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ROMANIA

*Cristina Merrill is a John O. Crane Memorial Fellow of the Institute studying post-Ceausescu and post-communist Romania.*

## The Worst of Times, the Best of Times for Romanian Media

By Cristina Merrill

DECEMBER 13, 2004

**BUCHAREST, Romania**—It has been said that the more you know about Romanians, the less you understand them. Like willows swaying with the wind in order to stay rooted, these people have lasted through centuries of foreign domination, and decades of Communism, by learning to adapt to anything. They figured they had to play whatever role was required for survival: the good, the bad, or both, depending on the prevailing breezes. The same rules apply in today's uncertain times, when the struggle for daily existence is fought individually. The unfortunate result is that it slows progress towards a unified and altruistic society. Nicolae Ceausescu must have understood that his people's deep-seated instinct for survival and individual preservation could be manipulated to his benefit — he played Romanians one against the other.

Solidarity is missing in many areas, including the media. Cristian Tudor Popescu, president of the Romanian Press Club and editor of a big Bucharest daily, *Adevarul*, took issue with a recent Reporters-Without-Borders ranking that placed Romania 70<sup>th</sup> globally on its press-freedom list, between Congo and Nigeria. He said that the press is actually free in this country. And when recent controversy erupted over foreign ownership of media, and editorial interference, he said it was the right of patrons to determine the fate of their properties. His critics, in turn, accused him of making deals with the ruling establishment in order to keep his paper afloat. Mr. Popescu represents the conservative view of the Romanian Press Club, many of whose elderly members are journalists who trained and served under the old regime and are now catering to the current one as well.

Gossip, a favorite pastime here, can turn downright malicious in this spirit of discord. Even Mr. Cornel Nistorescu, the popular former director of *Evenimentul Zilei*, the best-quality daily in Romania, has his enemies. In an article published in a competitor's paper, *Jurnalul National*, prominent journalist and political analyst Ion Cristoiu said Mr. Nistorescu made millions in marketing on the black market before the current regime, and "the man who wears Cartier couldn't possibly understand a country where doctors buy clothes in cheap bazaars." Mr. Cristoiu may have his own hidden agenda. *Jurnalul National* belongs to the leader of a party allied with the government in the recent nationwide elections. According to one report, *Jurnalul* has benefited from an infusion of 7,000 subscriptions from a government-owned agency. The agency has only 950 employees.

Part of the post-Ceausescu cleansing process is a witch-hunt, involving the rooting out of former Communist party members from journalist ranks. Mr. Nistorescu is again a victim. Critics have brought up his past as writer for a Communist paper that sang the praises of the old regime. Expecting to have "pure," high-minded journalists so soon after Communism may be unreasonable, according to Andrei Plesu, a former Culture Minister and founder of the leading intellectual weekly *Dilema Veche*, ("Old Dilemma"). Mr. Plesu, who has made a career of writing excellent prose about Romania's "great brothel of transition," said in one of his columns that journalists are a reflection of a populace that has

kept a Communist mentality: "Because we too, we who want change, who want NATO and to be part of the European Union, who want to change the country without changing ourselves, are still the same ones who stood complacently by, obediently, during dictatorship, who dozed off through endless [party] meetings, who tolerated lying, fear and injustice. Newspaper men are our public mirror, the emblem of our 'transition' from ourselves."

### David and Der Goliath

To add dirt to the muddy waters caused by national introspection, a couple of new scandals recently erupted over foreign ownership of Romanian media. Foreign companies have entered the Romanian market in the last few years, as they have elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Swiss firm Ringier is the print-industry leader and owns best-selling *Libertatea* (daily circulation about 270,000) and third-ranked *Evenimentul* (estimated circulation 80,000-100,000). Germany's Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (WAZ) owns a majority share of the fourth-ranked daily *Romania Libera* ("Free Romania"), as well as the smaller *National* newspaper.

*Evenimentul* and *Romania Libera* are the only two national papers consistently critical of the ruling party. Stories of corruption in the government are regularly splashed, often in the largest type possible, onto their front pages. Rumors earlier this year that both Ringier and WAZ were putting pressure on their Romanian dailies to "soften" their criticism, erupted into public scandals in early fall. In September, 50 staff members of *Evenimentul* signed a letter protesting editorial interference by Ringier. Journalists said they were told by the foreign owners to pare down political coverage and focus more on lifestyle stories. Reports started circulating that, in fact, Ringier was reacting to pressure from the government, which was worried about its image in light of the upcoming elections.

