen the main characters of the system to be punished, not "just those who had to survive in the system", so not reporters or editors, but the heads of the system. He claims this is rather related to his family experience than to his membership in the communist party. He said his father's career and life was destroyed after 1968. "I disagree with destroying the whole generation; the mass lynch. I'm not lynching anyone."

The protest and the vote were not the only revolutionary activities. The VPN faction of Slovak Radio had meetings and discussions regularly. According to Michal Berko, they negotiated with the director of the Slovak Radio and with other directors of sections:

> "[A]nd then there was the biggest programme board and director Bejda *[Director of the Slovak Radio]* who openly declared that he was offering me the job of chief editor of the news, then he offers me a job as a programme director and I refused everything. Because I said that we were not there to get new positions; we wanted to start a change in the radio."

After the vote, some of the communists among the editors and reporters left their jobs voluntarily. Ivan Mjartan claims: "I don't know why they left. I know there were many people from management and from the propaganda section." His superior, the chief of the foreign desk, resigned, and the former correspondent in Moscow as well. Michal Berko remembers that the change of the regime was for some people, notably for the communists, unbearable. "There was a woman from news department, she was such a dedicated communist that she fell sick and had to be hospitalised. Another one that wrote poems about the communist party, she fainted as well." Michal Tvarožek has similar memories. "Some were not able not make it, personally. The times had changed and they had skeletons in their closets. They knew they were going to be the next ones to leave anyway."

According to Ľuboš Machaj, there were people at the Slovak Radio who were directed by the ŠtB (the state security service) and by the party. "They knew it was over and they left. It was self-directed process. Those people did not resist. No violence or arrests were needed. They understood. Part of them left, part of them adapted." He estimates only around 10 to 15 people left their jobs at Slovak Radio, while

some people from VPN wanted to fire the other communists as well. "I said we had no mandate to do that. How would we cancel their valid job contracts?"

Ivan Mjartan was a party member, so naturally he did not like the idea of giving notice to all communists. "If we would apply the principle of collective guilt, meaning all members of the party out of their jobs, the state would stop working, the hospitals – everything we need for a normal life – and also in the radio there would be very few people to maintain broadcasting." Ivan Mjartan says that some people left the job with tears in their eyes, and, in his view, not all of the notices given to people were justified. “I had a colleague who was really a good professional, he was at the foreign desk with me; he was preparing for the job of a correspondent in New York. I don’t know whom he hurt or what.”

Michal Tvarožek’s experience with people who lost their jobs at the Slovak Radio was very different from the one described by Ľuboš Machaj. While Machaj worked in the non-political fields of radio drama and the automobile programme, Michal Tvarožek claims that from the political news, probably half of the employees left. As reporters are concerned, they mostly did not lose their positions immediately after the revolution, but changes on this level were connected to abolishment of whole departments (of propaganda and domestic news) and their replacement by the completely new radio news programme Rádiožurnál. This programme, had recreated the newsroom, with the vast majority of reporters having to undergo a selection process. Since this happened later, in 1990, it is further described in the chapter on transformation.

4.3.1. New Directors

Everything was changing quickly in society, politics and in radio as well. When the old directors lost their jobs, someone new had to take their place. According to Ľuboš Machaj from VPN, the process of selecting new editors had democratic features. Some of the new editors replacing those who left were elected by the team of reporters. “There was no other way at that time. Only after the new director Štefko was appointed later, he chose the management. But before that, from the start, those people were approved at a meeting.”

One of the most interesting parts was the selection of the new director of the entire Slovak Radio institution. In December, Viliam Roth became the Director of the Slovak Radio, "Two days before Christmas Eve, on Friday, eight men came to see me, they were from the radio VPN and they asked me to take the lead role at the radio.” He was the director only for 3 weeks. On 12 January, the new minister of culture Ladislav Chudík approached the radio building with the new director Vladimír Štefko. According to Roth’s memory, people did not like the change. The vestibule of the inverted pyramid was full of radio employees, “so they stood up into their way and said, ‘minister, we finally had the director from our people, which has not been possible for years…’” After all, Vladimír Štefko, who was previously a member of the communist party, became the new official director. Ernest Weidler and Michal Berko became deputy directors. Ivan Mjartan recalls: “The change came with new people in charge. Michal Berko, who was my colleague from the same office, became the deputy director. There was a new guy as the chief of news. It was like a fresh breath.” Ivan Mjartan says that they thought about changes in broadcasting from the first day of having new people in charge. They wanted to change the form and the content. “The news before was artificial, controlled, full of speechifying officials. A few days after the personnel changes, we started to work on the new forms.”

