

**POLITICAL SPEAKING IN BULGARIAN TABLOIDS:
ON THE BORDER LINE BETWEEN BEING ATTRACTIVE AND BEING
EFFICIENT**

By

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the problem of political representation in the Bulgarian tabloid press, the most successful journalist genre in Bulgaria in the transition period after 1989. Following the debates around the European Union in the press, the thesis argues that there still exist formal, “under construction” rules of the juridical and market order, influencing the actual professional values of the journalistic field. These obstacles cause the problematic transformation of the press from being critically minded to be oriented towards the market. Using the methods of critical discourse analysis, semi-structured expert interviews and a focus group, this research presents the actual rules on the journalistic field in Bulgaria. And as a result, this thesis offers empirical data, which shows how the transition from socialism to democracy is reflected in the press.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The emergence and transformation of the current global media landscape is part of a complex process that happens all over the world. Media is becoming an intriguing sociological phenomenon. One measure of its importance is its influencing on events, which are reported and presented through the lenses of the actors in them and through the journalistic practices. Many social scholars admit the importance of emerging “tabloidization” of all kind of media. Today we witness a great shift in relationships between us as citizens (and as consumers), politicians as our representatives and journalists as mediators in between.

The current tabloid press is one of those social phenomena, which are marked by significant change. By presenting gossip and scandalous facts, these media attract more and more advertisers and increase their number of readers. One may observe the thirst for sensations and scandals in current social reality. Popularity of tabloids is growing and this fact cannot be underestimated. That leads to the supposition that citizens are not the same, politicians are not the same and last, but not least, the media market is not the same.

1.1 Relevance of the Topic

This research is oriented towards a problem which intrigues me as citizen and as a person questioning and explaining the uniqueness of the social reality. The tabloid press has been the most successful journalist genre in Bulgaria in the transition period after

1989 from a socialist to a democratic state¹. Generally speaking that creates a specific “tabloid” reality and everyday life ideology in the individuals as citizens. Moreover, the shifted political and market situations create conditions for the emergence of this type of media format, close to the classical notion of the genre of “tabloid”, even though none of the so called “serious” newspapers communicate themselves as a tabloid.

Provoked by this, my main aim is to give one plausible explanation of the general problem of what are those features that allow the tabloid journalism to produce and reports political messages and how the vision of politics in those editions can be explained? What are political acts, messages, and visions of the future? Are there explicit ideologies and how these looks like?

In order to answer these questions, this research looks into the topic of the representation of European Union as a political reality and achievement. During the last 20 transitional years it was explained as a major outcome of the national external politics. By focusing on the coverage of the European Union in the tabloid press, I will show the meaning of the political debate in Bulgaria. This topic is relevant and worth exploring because of its novelty in the sociological literature in the post socialist countries. Bulgaria joined the European Union in 2007 and the political debates around it are still very active. Also, it is a new concept and as a consequence of it is intriguing to see how the politics is represented in what is meant to be entertaining journalistic genre.

¹For example, before 1990 there is no independent newspaper. There is one “official” edition, owned by the governing communist party. After the liberalization of the market in 1990, they were founded majority of the editorial houses.

1.2 Aims of the thesis

Through an analysis including three methodological approaches - critical discourse analysis, semi-structured interviews and one creative group discussion this research project will contribute to expanding a research concern and to give some new directions of better understanding post socialist transition in terms of media issues. Second, some new cases will be defined, producing visions of political messages. Nevertheless, this research is trying to reconsider some main points of media-analysis and to map the relationship between the journalistic field, readers and politicians as main characters in presented reality. This will be done through the expert semi-structured interviews with journalists. Also, working on the specific case of a post-socialist country as Bulgaria, the findings of this research will contribute to the general body of knowledge about what place the tabloid press has in Bulgarian context and how citizens react on it. Using the method of group discussion I will explore some main assumptions about the impact of the journalistic tabloid practice on the readers. Finally, by focusing on the journalistic practice, I produce some different ideas on how this specific professional field looks like and how the boundaries of it as a practice in one post socialist transitional country can be defined. I think that this kind of study is still underdeveloped and will be a good starting point for a future research.

1.3 Research Problematic

In order to explore my questions on the exact situation on the Bulgarian journalistic field and how it is situated in the border between the field of politics and citizens, it is important to define a clear problematic question. The collected data from the fieldwork show abundance of empirical material, which can produce different approaches to the

analyzed topic. The attentive inquiry on what is behind them, will lead to the assumption that the topic of the membership in European Union is considered as a central one in the public discourse of one new member-state as Bulgaria. The Bulgarian journalists working on the European Union are valued as professionals in terms of expert knowledge and their reporting of it should be central to what is happening. However, the rules on the field are different. This puzzle can be solved with using several theoretical concepts. On the one side, I explore the notion and position of the concept of the “field”, introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (1989; 1993;1994; 1998) and on the other, I am working with the idea about the public sphere, placed by Jurgen Habermass (1993). In order to understand those theories, I use several critiques and analyses of them. Moreover, this research presents some examples, showing different sources of evidence of the current concepts of Michael Schudson (2003) and the distinction between story telling and news making, made by Hellen Fulton (2005).

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter I provide a brief overview of some basic theoretical concepts dealing with some general terms in sociology of media. First, I explore the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu towards the notion of the “field” and the case of journalistic field. Second, I examine the concept of public sphere, introduced by Jurgen Habermas and I continue with specifying a possible supplementation of the both theories. I will discuss and specify some criticisms about the abovementioned ideas. As a conclusion I introduce the point of view of Michael Schudson about why media changes today and the vision of Hellen Fulton about the construction of the news as narrative.

2.1 Media and Journalistic Field

Through an analysis of the interrelations between citizens as consumers and journalists, as mediators between them and politicians, it can be unwrapped various ways how to conceptualize modern society. In his book “The field of cultural production” (1993) he positioned the literary field among the “fields” of symbolic and structural power. Together with this he argued that “a journalistic field produces and imposes on the public a very particular vision of a political field, a vision that is grounded in the very structure of the journalistic field and in journalists' specific interests produced and by that field” (Bourdieu 1998:2). Keeping this claim in mind, journalistic field cannot be reduced only to the terms of relations and distinctions between political and economic field and part of the biggest field of cultural production. Johnson points out that: “The journalistic field seen in this light cannot be reduced to merely economic or political functions or isolated from the influence of these fields” (Johnson 2006, 2).

In other words, all the issues, which are connected with the development and emergence of political act, are definitely becoming problems of journalism. Trying to clarify the particularities of the journalism as such, Bourdieu argued that in a certain way, journalistic field is a part of the political field on which it has no such a powerful impact (Bourdieu, 1998). In discussing boundaries of the journalistic field and positioning it in the map of field of cultural production in general, he stated that today, a political agenda is determined by the journalism and especially by television and Bourdieu argued that modern journalism is transforming into the State symbolic violence. For example, one since Bulgaria is a post socialist state as with almost forty five years planned economy and state regulated market; it is legitimate to consider the characteristics of State effect on the journalistic field. Bourdieu is convincingly enhancing his theory with the argument that the state is “the culmination of a process of concentration of different species of capital: capital of physical force or instruments of coercion (army, police), economic capital, cultural (or better) informational capital, and symbolic capital. He claims that the state is a concentration as such which constitutes it as the holder of a sort of meta-capital granting power over other species of capital and over their holders. “ (Bourdieu 1994, 4).

This leads to the formation of, as it should be called statist capital. It must be considered as a tool, which may make possible the state to implement “power over the different fields and over the different particular species of capital, and especially over the rates of conversion between them (and thereby over the relations of force between their respective holders)” (Bourdieu 1994, 5) Moreover, in Bourdieu’s sense, economic, political and academic field are strongly related to development of the Media and political field.

Looking at the changed ground of relationship between politics and readers and journalists, Pierre Bourdieu shows some very important facts about the current situation. He explained “mediatization” of politics with different ways. One of them is the connection between politics and media. Bourdieu mentioned that now the world is “ruled by the fear of being boring and anxiety about being amusing”. (Bourdieu 1998, 2-3) He claims that showing off is becoming more and more important and appearing in different types of media is the only solution for politicians to be interested. He continues by saying that “They are so afraid of being boring, they opt for confrontations over debates, prefer polemics over rigorous argument and in general do whatever they can to promote conflict” (Bourdieu, 1998, 3)

In order to explain these phenomena, Bourdieu is stating that the political realm is changing due to the media. Connected with transformation of politic, it could be said that a kind of “cynical view of politics which is reflected in their political arguments” is created. Media as a ‘translator’ plays a critical role because it changed the relationship/interaction between the politicians and the electors. Furthermore, searching for a plausible explanation of the visions of politics in Bulgarian tabloids, I will draw an image of a “field” as a meeting point of practices of different social agents. I assume that the public sphere is in the same time packaged between different “playgrounds”; interrelated between the fields of journalism, critical public and economic, as well as decision-making process field. Moreover, within it we have varying actors with certain position and its objective characteristics in this field.

