

# *Foreword*

*The iron curtain,  
geopolitics and the  
cultural exception*



BY PAULO FAUSTINO

**THE TREE, THE FOREST AND THE CULTURAL EXCEPTION**

As I write this editorial, the war going on the air space and on the field and over communication (invasion or the special military intervention, in the words of the Russian government) in Ukraine by Russia continues. A situation that would be unthinkable to happen in the 21st century where humanist values seem to follow a path of increasing strength; at least in most continents, although the democratic political system is largely a minority in the world; dictatorships or autocracies are dominating the political landscape, especially in Asia, the Middle East and Africa. We must not forget this!

I believe that even analysts and experts in international relations, including the ones in the countries with sophisticated espionage systems like USA or Great Britain, would be far from predicting a conflict of this intensity and negative impact on humanity: more than three million refugees and thousands of deaths (both amongst military and civilians) in both countries.

Even in the most Machiavellian and fictional scenario this was unexpected. And it seems, so far, that there is no light at the end of the tunnel – despite diplomatic negotiations and the theatre of communication. On the contrary, there is even the risk of stepping right in front of the train meaning pressing the nuclear bomb button. No, that cannot happen! There must be room for diplomacy and human rights and respect for the cultural and artistic expression of all people. The 2 months since the war started already show a great civilizational regression.

However, we also have to be able to identify – and differentiate – the trees (the hardcore of the Russian war machine) from the forest (the Russian and Ukrainian people, with a lot of common blood). That is to say, to prevent greater evil (the World War) the political leaders of the world have decided – and rightly so – to apply a wide range of economic sanctions to Russia with the indirect aim of reducing the sources of funding for the war effort undertaken by the Kremlin.

But these sanctions were blindly applied and without giving space to preserving fundamental values, as is the right to information and cultural and artistic expression. Of course, we know that both communication and culture can speak for the dominant power. However, we cannot generalize, and when this happens today – especially in the West – people are better prepared to separate the wheat from the chaff and filter out journalistic, cultural, and artistic messages. Once again, we are not distinguishing trees (political propaganda via journalism or culture) from the forest (journalistic practices and independent artistic expression).

This war has another particularity at the level of communication since it is exhibited in two stages of war: political and military communication and journalistic and cultural communication. Of course, war propaganda has always been an important weapon, but this war takes place in the context of the digital age. And communication strategies are clearly different between the two countries: on the Russian side, communication takes a vertical approach and is predominantly based on traditional media (centred on the cult of the leader (Putin) and traditional media, essentially television) and, on the Ukrainian side, communication is horizontal (centred on the leader Zelensky and with the delegation to sub-leaders).

In other words, the communication by the Ukrainian leader is also more spontaneous and enshrines a relational and bilateral approach transforming the public into ambassadors of the cause. In contrast, the communication of the Russian leader is dictatorial and unilateral fomenting fear and hate speech. From the communicational point of view, Ukraine is the big winner and has managed to obtain the solidarity of a large part of the world, but unfortunately it has not been enough!

Another aspect visible from the point of view of communication is companies' major concerns with brand reputation management. There are many examples of big companies/brands – from many different sectors – not wanting to associate their brands with the country and its “toxic” leader and by these means avoid reputational costs. The media, cultural and creative sector also does not escape this concern, as is, for example, the case of Disney, with the ban on the dissemination of its content in Russia. However, there has also

been a ban on the reception of media content (Russia Today, for example) in the countries of the European Union and in USA. On these aspects – communication and *cultural exception* – , it is also worth making some reflections and questions – would it really be necessary to apply this sanction and prohibition?

From a strategic point of view for Ukraine’s allies, would it not be better to have access to the information even though it would have to be filtered? From a tactical perspective, and even knowing that these are propaganda content – as it always is in war communication, what differs is that we are more predisposed to a certain ideology and reception of the message from one side. Access to this information can be useful, filtered and purified to make strategic decisions. And in the same vein of thought, there should also be a cultural exception<sup>1</sup>, since it deals with the Russian cultural and creative products, which express not only the values of the Kremlin but also, of the people of great cultural wealth that, in many cases, are not aligned with an imperialist or warlike vision that supports the hardcore of the Kremlin. In this context, the *cultural exception* must be preserved since it is part of the memory (good or bad) and of the European cultural and creative diversity. It is necessary to defend the *cultural exception* in the theatres of war to avoid a unilateral vision of society and its social and political dynamics.