Less than a week later, *Romania Libera* came out with a front-page headline: "The Darkest Day for the Paper." It accused WAZ of editorial interference and illegally seeking to remove the editorial manager, Petre Mihai Bacanu (who owns 20 percent of the paper), from leadership. The fight continued publicly in *Romania Libera*. Sometimes the whole front page (and many others inside) were filled with the conflict. The fight was not pretty. The stories reporters were publishing against their owner were highly-charged opinion articles bordering on personal vendetta. At the same time, precious few Romanian-language publications showed solidarity with the *Romania Libera* editorial staff.

Both Rigier and WAZ denied they

were seeking to restrict editorial freedom, arguing that their involvement was about trying to increase commercial viability and not about changing the editorial stance of the newspapers. Indeed, *Romania Libera* had been losing readership over the years, but editorial involvement so close to elections looked suspicious. In particular, links between the German owners and the Romanian government seemed strangely close. Bodo Hombach, manager of WAZ, is also an executive member of an agency that seeks to promote foreign investment in Romania, and reports to the Romanian Prime Minister's Office — and the Romanian Prime Minister was a favorite to win the presidential election. Mr. Hombach, once Gerhard Schroder's counselor, is believed to be a chief fundraiser for the German Chancellor. The media have speculated that Mr. Hombach is staying friendly with the government here in order to get a share in foreign contracts, the profits of which could be funneled to Germany.

Around the time the controversy was sizzling on the pages of *Romania Libera* and *Evenimentul*, I was fortunate enough to get an invitation to a small private dinner hosted by two foreign correspondents for *Romania Libera*'s manager, Petre Bacanu, and *Evenimentul*'s Cornel Nistorescu. Dressed in a blue-checked shirt, Mr. Nistorescu filled the room with confidence. He gave strong opinions, in fluent English, on just about anything except Ringier. He had just quit as director of the paper (though he continues as columnist) after his staff's protest against the Swiss owner. It is said that his contract with Ringier prohibits him from speaking publicly about the owner. When I asked him if he planned to start another paper, he cautiously answered that he was waiting to see how this month's elections turned out. "It's easiest to be an opposition newspaper." The answer surprised me. I had expected a stronger answer from a man whose brawny writing had captivated me. Romanian journalists still watch what they say. He did, however, emphasize





*Petre Mihai Bacanu, the manager of Romania Libera: too old-fashioned to be a role model for a new generation of journalists?*

that he'll stay away from foreign ownership.

Mr. Bacanu, who speaks little English, had kept quiet during dinner. He was much more alive when I visited him at his office a few days later. Gone was the carefully neat suit he had worn, probably not very comfortably, at the dinner. Instead I found a man in a snug sweatshirt ready to fight the world: informers, the government, the "Germans" in the office nearby. "My phone is tapped, so I keep telling [the eavesdroppers] not to worry; they'll read what I say in twenty-four hours."

On his large wooden desk he had stacks of print-outs of typed or electronic correspondence with WAZ dating back to last year. He doesn't use a computer. A typist transcribes his hand-written articles. The 60-year-old talked about his beginning as a journalist at age 19 and about how it was to write during Communism and avoid the censors. He laughed when he recalled how he used to play with page-layouts so that Ceausescu still received his required seven columns of coverage on the first page — but shrunken columns. He avoided writing about politics and instead chose lighter subjects, such as fiction and nature, but even those got him in trouble. After an international newswire agency picked up one of his stories about a wounded dog that got treated at the vet and later brought another wounded pal to the same vet, he heard complaints from the thought police about why that particular story was chosen and not some other items, written by others, praising Ceausescu.

He was jailed for having started an "illegal" paper. He was tortured (I looked away when he pointed at the nail that had been pulled from his finger) and then freed around the time of the revolution in December 1989. He and members of the staff took advantage of an obscure law and grouped together into the first private association in Romania. It soon became the newspaper associated with the new democracy, a revolutionary cause Mr.

Bacanu still supports with vigor. He described how after three years of negotiations, he agreed to an association with WAZ. "I said I'll take care of the editorial, and they would oversee the business side."

Problems began last October, when WAZ executives asked him to soften the tone against the ruling party, the PSD. "Why PSD?" they asked. "We can't increase sales by attacking the party that people voted in." He was asked to add more lifestyle stories, put large pictures on the front page, launch more "positive investigations." He said he refused to have *Romania Libera* become a cheap-looking tabloid. Even though his readers are "intellectuals and idealists without money," he said the newspaper and the printing business it owns made enough profit, about \$3.5 million a year. "We'd lose all the credibility and the money if we became a tabloid. Our paper has stayed true to its mission since 1990. We're a serious paper."