Bulgarian media landscape is determined by its boundaries. Therefore the question arises of how the boundaries within the field grow and the reasons for softening?

This could be resolved if it is accepted that field is the name of the structures, capital is its resources and habitus is our skill to manage capital in a field. This point is very relevant for the construction of a description of the journalistic field in Bulgaria. For Bourdieu the social is spatial and he sees society as divided into different semi-autonomous fields (Benson, 1998); all of them are governed by their own "rules of the game".

Many scholars - for example Calhoun (1992), Dalgrhen (1996) and Schudson (1989; 2003), are engaged with the expansion of a media-related field and with the representation of political image they produce. In this research I explore some of the major concepts of Bourdieu's theory of society as specific construct, based on the relationships between different fields. In addition to this main theoretical concept, I am investigating into the Habermas' notion of the "public sphere. Above all, I consider both theories as a supplementing to one another and this assumption gives a fruitful basis for explaining the features of Bulgarian Tabloid Landscape and its emphasis on politics.

In order to clarify the position of a journalistic field in Bulgaria, it needs to be located and opposed to the other "fields". That will produce a possibility to conceptualize the current Bulgarian State. I present it as a discussion about an in-between position of the journalistic field, situated in between the efficiency of cultural and economic capital and related to the fields of cultural production, political and economic fields. This research is oriented towards possible explanation of existing of different ties that connect and interrelate the journalistic "field" with the abovementioned other. Discussing it independently, it allows me to make a connection with the Habermas' concept of public sphere and to answer of a question of the emergence of establishing the media "field" as

corresponding to cultural, economic and political field. Consequently it will give a possibility to create a tight connection with the supplement of field theory with public sphere concept.

2.2 Mediated Public Sphere

For the public discourses of journalism in Bulgaria would be relevant to determine the rules according to which different actors are playing and to elaborate the concept that can be conceptualize the current post socialist state. However, this point can be related to the Bulgarian media sphere with the linkage of the different processes, which encompasses the transition period. That is still improving part within the public sphere. Its difficulties and particularities produce different barriers, which tend to be explained with deeper elaboration of the public sphere concept of Jurgen Habermas.

The sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason. (Habermass 1993, 27).

The notion of the public sphere is oriented towards the assumption that citizens are constantly “dialoguesing” different type of information and sharing different opinions. Hence, through its lenses it can be seen how public sphere,—transform and impacted the media sphere. Moreover, the boundaries of the media sphere became more visible, if we relate and supplement them to the boundaries of bourgeois public sphere.

For the purposes of this research project, I consider Calhoun’s idea of that it lies in its potential as a mode of societal integration. In my opinion, I see this as an assumption that it exists a real possibility for the forming in this time citizens to be

integrate in the formation of the nation-state. Also, he presupposes a bit extra importance of critical public, which is reflecting and influencing the public opinion. I would extend this argument and ask some questions about the popular media. Their market share is growing without specific analytical content. Warner states: “Where printed public discourse formerly relied on a rhetoric or abstract disembodiment, visual media, including print, now display bodies for a range of purposes: admiration, identification, appropriation, scandal, etc. To be public in the West means to have an iconicity” (Warner 1992, 385). This is very valid for the Bulgarian tabloids, which are positioned very “smoothly” on the border limit between its market emergence and institutionalization and political dependency, as I will attempt to show in this thesis.

Commenting this, Calhoun makes a reference to the works of Hanna Arendt and Habermas who both highlight that a private sphere of society could take on public relevance. There are certain educated elites who think of themselves not just as object of state actions but as the opponents of the public authority; they consider themselves as a fundamental part of the public and thereby transformed the abstract notion of *publicum* as counterpart to public authority into a much more concrete set of practices. In regard to the Bulgarian case, the emergence of this critical public is still questionable and it reflects on the establishment of opinion-making media. In this research I present some of the features of the transition period in Bulgaria, which lead to this process.

Another important point is the Habermas’ assumption that the public sphere became institutionalized in the early modern era, through two processes. The first process states that the shifting role of the family and included into the market. The second process is the creation of the public sphere as an element, initially constituted in the world of

letters. Then he uses few different examples and explaining that it can serves as the pattern of the development of the public sphere with the elimination of the institution of censorship and it marked the new level of development of the public discourse. It is seen as natural order and the condition of strong Nation-state can be regarded as a regulative tool of the State apparatus.

Moreover, according to Garnham, Habermas disrespect the notion of public festivals, in sense of Rousseau, and citizenship and theatricality. From it can be derived one more general question: is there a place for resistance/politics in the tabloid version of the mass media, as the theorists of the popular public sphere argue, or is it all about hegemony and a decline of the public sphere as a sphere of critical discourse as Habermas argues?

The problem of representation in media is integral and central part of the political structure of the process. In addition, the debate on the relationship between public communication and democracy is still dominated by the model of the free press. As I have seen for these purposes Garnham is linking Giddens metaphor of the “power container” and Habermas’ concept of the public sphere and provides his theoretical point of view about the connection between nation-state and the emergence of public sphere. He is opposing on the one hand, State as an economic actor and political agent and “power container”; and on the other, the discussion of media and public sphere. He claims that it exists several social groups which are identified as potential elements in this shifting coalition in terms of group identities created through various forms and institutions of mediated communication (magazines, radio stations, record labels) or via

consumer-taste publics that themselves use, as their badges of identity, symbols created and circulated in the sphere of advertising. (Garhnam, 1992)

2.3 Why Media Change Today

Michael Schudson makes some significant historical remarks about temporality of media changing during 20th century in order to understand *why media change?* (As the name of one of his chapter in “*Sociology of news*”, 2003). He describes some particularities of media development in USA and Great Britain and claims that “after 1970s, news could be cheaply produced and yield large audiences” (Schudson, 2003:92). Nevertheless, he mentioned, as a core concept of the process of “trivialization” in news and new impact of soft stories, telling by the newspapers deserve particular attention. He claims to use a concept of British sociologist John Thompson about “subversive theory of scandal” (Schudson, 2003:103). Briefly this concept could be presented as the following: “scandal is an activity for popular media and their audiences who reject the dominant conventions of serious journalism and act out the inversions, travesties, and transgressions of carnival-the world turned upside down.” This can help me to provide some examples of how exactly in order to explain the process and mechanisms of “tabloidization” or “infotainment” of printed press.

Hellen Fulton presents her claim about the construction of the news in the current news media market. She is making a claim about the differentiation between story telling and news, presented as information. The overlapping of both is strongly related to the framing of one news as a personal, human story and to the issue, introduced by Schudson. Also, Fulton is looking towards this process as “a growing trend towards the narrativisation (or ‘tabloidisation’) of news is in fact an increasing tendency to present

information about current events in the form of ‘soft’ news, particularly human interest stories” (Fullton 2005, 242).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

Journalistic field is a particular reality, interrelated and positioned within the different parts of the social sphere. As such, to accomplish the main goal of this project and to draw the relevant picture of the functioning of one specific media landscape, I decided to use different research methods. Considering that the main research interest is about clarification and systematic account of Bulgarian journalistic field and its vision of politics, I choose to use several different techniques in order to achieve the best possible results. The combination of different research tools allowed me to present and analyze one complex field of theory, which cannot be considered as something isolated. For this purpose, my main theoretical assumptions will be exemplified with three basic qualitative sociological methods: critical discourse analysis, several semi-structured interviews and group discussion with readers of the newspapers.

3.1 Selection of *Printed Media and Topic*

As a first research site, I select to analyze and accomplish documentary research, collecting different articles from two main Bulgarian newspapers. On the first side, the dailies *24 chasa* and *Trud*² have been chosen because of the economic reasons. According to the last survey done for counting of the amount of the income coming from advertisements in the Bulgarian printed press, they are the leaders among all the other editions presented there. Moreover, I suppose that nowadays the newspapers are taking and its income more from assuring certain quantity of revenues through the existence of advertisement on their pages, rather than circulation. Thus, lead me to the conclusion

² *24 hours* and *Labor*

that these two newspapers could be considered as a substantial part of Bulgarian media landscape.

In addition to that, this choice was determined by the fact that majority of the Bulgarian social scientists (Lozanov 1999, Spasov 2000) are analyzing them as important testifiers of the social and political changes, happened in the arena of Bulgarian public after 1989. Specifically, those editions are used as a basis for this research. What I have done can be summarize and describe as daily monitoring of the abovementioned editions.