Later, Ivan Mjartan was appointed as the editor-in-chief of Rádiožurnál, the new main news programme. He was selected by his former colleague Michal Berko.

4.3.2. The Moment of Absolute Freedom?

Inspired by the research of Swedish researchers (Andersson & Westin, 2009), we asked whether there was a moment of freedom empowering journalists to say on air absolutely anything they wanted. All the respondents agreed that there was such a moment. Ivan Mjartan says the context is very important: "The revolution is one thing and another thing is what we do afterwards. We had a communist party that nobody respected anymore, and we had two civic movements that just connected the people against the previous regime. After the fall of the regime, they had no potential for progress. In these civic movements, there were liberals as well as Christian-conservatives, social democrats and even nationalists. New political parties started to emerge quickly, like in a normal pluralist society. They realised that free elections were coming, and from friends who met in VPN, many people became political adversaries and this caused the end of their friendships."

In this situation of ultimate chaos in society, the journalists in the radio had to broadcast the news. Michal Tvarožek claims that there was a euphoric moment when everything was possible, because the established institutions of the regime, state and society, seized respect.

> "In this period, one did what he felt, without a need for blessing from any institution; they were all discredited. We didn't care about the institutions, especially after abolishing the section about the leading role of the communist party in the constitution. We didn't trust any institution, just ourselves. But people were inexperienced, searching for something, exploring, making mistakes. But also, the politics were made on the streets."

Tvarožek remembers hours of live broadcasts from the meetings that replaced the established programme structure. The Slovak Radio also broadcasted very long discussions, often several hours in duration, directly from the VPN office. There was also a programme called "VPN is broadcasting."

Later, Ivan Mjartan became the chief of news and he claims that although some people felt like they could broadcast whatever they wished, anarchy was avoided.

> "Of course, there was the euphoria and sometimes we had to restrain it. I could not tolerate the moment when people stopped thinking and they thought they could do anything. No, the freedom and an opportunity to say the truth does not mean you can say whatever. If you speak to millions, you have to have certain responsibility; to confirm the information ten times, provide the opinions of all those involved and if there is a claim against someone, not to broadcast it without their reaction. I insisted on a very strict discipline in these things. I did not allow the ridicule of a person just because he or she made a mistake or said something clearly stupid."

Mjartan says that people outside of his news programme, in radio discussions, started to broadcast nationalist and extremist views and "things that had no logic" and, he claims, he fought against them at the management level. According to Ivan Mjartan, it was stabilised soon. Also Ľuboš Machaj remembers "the moment of euphoria" but, according to his memory, there was no anarchy. Michal Berko saw this period similarly.

5. Transformation of the News

After personnel changes, the Slovak Radio started to change its programme structure. The new management tried to employ models from other democratic countries. Most foreign reporters already knew how the models of broadcasting news worked abroad. Ivan Mjartan remembers Michal Berko who was inspired by Austrian broadcasting. Mjartan was also inspired by the historical radio broadcasts of pre-communist, democratic Czechoslovakia. "In 1924, radio started broadcasting the first news program called Radiojournal. So, we concluded that the name of the news is going to be Rádiožurnál. Not Radio News anymore." The need to change everything was why they changed the name of the programme, and they also discussed changing the time of broadcasting. People were used to listen to the Radio News main programme at 18:30. The decision was not only to change the time, but Michal Berko came with a more radical idea: to broadcast the main news of the day at 12:00, and to broadcast it live. "I told Štefko that I want to create a new newsroom that will broadcast live ... it will be a one-hour Rádiožurnál at noon, half an hour in the morning and in the evening also half an hour. And he said, 'Mišo, you must be crazy, who will be broadcasting one whole hour?'"

According to Ivan Mjartan, the news was the most important thing to change for everyone. He discussed the principal change with Michal Berko. "We concluded that we needed to dismiss the newsroom. Then we founded a new one." Mjartan says that the domestic news programme Radio News [Rozhlasové noviny] was the main news program during the former regime, being a symbol of pro-regime propaganda. They wanted to show the listeners that everything had changed. Only a few people from the previous Radio News stayed with Rádiožurnál. Ivan Mjartan, who was put in charge of choosing the new staff, can think of only two reporters who continued covering domestic news. He organised the selection process to hire reporters of other sections in radio.

> "I took them to the studio and gave them tasks to find out whether they can improvise and talk without reading from a paper. We wanted a new form of broadcasting – and what is truer than direct, live broadcasting? I wanted people who didn't need a text approved by the editor to speak for five or ten minutes, to describe what they see. It was a very strict selection. I said, 'put away the papers, imagine there is a ship and a big wave is coming – describe it to the radio.' Some of them said nothing and left. From the previous hosts who read the news for years, only one – Ján Jánošík – was able tell a story that we all laughed at."