### **IRON CURTAIN AND CULTURAL SUSPENSION**

Considering the points mentioned above, does it make sense for the sanctions against Russia to cover everything and everyone? Does it make sense to revive the “iron curtain”<sup>2</sup> in communication, culture, and arts? Is it justifiable to make it impossible to perform and exhibit some classics associated with Russian culture, from ballet to theatre, from classical music to art and literature (the Nutcracker, the Swan Lake, Tchaikovsky, Kandinsky, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, etc.), for example? Is it also justifiable to remove posters and concerts about the works of the composer and pianist Rachmaninoff or even

<sup>1</sup> This designation – *cultural exception* – originates in the French government whose objective was to defend local audiovisual products, made at the national level. This article thus invokes the specificity of cultural goods and the need to create exceptions.

<sup>2</sup> It refers to the division of Eastern Europe during the period known as the Cold War. This famous expression was said during the speech made by the British Prime Minister at the time, Winston Churchill, on 5 March 1946, shortly after the announcement of the end of World War II. In his speech, the Prime Minister stated that “From Stettin in the Baltic [sea] to Trieste in the Adriatic [sea], an iron curtain descended on the continent. Behind this line are all the capitals of the old states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest, and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them are in what I should call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject, in one way or another, not only to Soviet influence, but also to strong, and in some cases increasing, control measures issued from Moscow”.

the more contemporary pianist Sokolov? Does it make sense to cancel this culture of excellence, which also exists in Russia, while promoting universal and humanistic values? One of these days someone will remember to burn all the copies of Leo Tolstoy's book *War & Peace* (1869)!

The justified international solidarity with the Ukrainian people must not hide many of the merits of the Russian people, particularly those who, in their various civic interventions (in art, science, journalism, and culture, for example), do not see themselves in the invasion of Ukraine or "the special military intervention", as it is called in the political correctness prevailing in Russia. Surely a large part of the Russian population would like to live in a political context of openness and democracy and forget the "iron curtain", which resumed to suffer some deeper cuts after 2014!

As of 2014, with the annexation of Crimea, the tips of this renewed "curtain" began to be sewn together by the leaders of the Kremlin, although there were periods when there seemed to be a desire to "tear" some pieces of the cloth – meaning some openness for cultural, communicational, and scientific exchange; but this never fully occurred. At the same time, there were some interesting signs, including at the level of academic and scientific exchange, that made it possible to dream of greater openness to the world.

Between 2011 and 2016, I had the privilege of spending several seasons in Russia, particularly in Moscow, to teach classes and seminars in undergraduate and master's programs at two of the most distinguished universities in the country: Moscow State Lomonosov University (a 5 minute walk from the symbol of Russian power – Kremlin) and the National Research University Higher School of Economics (slightly further away, although in practice nothing is really far from the Kremlin...).

There were fantastic moments, and the contact with students and teachers was very rewarding; and, I confess, I miss those times of "apparent" lifting of the Iron Curtain! It was also with this spirit – and perception of openness and cultural and scientific dynamics – that, as the former President of the International Media Management Academic Association (IMMAA), I suggested – and my fellow colleagues accepted – to organize a scientific conference in Moscow, an event that was held with remarkable success in 2015.

In these (good) times the effort of the Russian academy was visible (I believe that this will genuinely be resumed one day...), to stimulate and promote international cooperation. In fact, I have had the privilege of collaborating with colleagues from the Russian academy and I "feel" that this war is also killing some of their dreams: to show the world that many are also on the right side! And we must not confuse the trees with the forest.

I also noticed a willingness of young people in general, and students in

particular, to want to catch the “sail” of democracy, communication, and international culture. Many young people speak English and are eager to help a foreigner; I have noted this in various circumstances: for example, I was a bit lost at one of the Moscow metro stations and a young woman gave me instructions, and for me not to lose the subway even used her card to get me into the subway – a hospitality lesson!

It was not only in academia that I found the will to open up to the world, but also to the media; I had the pleasure of going to dinner – coincidentally accompanied by a (good) Crimean red wine – with the outstanding professional of one of the most important news agencies and among many topics addressed, I asked: Why does Putin have a wide approval of the Russian people (at the time, in 2015, about 75%)? The answer was clear: because the Russians feel safe with him and with the way he dealt with the war in Chechnya (and how he ended terrorism actions, including in the metro stations); and more: with the transition of the government led by Boris Yeltsin, there was a period of some anarchy and he – Putin – managed to rebuild political power...

But the worst, unfortunately, was yet to come after all, he also wants to rebuild, at all costs, the power of the Soviet empire! And this is another war whose negative impacts on the world are inexpressible and unpredictable. In fact, we have already experienced a third world war, and the effects on the economy and society are beginning to be global.