As my main research sites, I have collected every article, dealing with the topic of European Union. This subject has been chosen, because after the contingent event in 1989, which changed the main political trajectory of Bulgaria as a political entity, the topic of EU was the only national goal accepted with a consensus from the society. The accession there was considered as the only possible solution of the social and economic issues, which came right after the shifts in economical and political system. Furthermore, the major hope in the society was connected with the idea about the transition period will finish with the acceptance as members in EU. Moreover, I assume that this topic is very relevant and tangible. First of all, through it can be touched some concrete political acts regarding two sides: on the one side the Bulgarian political playground and the tied with it effective policies; and on the other: the relationships with supranational organization. Thus, allows me to produce a general statement and claim what are the features of the hard parallel existence of the individual in one post socialist transitional country: simultaneously in Bulgarian and European reality.

As a result of this choice, I have found several difficulties during the research fieldwork. I have noticed a huge gap between not enough well explained what exactly is

EU and what will happen when we become members. Hence, this topic can provide evidences about the public sphere theory and it's merging with the field theory. Therefore, I have been lead to certain difficulties in the perception of the union as such and as an entity. For example, its parceled ideology and identity is hardly connected with the actual presented political reality in the Bulgarian newspapers. Consequently, some of my first hypothesis have been falsified and predefined.

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis: Limitations and Advantages

As a first main task of gathering empirical data I choose to use the method of critical discourse analysis. This is not an easy task, taking into consideration that it can be find a lot of difficulties doing that. Contextualizing text and newspapers gives a lot of opportunities and in the same time limits the researcher. One daily edition is always connected with certain particularities. It is issuing on certain day and following different stories each day, gives certain difficulties in front of the social scholar. However, this also can provide an opportunity to re-create certain reality and to analyze it through different methods. For better understanding of the Critical discourse Analysis, let me explain what the margins and borders with content analysis. It is more about relationships between expect and content without an approach to the validity or actual relationships could be established.

“Content analysis is often done to reveal the purposes, motives and other characteristics of the communicators, as they are presumably “reflected” in the content” (Berelson 1952, 264). Moreover, according to Berelson, the content can be related as a common-meeting ground for the communicator, the audience, and the analyst. This is the main triangle through whose relationships could be approached social reality and world.

They are getting into communication and content analysis assumes that the quantitative description of communication is meaningful” (Berelson 1952, 264) Moreover, he explains and shows very convincingly which are the main characteristics of the content analysis, insisting on the quantitative product and of collection of meanings.

Also, the content analysis is offering just one side of the social context. For Van Dijk it is an interdisciplinary tool (Van Dijk, 2008), which affects the whole sociopolitical world. The cross-disciplinarity of this method is meant to make a vivid analytical approach and it can be perceived as certain kind of a combination between different types of qualitative sociological and anthropological methods. In addition, Van Leeuwen is claiming that: “discourse is not only analyzed as an autonomous verbal object, but also as a situated interaction, as a social practice” (Woodak 2001,9). Instead of analyzing conversation between neighbors, we may, for example, have to do fieldwork in a neighborhood, observe how people talk in cafes or other public places, and describe many other aspects of this communicative event, such as temporal or spatial settings, special circumstances, the participants and their communicative and social roles and the various other activities, being accomplished in the same time “(Van Dijk 2008, 3-4).

As an outcome of above mentioned boundaries and characteristics, Van Dijk mentions that one of the principles of the critical discourse analysis is the opportunity to go deeply and to learn about the connections “between discourse structures and power structures more or less directly. This will often be effective and adequate”(Van Dijk 1993, 250). For him, there is a tension that we may assume that certain directive speech acts such as commands or orders may be used to enact power, and hence also to exercise and to reproduce dominance.

The critical discourse analysis is an appropriate method for this research, because it offers interpretations of the meaning of the texts. Otherwise, there is a possibility of doing just collecting data and tension of quantifying textual features and deriving meaning from this. Equally important for using critical discourse analysis is that it is concerned with social problems. Discussing the coverage of EU in Bulgarian newspapers, for example, can draw the attention on the notions of different important terms, all related to the perception of European Union among the individuals. For example: what is a “union” and what is the difference with “community”; what is a national government; what is the notion of objectivity in one transnational association and how can be explained some sorts of interaction on international level. This proves the argument that discourses and the language usage can be very ideological (Schiffrin 1994). They are intending to be connected to some kind of a research of their interpretation, reception and social effects.

3.3 Methodological Argumentation

For the purposes of this research during the fieldwork in month of April 2010, I conducted 4 semi-structured interviews. Their main outcome was to produce a vision of journalistic field from inside. The main criterion according to which I choose my respondents was their occupation with journalistic practice. I have been assuming that this tool will allow me to do deeply in the specific field and to inquire into the journalistic discourse. It was very intriguing to interrogate them about own their practices, their allegiance to the institution, especially when it comes to journalists: how do they work, how do they select topics, what are the criteria of excellence, how does one make it to

page one etc.³ Furthermore, this interviews help to get an overview of the relations between journalists as professionalism and their “object” of representation – the decision makers. With this, I will have an approach towards the hints, implied in their work and produced on the pages of the newspapers.

Certain objective difficulties during the research period had made me to stay limited only to the 4 main newspapers in Bulgaria⁴. If I had more time, I would made interviews with people who are working on this topic in majority of the editions, but for this project I am working only with the first 4.⁵ As an additional part of my research, I made one focus group with readers of tabloid newspapers. The main guideline⁶ was created similarly to the pattern of the semi-structured interviews, conducted with the journalists. This allows me to compare how similar issues are perceived by two, supposing connected parts of the media sphere: on the one side those who create the news and on the other from those who are the consumers of it. Also, I wanted to verify how the main dimensions, appearing as crucial in the discourse analysis part, could be related to the actual audience. Another important purpose was to follow and inquire into the impact of the tabloids as a genre, presenting politics. In what follows I offer various explanations of the question how the journalistic field functions in Bulgaria in its relationships with politics and how the readership distinguishes the actual messages.

Journalism is a practice about producing and dispersing information about important contemporary affairs (Schudson, 2003). Moreover, as a provider of communication and as a container of symbols, it is determined by its everyday

³ The main guideline is attached in the Appendix

⁴ Again following the amount of advertising for the last year.

⁵ They are *24 hours*, *Labor*, *Standard* and *Diary*.

⁶ Which can be found attached in the appendix

partnership with the readers. They are the targets of journalistic practice. For that reason, all the findings of this focus-group can be seen as an essential point in clarifying the assumptions taken with the conducted interviews and collected data.

This group-discussion had as an aim to produce a vision of tabloids and journalistic practices as a market product. In other words, with conducting and later analyze it, I explain and present how readers apprehend tabloids as a cultural product. Moreover, these interviews could help me to specify different problems and how these problems are perceived by the readership. In addition, this group discussion is tightly connected to the benefits of the critical discourse analysis. It was created more as creative, brainstorm discussion. The main idea was to generate and invent some personal in-depth understanding of the journalistic field in Bulgaria. As a result, it produced particular vision of the limits and boundaries of this specific three-dimensional construct: the journalistic-political field and the readers.

I had the great opportunity to make it at the end of my research. Like this I have already had the main dimensions extracted from my article collection and had in mind about the results of the critical discourse analysis. To sum up, the decision of using focus group was made in order to elaborate on some perceptions, feelings and motivations considering journalism as a practice.

CHAPTER 4: BULGARIAN MEDIA CONTEXT

The vision and the image of the politics in Bulgarian tabloids may be understood and explored through careful immersing in the local context. That includes attentive explanation of the practices, which occur in the Bulgarian journalism as such. Furthermore, it is very important to have in mind some peculiarities, which embrace the whole development of the journalistic field in Bulgaria and its links with the other fields.

Bulgarian Media landscape is quite young. Most of the newspapers, TV broadcast channels and radio stations are functioning since 1989 or 1990 - right after the political transformation in 1989. As a new phenomenon, it is still very arguable question to what extent these channels of information are successful and how they are connected with politics and politicians. This process of “establishment” of the new democratic Media shows different relations between readers, journalists and politicians.

After 1989 Bulgarian public sphere appears in a specific situation, which focuses its development for many years. The transition from the former, totalitarian type of newspapers before the change and the later market-oriented form produces a much more complex process. Political transformation combined with the ordained path to democratization in Bulgaria and controlled transition from planned to market economy is creating conditions for developing specific “avenue” publicity. New power resources begin to reflect on themselves through their coverage in the media. Press party ceases to exist and come to the forefront of new dailies, supported by market conditions in which are working. It could be said that they find common fields that interact after the establishment of socialist rule in Bulgaria in 1945 and after "changes" to a democratic form of government. Publicity in both periods is quite unstable in terms of civic activism,

which it structured. Therefore may be seen a number of parallels between the two stages, and contemporary situation and the promotion of popular journalism is just one of the most evident.