Pressures mounted to a point where WAZ dispatched a team to eliminate Mr. Bacanu from daily responsibilities. With his staff by his side, Mr. Bacanu managed to put out the next morning's newspaper and remained on his post, defiant. "They should have known I'm a fighter."

### Young Hopefuls

Interestingly, even those who disagree with the methods WAZ used to undermine Mr. Bacanu are eager for the standoff at the daily to end soon. Some say that Mr. Bacanu is behind the times, that he's not forthcoming about the true goings-on at his newspaper. In some ways he is as guilty of using forceful tactics to quiet his opponents as the former communists were. Not allowing critics to respond is a form of censorship. Having grown up under an authoritarian regime, he displays some of the heavy-handedness once used to suppress dissent. And as a journalist, he has the responsibility to be fair and perhaps more forthcoming about his own financial affairs. After all, *Romania Libera* has made him a wealthy man. "Mr. Bacanu plays a dangerous and not very credible game of the press owner dressed in the clothes of editor in chief and it doesn't help," a columnist wrote. "The crisis *Romania Libera* is going through is not what it seems. It hides other conflicts and personal interests that we'll never know. Unfortunately, as with many other cases, the media consumer is trapped in a war that doesn't belong to him."

A feeling of helplessness, compounded by the fatigue of daily struggle, may have chased consumers away from reading newspapers. With the exception of journalists, most of my Romanian friends glean the news from television. "I'm sick of reading about scandals," said Raluca Bajora, a copy editor with a publishing house who also works evenings as aerobics instructor. "I don't have the time to read and if I did I'd rather read a good fiction book." This may explain why only about eight percent of people here read a paper and how the best-selling



Romanians prefer to escape their reality by reading infotainment in daily Libertatea.

newspaper is a tabloid like *Libertatea*, filled with cheap gossip about entertainment and sports. (They say that one good thing about leafing through this tabloid on the bus in the morning is to avoid looking at the depressed faces of other commuters.) This extends to the infotainment prevalent on Romanian television, where shows about pop stars, astrology, diet — shows about nothing, as Jerry Seinfeld would say — fill the airwaves at all hours of the day. Cheap entertainment has become the plague of the Western world as well, but the viewer in a civilized world “dumbs down” as a *result* of material comforts, not despite them.

“In our country it’s called escapism,” said *Evenimentul* editor in chief Dan Cristian Turturica. “In times of hardship, people prefer to run away from reality.” Mr. Turturica, who spent a few years in the United States in the 1990s, said that the Romanian consumer is fast making up for decades of material deprivation under Communism — and for today’s low standards of living — by embracing a materialism even more strident than that in the West. “I’ve seen fancier cars in Bucharest than in Beverly Hills, where people really have everything they need.”

Mr. Turturica sees it as his duty to shake up Romanians’ conscience by providing investigations into corruption at all levels. His journalists rely less on opinion and more on evidence than their colleagues at *Romania Libera*, which is why his paper is considered more respectable. During his time at *Evenimentul*, Mr. Nistorescu set a more balanced approach to investigative journalism by threatening to fine any writer who didn’t consult both sides when filing a story. Even so, the paper is anything but forgiving of those it considers in the wrong. “This is a crusade we have assumed in order to accomplish what others have not,” Mr. Turturica said. His publication, which government loyalists have called “the screaming mad man,” has faced hundreds of suits from government officials or business groups. *Evenimentul* has taken to task many high-profile Romanian figures for amassing serious fortunes through shady dealings. “We have been

forced to become a prosecuting newspaper because prosecutors are not doing their jobs,” said Mr. Turturica.

A pair of bright and intelligent eyes frame Mr. Turturica’s boyish face. He seems wiser than his 35 years. Some 15 years of investigative reporting years have matured him. “Constantly digging dirt and coming up with unpleasant things tires you fast. Sometimes you forget what reality is.” He worked on an underground anti-Communist paper before the fall of the dictatorship and when the Revolution happened he knew he had found his calling. “In 1990 I told myself I was going to be a journalist for life, not for a couple of years.” He has covered several international conflicts, including the war in Bosnia, but seemed particularly influenced by the turbulent time right after the Revolution in Romania when miners were called in by now President Ion Iliescu to quiet opposition. During the “*mineriada*” of June 1990 and a few other confrontations that followed, many students and intellectuals were attacked and seriously beaten by the miners, who kept shouting communist-type slogans like “Down with the intellectuals; Students, go work,” or “We work; we don’t think.”