Ivan Mjartan also admits that some people were not selected by this process, but he selected them because of his personal relations with them. He says the selection was quick and he knew some of the people for years, for example, reporter Alica Bieliková, who covered domestic news years before 1989, "was the person who taught me to smoke." He also remembers that there was a lot of work with rebuilding the news programme so quickly. The Slovak Radio launched the programme Rádiožurnál on 5 March, 1990, just three and half months after November 1989. "Sometimes we worked twenty hours a day, once I didn't come home for three days. We had to work a lot with those jingles, I trained the regional reporters. We built a new newsroom in just a few weeks." He says everybody worked from the morning until the evening, but the atmosphere was good; there was no need to raise one's voice, no sanctions for mistakes. Ivan Mjartan claims he asked for higher salaries for the reporters in Rádiožurnál, and the new director said yes, so these reporters were the best-paid people in the radio.

Michal Tvarožek was also a part of this new newsroom and he remembers that Rádiožurnál at 12:00 had many listeners: "The running time did not matter, the reporter came, sat at the microphone, and we aired, I don't know... a ten or fifteen minutes long live broadcast from the National Council, we aired the interviews on the topics that people wanted." Ivan Mjartan has the same point of view. The new programme Rádiožurnál was an immediate success. "People were rushing to listen to us at twelve, we became the most influential medium, we dictated the public discourse, we were always the first with topics that newspapers were able to open only the next day. We communicated directly with ministers, we knew about events before they had even happened."

6. Conclusion

The essential aspect of the change at the Slovak Radio, from a totalitarian propagandist channel to a revolutionary, and then later to a standard public-service radio, was the personal change that took part immediately in November 1989. All of those interviewed agreed that the moment when the members of the old communist management of the radio lost their jobs being replaced by new editors and new managers, was absolutely essential for any further changes. This was achieved not only by external pressure on the radio, but also thanks to internal activities such as the protest meeting and the employees voting against the old management.

The new management was first appointed by a pro-democratic movement inside the radio – the radio VPN cell – who chose the first director, Viliam Roth. New editors were also approved internally, from the bottom-up – during the meeting of their future subordinates. We interpret this as a moment of democratic ideals applied in the workplace.

Later, the post-revolutionary management was selected on a higher political level (VPN central and governmental) and appointed externally, with Vladimír Štefko being appointed as a new director by the minister of culture. The principle changed from bottom-up to top-down.

Personal changes in the newsrooms took a longer time. Some communists left voluntarily and immediately, others only later, in 1990, when the previous newsrooms were dissolved, and some stayed and adapted. Those reporters who created the newsroom of the new main news programme Rádiožurnál, had to be reselected. The criteria of this selection were not merely political anymore. Even the editor-in-chief was a former communist, who adapted to a new form of broadcasting.

Another essential aspect of the change was the radical change in the form of broadcasting. After censorship ceased to exist, all of those interviewed described the need for live broadcasting instead the previous system where the broadcast was prepared and edited in advance. We interpret this as demonstration of the newly gained freedom which was also expected by the audience, and that is a reason why the new live-broadcast news format at Rádiožurnál had such a large, immediate success.

One of the research assumptions was also the existence of the moment of the absolute freedom in-between two regimes when almost anything was possible to broadcast. Several participants confirmed that broadcasting changed to something that otherwise would not be possible: the standard programme structure was replaced by long-lasting live broadcasting from the meetings, and there were also discussions held for many hours. On the one hand, some of the participants in the research claim that excesses like nationalism and extremism appeared in the live broadcast as well. On the other hand, none of the participants spoke about any kind of anarchy as order and structure was soon brought back. Our interpretation is that this happened because many experienced journalists kept their jobs and some of them became editors. Therefore, they were used to structure and they kept certain professional standards: censorship did not come back, but it was replaced by the professional responsibility of the editors.

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Interviews

Interview with Michal Tvarožek conducted by Peter Hanák and Lucia Osvaldová, October 2016

Interview with Viliam Roth conducted by Peter Hanák and Lucia Osvaldová, January 2017

Interview with Ľuboš Machaj conducted by Peter Hanák and Lucia Osvaldová, February 2017

Interview with Michal Berko conducted by Peter Hanák and Lucia Osvaldová, February 2017

Interview with Ivan Mjartan conducted by Peter Hanák, February 2017