To explain the context about political and civil action in Bulgaria should be taken into account some essential features. Media scholars there explain in different ways the characteristics of the new situation. The pluralization of the printing market led to the formation of qualitatively new editions and the rules in it. The officiousness of the outgoing press is changing together with the principle of distribution. The impose conditions on the market, which should lead to the relative autonomy of journalism and the press and to the emergence of an independent press. Politicized and party division of the newspaper market is the decisive difference in terms of print media at the time of socialism.

Bulgarian democratic publicity can be considered as a peculiar accent in transitional Bulgarian environment. Political analysts and scientists dealing with the problems of transitions point transformations in the public domain as one of the main achievements of the post 1989th year. However, the old elites are no longer legitimate; the new ones are still not accepted in the public and naturally seek a place where they can express their positions. Democratization of the position of publicity, the intellectual elite has failed to impose his stamp as a platform from which to speak and to defend those positions. Emerging market is dictated by media sensationalism and criminal-news, which can ensure fast and quick profit buying a newspaper. These types of newspapers, in return, refer to readers as a customer. This position entitles them to be not only consumers but also citizens; to be able to set their own interpretation of what happens in

political life through the consumption of a newspaper. Independent marketing and print media does not automatically mean independence in interpretation. The autonomous dailies in Bulgaria offer a specific discourse to their readers and allow them to choose the information they need.

At the beginning of its existence, post-socialist newspapers offer a totally new style of writing. Probably it is a searched effect, but the style is clearly distinguished from the totalitarian one. This can become visible when the slang of the street begins to invade the official publicity in the case of *24 hours* as its mouthpiece.

"At the level of language change are highlighted and intensified the contrast with the previous era is clearly expressed. Actively invade new language in the discursive construction of reality of the transition " (Spasov 2000, 52).⁷ Rejecting the literary language newspaper occupies the position of the mass ordinary reader and is directly expresses what he wants to read.

After completion of the transformation in Bulgarian society, the Bulgarian public is starting to develop a new road, which determines the new evolving social situation. The new context indicates the direction in which they can be seen the problems in social and cultural-political stratum. Bulgarian publicity during the transformation appears to be facing not represented experts, "bricolage" coverage, which can be seen in the requirements of the new market relations and all this coupled with the political ideas and positions that cannot be clearly defined. Thirst for news - as they are, leads to the emergence of daily newspapers which are either strictly partisan – "Duma" and "Democratsia"⁸ or are called "Hybrid tabloid". One of the peculiarities in the

⁷ All the translations from Bulgarian to English are made by me

⁸ "Duma" means word, "Demokratsia"-democracy

development of Bulgarian media in 90's is the lack of typical features daily press. Press in Bulgaria is fully realized only in the form of tabloids (Znepolski 1997; Lozanov 1999; Kiosev 1999).

"Overall Bulgarian tabloid publications operate on two levels. The first comes from best-selling dailies such as "Dneven Trud" and "24 chasa". We might call this kind of dailies hybrid tabloid publications. They combine the qualities of the serious and tabloid press" (Spasov 2000, 52).

Both types of press play different roles. Hybrid Bulgarian press is that phenomenon which is most homogeneous in terms of market expectations of the situation. Independence from the state and self-dependent constraints and implies the presence of dispersed topics on the pages of these journals. I consider that in this type of media representation many of difficulties of a transition period in Bulgaria can be seen, during the so-called "transition" period.

This particular definition will be used because it shows the extremity and specificity of Bulgarian newspapers. Even though, I understand the basic notion of "tabloids", as: "The keen observer of a new society of sensational scandals, popular culture crazes, organized crime, spectator sports, skyscraper buildings, new immigration, and debates about sexual morality" (Wallace 2005).

Hence, all of these explanations are needed in order to understand and analyze the particular case study of what is political speaking in Bulgarian semi/hybrid tabloid press. I am defining it through this method, because I think that it is one of the most appropriable and giving a lot of opportunities to debate it. Moreover, this case, which drives the whole research, could help us for better comprehension of how is Bulgarian

media working and what are the rules of the field which regulate it and make possible the actual political debate in the tabloids.

As Ragin claims, the idea of case analysis is to present the objects of inquiry as similar and enough separate to allow considering them as comparable to the same general phenomenon. Moreover, he is claiming that social scientists, which conduct case studies argue that this cases are typical or exemplary or extreme or theoretically decisive ((Ragin:1992; Platt:1992). I assume that here presented case is very significant for the development of Bulgarian Media and through it, can be made a lot of conclusions about it and about the conceptualization of the current Bulgarian State through its journalistic field.

CHAPTER 5: THE STRUCTURE OF BULGARIAN JOURNALISTIC FIELD AND THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A CASE OF POLITICAL ISSUE IN BULGARIAN PRESS

From the actual situation in the field and its connections with the articles, I define 4 basic dimensions of perceiving and apprehending the European Union with which could be explained the problematic that in Bulgarian newspapers; there is lack of professional talking and speaking about the EU and there are more internal and attractive messages which engage the spicy details from the field.

As a departure point for the critical discourse analysis, I am taking the theoretical assumption of supplementation on the one side of the theories of Bourdieu about the field and in details about the journalistic field; and on the other the concept of Habermas on development of the public sphere. Therefore, a logical question arises about how the connection between political representations of the European Union in the newspapers on the one side can be related and empowered, journalism as a practice (or *techne*⁹) on the other and readerships position towards lack of opinion. What does that mean about journalism in Bulgaria and what does that mean about the politics? To whom the information is oriented? What does it serve? What type of an ideology is presented and how does this ideology serve Bulgarian national politics?

The Bulgarian media landscape is a field that has become professionalized and institutionalized in the last 20 years. It is still underdeveloped in terms of its emergency as a market: symbolic and economic. Next, the heritage of the socialist period in the

⁹ The word “τέχνη” is coming from Ancient Greek and means The set of principles, or rational method, involved in the production of an object or the accomplishment of an end; the knowledge of such principles or method; art. *Techne* resembles *episteme* in implying knowledge of principles, but differs in that its aim is making or doing, not disinterested understanding- <http://www.ditext.com/runes/t.html>

country, such as not very well defined and established relationships within the field itself and its relations produced an interesting picture. The media market appears as something relatively new after the collapse of the planned economy and its regulation on everything, including news production and media functioning.¹⁰

To look deeply into the Bulgarian journalistic field and to scrutinize better its features, I need to describe its structures and its formal shape. This is important in order to produce a relevant claim about the actual rules on the field, which determine and regulate it. To illustrate this, I will sketch the positions of the different actors. As a consequence, I give an overview of independence of the journalistic field in one post socialist country; outline the obstacles in front of the dependency and the lack of autonomy of the journalistic field and will describe the reasons why there is lack of autonomy in Bulgarian journalistic field. In order to achieve this goal I made 4 semi structured interviews with 4 journalists. 3 of them are working for the leaders in daily editions- Mihailina Dimitrova for *Labor*, Petya Dikova for *24 hours* and Krassimira Temelkova for *Standart*.¹¹ All three of them are editors in the section, dealing with international and European affaires. I also made an interview with the Svetlomira Pavlova, journalist from the leading weekly edition “Kapital”.¹²

TNS/TV Plan is the only market research agency in Bulgaria measuring the amount of income, coming from advertisements in the printed media. According to its data for the year 2009, *24 hours* and *Labor* and *Standart* follow them. This formal

¹⁰ There was a great debate in Bulgarian society around the announcement of the journalists, working for the former state secret service. That is why, the new generation of journalists is considered as experienced the transition and it is highly important to emphasize their self-definition as dissimilar from the previous one. And this can be found in terms of covering news and in terms of professional values.

¹¹ During the fieldwork research, I found the information that *24 hours* and *Labor* have the same correspondent in Brussels, dealing with the European union topic.

¹² This was influenced by the extreme popularity of this edition, proved by the conducted focus group.

criterion is used as a basis in my choice of contacting people, who are working for those daily newspapers. As market leaders, I suppose that they have the largest readership. Moreover, this economic benchmark can be assumed to be a result of the start of the journalistic market in Bulgaria. Hence, here there is an effort of presenting not only the most profitable newspapers, but also, to take an overview of the topic of the European Union from the most desirable for different companies editions.