Mr. Turturica said that much has changed in the 14 years since, and people like Mr. Iliescu have softened their tone, but he and the journalists who were there remember that period vividly. This, he said, is what makes him scrutinize many of the wolves in sheep’s clothing now parading as Romania’s powerful people. “We cannot forget what happened then. We know too much. We’re children of the Revolution.”

Mr. Turturica is driven by the same solid journalistic instinct to afflict the comfortable that top reporters in the U.S. possess. He even spent a few years in California, getting a Masters’ in Mass Communications and studying, thanks to a fellowship from the USIA (United States Information Agency). He said he is still inspired by the principles and responsibilities of a free press he learned in America. He returned in 1997 and was hired by Mr. Nistorescu, who at the time was trying to convert *Evenimentul* from a scandal sheet into what the paper is today. The beginning was rough. After his time in America, he was shocked by the racism and nationalism he found at home, “the opposite of everything I learned in America. I didn’t think I’d last a month.”

### Journalism with Conscience

He has lasted almost eight years, probably because he feels there is a need in this country for “journalism of conscience.” I heard the word “conscience” many times during my interviews with journalists. Some said that while they felt the instinct to follow their heart and the truth, they couldn’t do it for long. Journalists were mere functionaries following the Party’s orders during Communism. They still don’t feel they get respect, especially in the provinces, but at least they are starting to respect themselves. “Journalists had to prostitute them-

selves for so long, and all of a sudden they realized they didn't have to," said Media Monitorization Agency Director Mircea Toma. The agency has been at the front of promoting a free press here and in 1999 launched a program called "FreeEX" that has sought to protect journalists' rights. Besides reports and active campaigning on that topic, the agency also created an online forum for journalists to communicate with one another. The good news is that the first-ever media labor contract, including a specific call to maintain journalistic conscience, was signed earlier this year by representatives of unions and media owners.

Romanian reporters hope that the Ceausescu days of journalists carrying suitcases packed with bribe money to their editors are gone — or soon will be. A confluence of factors is helping the cleansing and advancement of the profession, even as grave problems exist outside the capital. For one, the scrutiny Romania is receiving from the EU is putting pressure on authorities to change their behavior. In addition, knowing they will be listened by the EU and NGOs supporting the press, journalists are gaining courage to speak freely. One good outcome of foreign-press investment by in the country is that journalists' salaries are starting to increase and thus diminish temptation to accept bribes.

"Until last year, some journalists couldn't even afford to buy a coffee for sources," said Laura Lica, editor of *Bucharest Daily News*. Salaries have almost doubled in the last year alone, ranging from \$300 to \$700 a month for an experienced journalist. Columnists and top editors can command several times that amount.

In recent years more journalists like *Evenimentul's* Mr. Turturica have traveled abroad on exchange programs and fellowships, bringing back fresh ideas about how media function in more established societies. Ms. Lica, 26, is one of them. She worked as an investigative reporter at *Evenimentul* for five years before traveling to St. Petersburg, Fla., to study at the Poynter Institute. She then won a fellowship to work at the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. She came back last year and was snapped up by the publishers of the *Bucharest Daily News* for the top spot. Ms. Lica, who looks like Mira Sorvino before the Hollywood make-over tainted her natural brunette beauty, said her academic and practical experience in America was central to learning how the press works in a democracy. It was there she was first exposed to fact-checking — and the strict separation of editorial and advertising departments, especially at quality publications.

"We're trying to be a professional English-language newspaper," she said, adding that she insists on editorial independence. "We want people to want to work for us knowing they will be protected from bribery." She said it has been hard to find good reporters who are fluent in English and can write well enough for a sophisticated international audience. There are about 10,000 foreigners in Bucharest. A lot of thought and money has been



The editor is hoping to make Bucharest Daily News into a professional English-language newspaper.

poured into this four-color paper, to my eyes the most attractive one on the Romanian market. "Many young people here have never gone to journalism school, have never been abroad. Journalism is still a profession we're learning on the run."

Modestly, Ms. Lica, the daughter of veteran employees of Romania's national airline, Tarom, said she feels she is too young to be the editor of a newspaper, especially if comparison were made to the situation in the U.S. "The journalism market is improving, but it is still too weak. The most experience [with a free press] a journalist can have is fourteen to fifteen years. We lack role models." She said she considers Mr. Nistorescu the only such role model.