Particularly, *24 hours* and *Labor* occurred that belong to WAZ Mediengruppe, a German company, holding parts of the media market in different Southeastern European Countries.¹³ They started their business in Bulgaria in 1997, buying the only private media company Pressgroup 168 chasa and its main product *24 hours*. A few months later, they expanded their business with acquiring part of “Media Holding” and its good *Labor*. Most importantly these two editions are considered as the most important “witnesses” of the transition, which happened after the 1989.

Standart is different. It is owned by one Bulgarian lawyer-Todor Batkov. The newspaper was established in 1992 and it was the first newspaper in the country with online edition.

These three editions do not claim any political position. In contrast, *Kapital* is proclaimed as a newspaper with a conservative political position and it is considered as the most prestigious weekly newspaper in Bulgaria. Its owner is media group “Economedia”.

By conducting interviews with “practitioners” working for different owners, I was able to create a better picture of the journalistic field and media landscape on one side,

¹³ According to its website, they have a possession of different media products in Austria, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Russia.

and on the other check the validity of a correlation between the importance of the ownership and presentation of the analyzed topic.

The chosen journalists write on the European and international issues. They have clear arguments and experience towards the process of debating EU during the membership application and afterwards. They have different personal and educational background. Mihailina Dimitrova from “Trud” has a Master degree in political science and European studies; Petya Dikova graduated as a philologist; Krasimira Temelkova again has a diploma in political science. Svetlomira Pavlova from “Kapital” graduated in economics. It is evident that no one studied journalism. That would lead to the assumption of the value of the journalistic school in Bulgaria and can draw an interesting approach towards the differences and difficulties with the establishment of the autonomous journalistic field. Reasons why can be searched in many various aspects. For example, one of them could be assumed as lack of journalistic school due to absence of established intellectual elite. That reflects very much on the institutionalization of the field as such and of deficiency of autonomy of it. That leads to the assumption that the journalistic field in Bulgaria is still very dependent on the market and politics, rather than on objectivity and formal intellectual circles, as Habermas argues. Furthermore, this supplements the concept of Bourdieu about the field, because distinguishably shows the deficit of specific capital. To sum up, this may be referred to the conspicuous restatement from the readers about the quality of Bulgarian journalists and its lack of opinion making.

The consequences of the lack of specific journalistic education or the reason of its devaluation may be searched in various places. Journalists as a collective tied to express

very close and self-maintaining community feeling.¹⁴ For this reasons it could be produced very tight description of the field and its internal connections.

This argument can be related to Bourdieu' claim that the journalistic field as such is situated on the border between political field and individuals and through the positions and opinions of the journalists towards the political field can be explored and differentiate different "habitus" and practices towards the journalistic field in Bulgaria itself. The collected articles are significant part of the field and their inquiry may offer the existence of a debate, through which can be researched my basic theoretical assumptions. Moreover, there are several themes, which are considered as central one in reporting the EU and following the analytical approach towards the challenging relationship between politics and journalistic field in Bulgaria.

5.1 Political and Social Context

To concretize the context and to draw a more tangible picture of what was happened during the month of April in the European Union, I will discuss the actual details from my set of articles.

At the beginning of the month, the world is still under the impression of the earthquake in Haiti ("Donation conference of UN for Haiti" *24 hours*, 01/04/2010) and collects donations for the people who are living there. ("10 billion USD gathered as a help for Haiti, *24 hours* 02/04/2010). In the meantime, the chief of the European Commission Barosu is suspected of participation in some corrupt deal about helicopters in Portuga, considered from *Labor* as a bribe *Barosu dragged into bribe affaire* (03/04/2010).

¹⁴ One example for this could be that after one week on the field, in the main edition houses of newspapers, they were already discussing one student from CEU.

The main event of the month though is very different. On 10th of April the Polish president Leh Kachinski and around 100 polish politicians and presenters of the polish political elite died in a plane crash (“Flags on a half today in the whole Union” *24 hours* 10/04/2010; “Instead of match in Madrid, Kachinski choose Katin” *24 hours* 12/04/2010; “Carpet from candles for the perished president” *Labor* 13/04/2010). This news was central for the newspapers all over Europe for at least two weeks. It invoked some national feelings, local patriotism and empathy among the other members of the Union.

The other major event was the eruption of the volcano Eyjafjallajökull in Iceland, which produced a crisis on the airports all over the Europe. (“Cloud from a volcano descending towards Europe” *24 hours* 16/04/2010; “Travelers took a taxi to Vienna” *Labor* 18/04/2010). The fear of damages from the ash, erupted by the volcano closed the airports in almost every part of Europe and affected the air industry all over the world. That provoked some concrete acts, done by the European Commission towards providing enough security of the common air space and debate around the nature. (“European Commission tightens up the rules for the air transport” *Labor* 20/04/2010)

At that time, the financial crisis in Greece had been falling sharply and the Union provided certain financial aid for resolving its economical problems. This topic was constantly repeating in every newspaper and formed certain attitude towards the whole financial situation in the region. (“Shengen saves Greece” *24 hours*, 12/04/2010; “Greece is searching for emergence help from European Central Bank” *Labor* 09/04/2010).

To conclude, this month offered an abundance of major events, which can make available clear political position from the Bulgarian side. And also, it showed why the

European Union as a topic present a very fruitful debate around certain events; through which could be extrapolate the sense of politics in particularity.

5.2 Journalistic Practice

Following the materials presented in the articles, for Bulgarian it looks like European Union is only money and punitive procedures. This can be exemplified in the headings as: “Bulgarian forest is waiting for 300 billion euro” (*Labor* 20/04/2010); “Brussels will not stop the money for us, if we find mistakes by ourselves” (*24 hours* 09/04/2010); “Europe saves Greece with financial aid” *Labor* 12/04/2010. Thus, the reader is having a picture of the European Union as a regulative institution, which is prosecuting and punishing the bad behavior and Bulgarians will be the next in line. In addition, the main actors in decision-making process are involved in situations as this, explained by Simeon Diankov minister of finance of Bulgaria “*Next week, I will be ashamed on the summit of ministers of finance of Europe*. In an article from 10/04/2010 in *24 hours* he is blaming the former government about the budget deficit, which will not allow Bulgaria to apply for entering ERM mechanism.¹⁵ Also, he connects the difficulties in the financial sphere with certain issues unsolved by the previous rulers and says, “*Next week the ECOFIN meeting in Madrid will gather a great shame. From outstanding Students of Europe together with Estonia, will now gather shame, while finance ministers explain what had happened. Because the EU does not distinguish between past and present rulers, they have only Bulgaria*”.

¹⁵ ERM II is an exchange rate fluctuation between the euro and other EU currencies do not disrupt economic stability within the single market, and to help non euro-area countries prepare themselves for participation in the euro area. The convergence criterion on exchange rate stability requires participation in ERM II- http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/euro/adoption/erm2/index_en.htm

Furthermore, this is very visible through the expose of one of the journalists - Petya Dikova. When she is describing her job, she said that:

Though, it has to be said that before there was a talk about the EU as a thing that some money will come just like this; this was kind of a myth in society. Everyone thought that EU is extraordinary money funds, which are going to help us. Yes, but it turned out that we have to cherish them. Now, people realized that the membership itself is not easy. They give us some opportunities and we can take or not take them.

5.3 The externality of the European Topic

The European topic is graphically positioned far behind in the newspapers. That gives much more impression that the reportage and covering the news, which are coming from Brussels, are distant and far away from the actual happening of our political agenda.

As a topic, which can be considered as a significant and giving an opportunity to explore the meaning itself of the European Union, the data show one perception of it as a externality in apprehension and perception about the covering the European Union. The actual position on the newspapers pages is varying. Depending of the materials, they are all positioned after the page 20. In *24 hours*, the name of the page is “Outside”; and the name of the page in *Labor* is “Planet”. These are the main sections on which can be found the majority of the materials about the news from EU. Along with the titles of the pages, which imply certain type of remoteness, if we are looking very attentively, it can be discovered that the writing about it is always colored with words, expressing externality, distance from the actual happening of the news. “*Europol applauds us about the crime struggle*”, writes *Labor* on 08.04 in an article describing the efforts of the Bulgarian ministry of internal affaires and its grade from Brussels.

Furthermore, the interviewees described the union as is something coming from outside of us, as a community. Krasimira Temelkova gave her opinion, saying that: *It*

looks like the membership stayed outside and we left all the other part of it aside. ; We are Bulgarian journalists and we take into consideration our prospective. It's unquestionable. This statement is strongly repeated in the opinions of the presenters of the media. It can be found in the statement of Mihailina Dimitrova and her explanation about the change, which is coming with the ascension of the union. There was a strong Anti-NATO wave during the attacks against Serbia, so this was transferred automatically towards the EU. Than we had two types of attitude- yes, it is useful-first; second-it is not, coz we are going to be assimilate from the richer countries- we are going to lose part of our economic sovereignty, political, geostrategic etc.

She was also arguing that the crucial moment in the transformation of the perception towards the future accession into the European Union was the moment of the elimination of the visas. *It was the borderline after which we understood that our life is changed. I witnessed that-when this happened the life here got more vivid. We changed our approach to life. I started talking that EU is not only authority from the flag with the stars, but these are some little things, which could give us a result (Mihailina Dimitrova, 2010).*

In addition to that it comes the claim from Dikova. She presented her view about the role of the government in this type of opposition. She imposes the crucial role of the national government in certain kind of a regulation about the division between European and Bulgarian context. *And here comes something, which is provoked by the national governments- they are trying to politicize more. And it changed into debate-we here, they there. And only the national government could be blamed for this. People are searching for ordinary stuffs-services.*

5.4 National Identification and “External” European Union

Together with the claim that “we” are on a distance from them – the problem with who are we and who are they and our own national identification towards the community, comes the problem with the explanation of the journalistic “habitus” towards the politics. The basic relationships between them and the political field are from highly importance, looking at the coverage of political issues. There is no clear distinction and clearly defined roles of the journalists as “translators” (Temelkova, 2010) and politicians as decision-makers. Hence, it is very difficult to produce an image of strictly defined relationships between two of them.

According to the Treaty of Membership of Bulgaria and Romania,¹⁶ there is a procedure of monitoring mechanism for the two countries. This mechanism is centered around the development of them on several topics¹⁷ and it is issued twice a year. As a main outcome and political issue, it is perfectly normal that this is the event, which takes the most of the media attention. However, it got the most coverage and it is appreciated as a weakness from the journalists. *“You know about the mechanism of control that we have and we stayed focused only on this control and reports twice a year”* Her comment on this was:

During the first three years of the membership, we stayed centered around ourselves. You know about the mechanism of control that we have and we stayed focused only on this control and reports twice a year. Like the membership stayed outside and we left all the other part of it aside. ; we are Bulgarian journalists and we take into consideration our prospective. It’s unquestionable. I do not say that the reports are not important, but me, personally I do not approve this focusing only on one topic.

¹⁶Signed on 25.04.2005

¹⁷ For Bulgaria it is on the areas of judicial reform, fight against corruption and organizational crime

The above-mentioned topic is very strongly related to the vision of national identity, produced through the analyzed interviews. Part of the job of the media is to generate news and messages, which are with ideological sense. For that reason, the idea of offering clear national identity is significant achievement of the modern public sphere. Considering the particularities, which become visible with the chosen topic of this research, should be pointed out the importance of the opposition between the national and European politics. This is quite visible in the responses of the journalists and it is another important part of the construction of reality, which they give to their readers.

5.5 Spatial Diversity: Who is here and who is there?

Another important topic is the actual spatial and social opposition between “here” and “there”. For Krasimira Temelkova *“that is what I meant all the time. Sometimes we are behaving as someone who is not external part. EU is part of us and we are part of EU. But we are still young member. We have to perceive that we are true part of the union. I hope that this is going to happen. The problem is not only in journalists; it’s always about the people.”* This suggestion could be related to the proposed view of positioning of the journalistic field and its dependency from the politics and its responsibility towards the readers. This dependency is also related to the lack of autonomy and institutionalizing of specific rules on the field in Bulgaria. Also, it could be referred to the idea of state-media relationship, which can be better conceptualized through an understanding of the journalistic field. In the light of opposition with some significant other from outside, it is easy to connected it to the assumption about one peripheral country which is seeking its criteria of excellence, reflecting itself with considered as something more countries, institutions and practices. For Dimitrova *“this*

is everywhere. And she proves her statement, saying that “Because it is still not the moment when the so-called European citizen decided that EU is more important than it’s country. The countries are still countries-members, not actual members in the real sense of the word. And I don’t think that this citizen exists. And he doesn’t need to exist. Only your rights can give you more self-confidence.

5.6 The Journalism as Vocation

There is a strong claim about the role of journalists in their work as a “vocation”. The perception of what they are doing as educators of a society and enlighteners, can be explored in Bourdieu’s terms like the specific “habitus” and practices. That could give broader prospective about the field and its substances.

Talking about the actual journalistic field, it should be taken into consideration the relationships within the field and how they are constructed from the participants of it. It is a very hard task, because for them is very hard to rationalize and put words into practice their own personal experience. In order to achieve this goal, has been put the question about the mission of one newspaper. Hence, they were asked about their position in front of the field of power (Bourdieu, 1989).

The produced answers are convincingly showing the approach of the practitioners in the field. They are self-defining themselves as “position-makers”. That allows producing and creation of certain type of dominant position, faced by Dimitrova as: *One national newspaper has to form a position. And to show that everything which is happening of Earth is affecting everyone of us.* Thus, informing and delivering certain type of news, journalists are managing to get the responsibility of giving messages in a positivistic way.

Because, there are some people, who believe desperately in what is said in the newspaper. It is written there and that's it. End. But this has two sides-weak and strength one. It is weak, because media landscape in BG is a little bit strange and the majority of the paper media are serving some corporate interests. And sometimes one event is reported on two different ways. The strength point is that you can form a civic position. (Mihailina Dimitrova, 2010).

Here, following the claim of Bourdieu that analyzing one field, the scholar should “map out the objective structure of the relations between the positions occupied by the agents or institutions who compete for the legitimate form of specific authority” (Bourdieu 1989, 40). Consequently, the media presenters work on a polysemic level of the political and messages that they produce and are striving for legitimate position towards the problems, on which they are talking about. The opinion of Dimitrova is repeated by Temelkova saying that,

We are the link between the different institutions in the society, for me, it is, but very idealistically, and it is to educate, to spread knowledge. But I don't know if it's happening in reality. You are not just telling something; you must explain why you inform him on this, not on the other way. And when there is no background of one news, it is just news, thrown in the space.

5.7 The Language as an Edge point

As one of the most visible transitions in Bulgarian society, media market and landscape give some basic directions about the development of the language as such. As an act, the language is supposed to inter-act within the field and also is empowered to present some of the real connections there. Looking at the articles, it is very visible that it exists a very disrespectful language towards the Bulgarian politicians and extremely positive and courteous towards the European ones. “*Brussels denied involvement in the office of Kristalina*” (Labor, 13/04/2010); “*Boyko is going to watch a match in Madrid*” (24 hours, 08/04/2010); “*The chaimans of the EU did not attend the funeral ceremony of Kachinski*”(Labor, 19/04/2010) are some headings and parts of articles showing two of

the above mentioned assumptions: the distance from Brussels and local ties between us. On the language level, it could be analyzed several differences towards the former, “planned” public sphere. Here comes the argument about the dependencies of a socialistic heritage in all spheres of the citizenship. The newspapers as part of the civic presentation in civil society are strongly dependent from the participants with a leading role in it. After all, offering certain type of messages is already a part of this dominant-power relation within we manage to integrate or not our own civil existence.

Asking people who are writing about this irreverence of the language, they produce the same message: it is part of our division between here and there. In the interview, Temelkova explains that *“Brussels: it holds the poll and the carrot and we are still the bad kid, something is not going well.”* There is a very interesting position about this, declared from Mihailina Dimitrova:

Because there is a problem of being peasant in the last years in Bulgaria and the journalists, instead of stopping this process, they became its flagman. But politicians allowed this, so the responsibility is shared: People has stopped believe in politics and politicians. The PR wants to present the person with its own features and after – to be sold. And along with that can be sold the serious topics. There is no that evident difference between the yellow press and serious one. This leads to simplification of language and attitude towards the politicians.

This is the point where Fulton and Schudson are saying right about the degree of “softening” of the news. The global trend is orientated towards production of something personal and intimate. The readers are those who require some “spicy” interesting details about the last going out of the president Sarkozy and his wife Carla Bruni. Fulton offers that claim

“Newspaper readers are unlikely to be surprised by such a headline as ‘Mother of three awarded honorary doctorate’ but might well find a similar statement, ‘Father of three awarded honorary doctorate’, a little odd. In the world of the news media, which is supposed to be the ‘real world’, women are more likely to be

defined by their domestic relationships whereas men are defined by their occupations. These are among the narrative templates that characterize the discourse of news” (Fulton 2003, 221).

This personal element is illustrated the best by the phrase of Dikova, qualifying the attitude regarding Kristalina Georgieva¹⁸. *“Politicians allow us to use this kind of language. We are not that strict and moreover Kristalina is ours and we like her”*. In other words: it is significant to present an image of one politician, including in it some personal evaluation, rather than respectful attitude like between citizens and institutions.