### Down to Business

Ms. Lica, like Mr. Turturica and a few other talented Romanians, are too busy learning journalism on the run to realize that *they* are the standard for future role models, an opportunity that can be as exciting as frightening in its responsibility.

It will be fascinating to see who will fill the ranks of Romania's embryonic "free" journalism in all its varieties, not just in areas like investigative or political reporting. As with the more basic aspects of the profession, the rush to define media offerings has intensified as a result



(Above) Laurentiu Ispir, editor of Business Magazin. (Right) Inspired by the best in U.S. business journalism, the weekly Business Magazin is a respite from the strident tone of Romanian mainstream press.



of a mix of factors, including the country's impending entrance into the European Union. The expectation is that as Romania privatizes more of her industries in order to allow for the development of a real free-market economy, there will be a need for business journalism. Business writing, as well as a few other special-interest areas, is already competitive, with several business weeklies, monthlies and a daily in existence. The best-quality weekly magazine is also the most recent: three-month-old *Business Magazin*. Produced by the publishers of a successful financial daily, the magazine has the feel and (near-identical) look of *Business Week*. Apparently the publishers came close to securing a license from *Business Week* two years ago to produce a Romanian version, but it was decided that the audience here was not ready for the heavy international mix, including Asian coverage, of the U.S. weekly.

So far, *Business Magazin's* balanced analysis of a wide range of areas that influence business, from international and internal politics to culture, is a welcome respite from the strident tone of the Romanian mainstream press. According to the 26-year-old editor, Laurentiu Ispir, the publication is inspired by *The Wall Street Journal* in the way it tries to "humanize" the face of business. By offering complex topics explained in easy-to-understand terms, he wants to make it a good read for a general audience.

For now, the magazine is building on the readership of affluent readers of its sister daily, *Ziarul Financiar*. In time, however, the editor hopes to educate legions of other readers, including young people, to read about world events in order to understand their own immediate universe — and to understand that information is power, as they say.

"First, I want everyone to read it for the pleasure of reading," Mr. Ispir said. "But I also want Romanians to understand why certain things are happening to them. Romanians are not used to thinking about causes and

consequences. They have been conditioned to treat everything as a verdict." It has a relatively high newsstand price of about US\$1.30 for ordinary Romanians, but as the Romania middle class keeps developing, the weekly has potential to do well.

Then there's the emerging "media personality" of Robert Turcescu, a dashing young man with talent in print, television and radio. Not even Martha Stewart could top this 29-year-old's drive and pace. He is the producer and host of a daily radio and television show. He writes a column for a leading intellectual weekly and serves as editor of a Bucharest daily just relaunched. Besides gossip about his private life, this raven-haired journalist is attracting plenty of envy in the trade. Comments are heard, for example, about "Turcescu overkill" and about his making too much money too early. He said his "hyperactivity" in journalism is caused not by materialistic desire but by his passion for communication. His nature, he said, is to want to keep moving, which matches him to the fast-paced atmosphere of today's Romanian journalism. In fact, he fits the mold of the successful journalist anywhere in the world, albeit an overachieving one. "I love the company of people and I love communicating with those around me. I hate routine. Journalism is anything but a profession of routine."

Real talent and hard work have undoubtedly made Mr. Turcescu a success. This single father of a three-year-old writes and speaks impeccably and approaches his grueling daily schedule with extraordinary zeal. "I love what I do. For me there is nothing else right now besides my darling little girl. I feel fulfilled." But his courage to be different and recognized for his skills is what could



Robert Turcescu, a new media personality, said that a journalist's conscience is best preserved when working as an independent.

make him a role-model for other journalists.

Mr. Turcescu refuses to work for just one patron, having negotiated individual contracts for each of his four assignments through a company he established. “Journalists with good training and intentions have been stabbed by patronage,” he said. “I didn’t want to depend on any single patron’s special interests.” He said it hasn’t been easy to resist the lure of “black money” in an environment where salaries are small and temptation is great, but his desire to keep a clean reputation has motivated him to fight for his financial and editorial independence — and in so doing, push the boundaries of the media *status quo*.