5.8 Readership Perception: Context and Findings

In this part I present my main findings, which came to light through the group discussion that I made at the end of my fieldwork. I offer an overview of the data gathered about the different substances of the politics, presented in the tabloids. Politics are made from various “ingredients”. To illustrate this, below I provide data and give indication of the position on the problem of the softened boundaries between the existence of crucial debate or story telling in terms of proffering political analysis. In addition to that, this part of the research reveals more about what is a journalistic practice in Bulgaria and how it affects the reporting/storytelling about the politics. For that reason, the position of the presented sample of readership is important, because media cannot be studied in isolation – their field is related to all the substances of the social world.

How readers approached and apprehended the media reality during the month of April gave me an idea about some crucial elements in the positioning of different actors

¹⁸ The Bulgarian Commissioner in the current European Commission

on political and public sphere playground. It is important to mention that this focus - group was planned as a creative group discussion. That generated various personal approaches to the topic and, in addition, the group dynamic gave a very detailed approach of the question how the influence of the “tabloid” culture can be measure and how politics looks according to the readers.

The sample was made up of people between twenty two and thirty. Their educational background varies between political science and philology. The aim was to have a picture from people who are aware of the political process and have everyday contact with the newspapers. I acknowledge that it is not methodologically correct to work only with one group without comparison with other case extreme, but the main difficulties was to find and recruit individuals who want to participate in a discussion about Bulgarian tabloids. For the purposes of one future project I would like to continue with this method, following the attitudes towards the print media in a broader context.

The biographical context of the participants who took part of the discussion can be summarized as follows: Raya is a marketing assistant in the pharmaceutical company of Bayer. She is twenty four years and studied management and European studies. She is interested in yoga and playing a guitar and was just accepted for a MA in publishing. Yordanka is twenty seven years old, graduated in European Studies and MA in psychology of organizational attitude. Today, she is working in a company dealing with informational service of banks. She has one brother, twenty five years old and she is interested in music and travelling. Zornitsa graduated in university in the field of English philology and loves to travel; She has one older brother, living in France, working also as a translator. Parvan holds BA in journalism and MA in political science; now, he is

doing his Phd in political science; working in a political party and different electoral campaign. He has an older brother and sister and likes football. Petar has a BA in Economics and now he is in a MA Urban studies and has two sisters. Currently he is unemployed. Gergana is a bachelor in political science and she is also unemployed, twenty two years old. This background is important because some of the conclusions coming out from the answers can be tied with the personal history of each participant; and it is offering the basic lines in the personal capital of each of the participants and may influence their approach towards reading any kind of newspapers.

5.9 Classification of the Newspapers

There were two peak moments in the group conversation. The first one was when I led the discussion through ordering in different groups the whole range of newspapers, which are publishing today. I left the participants for ten minutes alone and in the meantime, they were discussing all together the most appropriate way to divide them. In the end, they put them into four groups: the first one they called “Newspapers for managers” where they put the newspapers with very distinguished political positions. The second group was called “Propaganda newspapers”, where they included the analyzed ones- *24 hours* and *Labor*; the so-called “Crap” newspapers followed them, and the last ones were the classical tabloids.

In the first group were positioned the newspapers for managers. They included *Dnevnik* and *Sega* - the most analytical and the most qualitative as journalism. Serious ones; Than, *Standart*, *24 hours*, *Labor*- rubbish, crap (Y.29/04/2010).¹⁹

¹⁹ All the quotations from the focus-group follow the model, presented in Krueger, “Analyzing and reporting focus group results”, Thousand Oaks SAGE Publications, 1998

Propaganda newspapers (P.29/04/2010)

Then, come the cheap ones: *Telegraph*, *Monitor*, *Novinar*- someone say proletariats newspapers, someone else tabloids. And the last ones are sole. (Y.29/04/2010)

But with the highest circulation! (G.29/04/2010)

They are gossip newspapers: for the housewives. (P.29/04/2010).

This exercise was important, because it led to a very fruitful discussion about positioning and differentiating within the whole media landscape in Bulgaria. Some key characteristics of the field became visible. The explanation of the group about the created division can be summarized as “according to degree of yellowness”. They produced all the characteristics of one tabloid: size of the headings; style of the topics and the difference between story telling and factual information. The example given by the participants was the emphasis on *24 hours* and *Labor* and the very passionate illustration of how they see them:

If I compared them on a degree of yellow-they are very cheap-“Grandmother kills his son in law...”(Y.29/04/2010)

Here are the criminal chronicles - in the second group. Especially *24 hours* and *Labor*. I would call them: “The historians of the organizational crimes”. (G.29/04/2010)

No!, they are from the neighborhood...from the block. Gossips from the block! (G.29/04/2010)

What the focus group said is easily related to the notion of “sensationalism”, introduced by Pierre Bourdieu in “On television” (1998). According to him journalists prefer to confront individuals, and the decision makers in particular instead to confronting their arguments. “Hence for them politics becomes an arena full of hyper ambitious people with no conviction but with a clear sense of the competitive situation and of their opposing interest” (Bourdieu 1998). The problem is becoming much more interesting when the main products of certain journalistic field are starting being defined

as “newspapers for housewives”. In addition to that point, their existence could be related to the explanation of Bourdieu about the sense of “sensationalism”. For him, it attracts notice and it also diverts it like “magicians whose basic operating principle is to direct attention to something other than what they are doing” and also that: “journalists have special eyeglasses through which they see certain things and not others and through which they see things in the special way’ (Bourdieu 1998, 22). No matter which media is described. To put it differently, this position of the group is connected with the claim that the journalistic practice is this crucial element within the public sphere, which transforms political events in their particular presentation.

5.10 Symbolic Power of the Tabloids

The role of the media appearance became more and more important for the main actors in the political process. The way in which they look like is changing even the message that they produce. However, media are engaged with this image, they possess many tools with which it can be demonstrate in a radically different manner. One example for this can be seen in the moment of the discussion when the conversation naturally went into direction of describing *24 hours* and *Labor*. Here, some of the participants started arguing about the design and circulation of the editions. Within it, it became visible the senses and feelings that affect them during the reading of certain edition. The discussants were describing this process this way:

There is a huge difference in their colors, headings: Look at *Dnevnik*; *24 hours* and *Telegraph*.; They attract you on a very primitive level of thinking: nicknames, their design...(R.29/04/2010)

Look at the titles of *24 hours* and *Labor*. They are shocking: Summer without hot water! The cheapest bread at least 0,80 st. (P.29/04/2010)

They have different fonts; like colored spots that grab your attention and show you the world. It’s a mess-bold, italic, everything is different...There is no style at all-

something is underlined, something is not, there is a random picture here and there.
(Y.29/04/2010)

The constant comparison with foreign newspapers (“I think that 24 hours has stolen its style from the English tabloids”R.29/04/2010) was influencing the main outcome of the conversation. Also, it speaks about the evidence of copying and lack of creativity in this field, according to the readers. More importantly is the fact that everything is implied; there is no actual, clear talk about the problems. This led to the supposition about how one media market is developed in a post socialist country. There are other more important regulative factors for its institutionalization: degree of showing off and expressing populist messages, rather than actual, objective report and opinion making.

5.11 Semiotic Sense of the Newspapers

Other significant points about the notion of politics in Bulgarian tabloids could be revealed under the usage of certain symbols. The readers pointed out very precisely that with the shocking headings and appalling messages about the reality, every individual is becoming frightened about his own future. Especially when they are working on several metaphors, which are considered as essential for every single human being: “Summer”, “Bread” and “Heating” invoke some vital needs for a man and work on a basic and “primordial” mental level. This is very visible in the following opinion: “They are annoying and manipulative. I feel fear from all of this news: I am always under pressure if something which is happening is good or not. It is the most disgusting thing, presented on the most disgusting way. And this information doesn’t give you anything.”
(Z.29/04/2010).

That shows the relations with the claim that journalists are responsible for politicians' success and they are actively participating in creating their image. It could be offered a specific view of connection between journalistic and politics field where journalists are presented as the day laborers of everyday life. Thus "can show us the world only as a series of unrelated, flash photos" (Bourdieu 1998, 7). The image of this can be seen in the part of the discussion while the group started discussing the degree of manipulation in the newspapers.

Gergana gave one current example about the role of the journalists in presenting news:

"Everything is out of the context. And in the same time...do you know something about Thailand? I have seen reportages on BBC, and it the same time-tourists are still there. I searched my relative there; he said that everything is fine".

5.12 European Union and the Tabloids

The other key moment during the debate was when the discussion turned to the European Union. Here can be referred to some nation-state concepts and the importance of conceptualizing current Bulgarian state. The conditions in which it has been developed during the last twenty years are reproduced and reestablished through the look at how this topic is presented. It is very evident that readers recognized this problematic as a crucial in explaining the sense of certain political acts. During the debate about the European Union were providing comprehensible facts about its controversies.

The group started describing the way in which they identify the topic with unclear language, which is used and especially with their difficulties in understanding it. In this part of the discussion, every participant had something to say and that showed not

only the importance of the topic as such, but also their claim is easily referred to the discussion around European Union topic, offered by the journalists.

For me, this is a new form of corruption: there is a second institution and in front of which we are proving ourselves; we have to demonstrate our abilities. (Y.29/04/2010)

And this institution is in the same time proving our corrupted mentality and it is the place, which has to punish the corrupted ones. (Parvan/29/04/2010)

I feel like EU is “measuring” institution, according to which we are adjusting our acts and in a certain moment these things became national topic, national shame and we are ashamed and embarrassed-at least, this is my impression of that. (R.29/04/2010)

It is interesting that the national feeling was tied with the notion of the “shame”. Thus, could be taken the conclusion about how the existence in the European Union and in the same time in Bulgaria can be a very problematic reality. Following the answer of one of the journalists about the role of their practice as “educators”, the vision of the political debate around the European Union is weakened on the one side from this “ashamed” realm, and on the other from the actual political image, which they provide.

Another illustration of the accent on the role of the European Union expressed by the readers can be easily related to the conclusions about the opposition and perception of the European Union as an external political topic. The almost every repeated sentence about it from the readers pose the appropriate question about how one considerably central topic as it, can be covered by the different rules on the field in practice.

Everyday, the media are talking about how bad we are and that reflects on our attitude. Do you all feel like a European, who can use his rights: regardless if he can travel abroad to see his kid, working as a servant somewhere and he can show his id, instead of passport. (G.29/04/2010)

But who will read this? It’s all about the consumption-you want to read something interesting. (Y.29/04/2010)

I would be very glad if I read something real - not something that is after the deadline; not that the tobacco producers are screwed because they don’t have funding, etc. It’s an expert knowledge; they won’t take these money, because they have thieves as state employees; uneducated local administration. The good news is very difficult to find, good opportunities which are not missed. (G.29/04/2010)

5.13 The Language of the Tabloids

Another topic, which came up both in the interviews and the focus group is the language change. The possible explanation is about the difficulties in the transition period on the one side; and on the other, that there is a certain undisputable shift in the everyday language, used on the streets. Hence, the newspapers as a “mediator” or “translator” between the institutions and the citizens are a “courier” of this novelty.

It is horrible and even it is hard to translate to myself, because it is slang. Some sentences do not have sense. (Z.29/04/2010)

These changes with the words are difficult for my grandmother. They are coming from the street and she barely can understand them. These words are new and unnecessary. They can be described with two Bulgarian words, but they are using the foreign ones. (G.29/04/2010)

The readers through the emergence of the tabloid market explained this language issue. That refers to the idea of the positioning of the journalistic field in-between the State, the market and its own independency. The state as a “power-container” (Giddens) is this specific reality, which determines certain type of usage of the language. The significant link here is that some kind of changes is related to the media market and its ties with advertisers:

“But look that the newspapers are holding from advertisements. They are not dependent on the readership” (Parvan, 29/04/2010).

5.14 Key Results

Analyzing the above-mentioned materials, this paper is trying to construct an explanation about the relation between “habitus” and field. Moreover, taking the collected articles and positioning the journalistic field as a basis, it would be honest to precede an exemplification of Bourdieu notion of two-way-relation of conditioning: “the

field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of the immanent necessity of a field (or of a hierarchically intersecting set of fields). On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or cognitive construction: “habitus” contributes to constructing the field as a meaningful world“ (Bourdieu1989, 44).

Bulgarian media landscape is a very intriguing field of looking at the unstable notions of politics, power and domination. In addition, it offers an opportunity to tie and explain the problematic definition of what can be politics in tabloid context. Equally important is the fact that the abovementioned produced and realized practices of the journalists are corresponding to some particularities of the perception of politics as such. Knitted with the particularities of the post-socialist context in which analyzed media are immersed, could be declared that there exist some old and non-problematic images of relations between citizens and politicians. The market success of those types of newspapers is part of it. The distant attitude from the politician side and not very well explained sense leads to fabrication of tabloids as the only format through which could be produced messages towards the common living together. And this dependency works on two dimensions: from the one side, there are the politicians who interact with the media as their re-translators and on the other side are media, which can be successful only in the format of tabloid. As a result, it appeared the existence of popular political messages on the level of propaganda and lack of expert knowledge.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND MAIN FINDINGS

In this thesis I have studied the representation of the politics in the Bulgarian newspapers and how through it one condensed and intriguing site of the Bulgarian society can be grasped. I have claimed that in the presented political topic of the image of the European Union is shown a broader social context in which can be distinguished and classified some basics conclusions about the actual debate on crucial public topic such as the European Union. In this situation for the politics itself, that signifies that there are some processes which still drive the process of transformation: first, from socialist to post socialist country; and second: from transitional to developed economy. As a result, this thesis offers empirical data, which can be used as an example how the transition of two political systems is related to the press.

The first main finding of this research project is that the European Union is perceived, according to its newspapers' image, as something like a myth; like an ideological reality which is meant to follow and control the juridical rules and order in Bulgaria. The European Union is identified only with possibility of traveling within it without visa. There is no coverage of certain everyday life practices: everything is either money from structural funds, both crimes and quarrels about unfulfilled assignments from Bulgarian side. In other words, the coverage of the European Union is depoliticized. While reasons for it can be found in the features of the tabloid genre, it could be considered as part of the local difficulties. Deregulated media market combined with the lack of stable institutional and citizen activism during the transitional period created circumstances for still unborn critical public. And this is very clearly marked in the opinions, expressed by the interviewed journalists. Everyone had thought that the

economic and social problems after the transition period would end up with the acceptance as members in EU. This huge gap between what actually is EU and what will happen with the actual membership, led to certain difficulties in perception of the Union. And this is reflected on the newspaper language and in their representation of politics.

The second main finding of this research is the received portrait of the journalistic field from the readers. For them, the newspapers are without opinion. They see an absence of analytical thinking and present one easy world where the reader can find a combination of a naked girl and an important interview with the prime minister. This can be linked with the emergence of online editions and to lead to the logical question of how the newspapers could be competitive enough in order do not die and to have profitable readership.

This leads to the question about the general political writing in contemporary journalism. Politics in Bulgarian tabloids is blurry and unclear. It is meant to be for a mass audience that is to be popular. It is situated on the border between being attractive and yellow and it is not designed to deepen knowledge. This coverage gives a presentation of the ideas of difficult dihotomical existence of the Bulgarian citizen: parallel in Bulgaria and in the European Union.

In order to analyze better the journalistic field and its practices, I presented the work of Pierre Bourdieu, defining the boundaries of a field. (Bourdieu 1989, 40) The third crucial conclusion from the empirical fieldwork is that in one post socialist country there still exist formal, still “under construction” rules of the juridical and market order, influencing the actual professional values of the journalistic field, which cause its problematic transformation into a critical opinion making public. The lack of autonomous

intellectual elite and its representation led to the expressed particular shape of the vision of politics of the current Bulgarian society.

This research opens up several areas for future research. For example: on similar problems in the Bulgarian media sphere besides politics. Such work could explain other post socialistic phenomena, which are associated with the decomposition of the former ideological world. In addition, a comparative research with some other media landscape could provide a deeper understanding of the notions of democracy in two extreme cases. Such research could shade further light on the current global media landscape.

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APENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

For semi-structured interviews with the journalists from Bulgarian newspapers

1. Self presentation: personal background and education; favorite newspaper:

Bulgarian and foreign one

2. How do you inform about the news

3. How does one your day at the office look like?

4. Target audience and structure of audience of the newspaper

5. General editorial policy defined regarding the target audience

6. What is a leading news for your newsroom

7. Audience surveys? What kind and how often?

8. The negotiating process before the membership in the European Union

9. What did change after the actual accession

10. How can you comment several topics that I meet in the articles:

- The externality of the European Union
- Irreverent language towards the politicians
- The opposition between “here” and “there”
- What is the notion of “national” in the articles

11. What is the mission of your newspaper?

APPENDIX 2: Focus group basic question guideline

1. Selfpresentation of each of the participants
2. Way of informing about the news
3. Classification and division of the newspapers
4. Way of reading of a newspaper
5. 24 hours and Labor-changes in them
6. Bulgaria vs EU – way of reporting and coverage of the news
7. The language in the newspapers
8. Comments on the major events during the month
9. The mission of the newspaper and the journalists
10. Serious vs tabloid journalism