### The Catavencu Guys: Wild, Crazy and Civic Minded

Mr. Turcescu is fortunate to be a journalist in Romania now, as opposed to 20 or even five years ago. Despite ongoing struggles to define their identity, journalists in this country have at least the opportunity to compete for the right to express themselves. A select number of them can even get paid handsomely for their skills, in part because media owners are getting better at competing in the free-market economy. As more money flows into advertising, publishers and broadcast moguls will hopefully be more willing to take risk and invest in talent.

One of the most benevolent media patrons has been Academia Catavencu, a press trust that began 15 years ago with a satirical weekly by the same name that is still very popular. Translated as “Catavencu Academy,” the weekly was named after a lampoon character in a famous play by the late-19th century Romanian author Ion Luca Caragiale. The character, Nae Catavencu, is a man who lets no scruples get in the way of getting what he wants; he is a hypocrite who is as vulnerable and endearing as he is cunning, a brilliant caricature of our flawed human nature. The young men who started the weekly around the time of the fall of Ceausescu thought the burlesque character appropriate for the times. It has remained relevant in part because the “Catavencus” — the “boys” behind the publication — have kept it relevant by making anyone and everyone a hilarious subject of satire. “Academia” is a legacy of the anti-establishment underground culture of parody and political humor that developed during the old regime. Many of the articles use slang, schoolboy humor (no women are listed on the masthead) and accessible language. Yet they are highly sophisticated in their political nuance, in ways that make the weekly similar to the English publication, “Private Eye.”

“Academia” has served an important role in Romania’s investigative journalism. Reporters and cartoonists for the newspaper have relentlessly attacked corruption by way of seemingly innocent humor, many times carrying more hard news than does the mainstream media. An impish print campaign reads: “We are pleasant newspapermen, we close our eyes, do not ask unpleas-

ant questions, do not cause stress to anyone, do not make trouble, do not reveal what needs to be revealed and people get overjoyed when our articles appear.”

Week after week, the publication manages to entertain, inform and shock, mostly at the expense of the ruling party. One cover featured an image of badly cropped photos of key people in government and business, as if they had gathered for dinner. The headline read, “Cocina de Taina,” a play on the “Last Supper.” The Romanian term for The Last Supper is *Cina Cea de Taina*, but *Cocina* means pigsty and *cina* means dinner, so *Cocina de Taina* converts into *The Secret Pigsty*. Easier to translate is a cover line mocking improper privatization contracts awarded to French companies by the PSD-led Romanian government (pronounced Peh-seh-deh) party: “Liberté, Pésédé, Fraiernité,” meaning liberty, PSD, stupidity. I don’t recall ever having been as entertained by a U.S. periodical. The humor does remind me of my college TV favorites, The Tonight Show and Saturday Night Live. I’m what marketers would call a passionate consumer of AC — one of many here.

Cristina Guseth, Bucharest director of the U.S.-sponsored Freedom House Foundation, is one as well. She joked that in the beginning she couldn’t persuade the weekly’s founders to accept advertising. They were determined not to “sell out.” But over the years, they decided to go commercial in order to survive. Now Coca Cola, Pfizer, Renault and BMW are some of the high-end



What started 15 years ago as a satiric weekly paper has become a civic-minded media leader.

advertisers gracing *Academia's* pages. Two years ago the founders sold half of their shares to Sorin Marin, a millionaire who made \$25 million by selling his holding in an oil company. Mr. Marin is considered a patron of Romanian culture and civic spirit. Among other projects, he has helped found a film festival and has invested money in building up the Danube Delta.

With his help, *Academia Catavencu* has moved beyond armchair satire into activism. It recently became a force behind a number of civic actions, including a widely publicized protest against Ukraine's building of a dam that could threaten the Danube's ecological habitat, as well as numerous media re-launches. The media company is now a full-fledged media icon. *Academia Catavencu* has investments in nine lines of business, including special-interest magazines, a monthly intellectual publication and a popular Bucharest city guide. The company is investing \$2.5 million to help relaunch a radio station, and has just reorganized *Cotidianul*, a newspaper that promises to be editorially independent, balanced and accountable to readers.

Teaser ads say that the only people who will "control" what goes into the newspaper will be readers. *Cotidianul*, which translates as *The Daily Journal*, will be "transparent" and "intelligently" navigated by a team of 70 professionals. Mr. Turcescu, who has a contract to oversee the launch for the first year as the editor, said the writing will target "educated" consumers who prefer to digest information on their own, as opposed to being told what to think.

Fifteen years into democracy, it is time for Romanians to realize that they are free — and free to choose a free press. □



*Newly reorganized Cotidianul promises to bring balance to, and revolutionize Romanian journalism.*

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