In fact, Putin has built an unparalleled power in the Western world: directly or indirectly he has been in power for more than 20 years and, according to Russian law (amended by Putin) may theoretically be until 2036. That is to say, he will be able to complete two further six-year terms each from 2024, when the current one ends (according to the amendment approved by the Parliament and by the Russian voters). This power is observed and even breathable in any corner of Russia, especially in Moscow. I still remember losing a ticket that was given to me on the passport validation ticket at the airport, and when on the eve of my return, a nice employee of the department where I was teaching, told me: “Don’t forget to show the ticket you were given on arrival”, because without it they won’t let you out.” I went to confirm, and I couldn’t find it and I panicked. When I informed her of this, still in panic, she said to me “it will be a complex process and we have to go to the foreign and border services” – or something similar – , and so it was.

And this was confirmed: it was a real ordeal. If it had not been for the help of this employee, I would have stayed a few more days in Moscow. As soon as I entered the services everything seemed intimidating – I felt I was living a scene of the end of the Cold War period – , from the heavy and unwelcome space to Putin’s posters in all divisions. Until then, I had only been able to feel

the cult of personality so strong in books or in cinema – but in this case it was really an experience of long hours of waiting; and today I see it only as a story to tell (whose episodes do not fit here) but at the time, I was a little worried!

And it was from there, I realized that the “curtain” was actually still down. And in that same day, I read in *Russia Today* (one of the few media that circulate in English) that the Kremlin had issued, on September 10, 2014, a law limiting foreign investment in the country’s media. According to the new legislation adopted at the end of September by the Russian parliament, the share of the foreign capital in the Russian media cannot exceed 20%. Previously, foreign participation was limited to 50% and did not impact on written media, as it did in 2015. Of course, this measure negatively influenced – and that was obviously the goal – a large part of the media including the “STS” channel, as well as the assets of “Sanoma Independent Media (SIM)”, “Conde Nast”, “Hearst Shkulev Media” and “Burda”, for example.

That legislative initiative was part of a series of restrictions implemented since Putin’s return in May 2012 to the presidency of the country and which has recently intensified because of the Western sanctions for Moscow’s role in the Ukrainian crisis; and now, in 2022, we are seeing the same over again, but with the war both on the big screen and on a digital and more global screen, based on a more nostalgic script of the Soviet imperialism. The renewed narrative is based on the “denazification” of Ukraine and also, by the way, of the West, on everything to the East. However, it is good to remember that there are several common denominators between Putin, Hitler, and Stalin, for example: to impose by force a monolithic vision of ideology.

Therefore, nevertheless, the strength of the reason for the arguments of the sanctions to try to halt the escalation of a war that no longer seemed to be part of European political and diplomatic language, it is important not to forget the good people who also exist, obviously, in Russia. Indeed, I believe that there must be a significant level of disapproval of this invasion amongst the younger Russian population. Young people are more cosmopolitan, use more technologies and observe social and cultural practices from other countries, and are more interested in talking about and understanding other cultures.

I had the opportunity to see this in various settings in Moscow: during one of my trips in 2012, I taught seminars in a Master’s/MBA program for executives (with an average age of over 40 years) in the media field and had to have the translator translate the English-to-Russian classes, which manifestly does not promote good interaction with students. However, in later years I had the opportunity to teach a Master’s degree in the field of media, but for younger students: they all spoke English and were full of curiosity about other cultures.

An interesting exercise – to prove that young Russians are more open to

the world and perhaps yearn for a democratic political approach – is to ask for instructions on the metro lines (whether in Moscow or St. Petersburg, for example) to people over the age of 40 (more or less) and young people up to the age of 40 (more or less): I have done this experiment several times and the former seem unsympathetic (the language barrier can help to convey this idea) and do not help to give information, and young people are very friendly (and show a voluntaristic spirit by being more comfortable with English). And, with luck, a “charitable” soul may even show up to pay us the metro ticket: as I mentioned earlier, in one of the situations in Moscow, my metro card was already without credit and a girl – very nice – asked me if I could help: I asked her the direction for the right train, but I told her I had still to validate the metro ticket – and she replied: “no need; you can swipe my card. And so, it was – I only had time to thank her in English and Russian (with the only word I knew!).

Unfortunately, I have never had the privilege of visiting Ukraine – I hope to do so as soon as possible –, but I have had the opportunity to participate in some projects involving Ukraine and other Eastern European countries. For example, in one of the projects – funded by the European Union – the central goal was to preserve the memory of countries that were part of the former Soviet Union. Among the various activities foreseen in this project was doing interviews with the 2nd or 3rd generations of descendants of families who live in Europe to their ancestors. The main idea was, for example, to understand how the older generations perceived the experiences they had as citizens who had lived under the authority of the Soviet countries. It was interesting work, but in some circumstances, it was difficult to interview older generations because they still had several memories that aroused negative feelings and experiences; indeed, one of the interviewees who, by chance, had been in the military asked us not to be identified and explained the reason: “You never know who will see this interview, and Russia continues to have a lot of political influence in the world!”

Therefore, that project had a good adhesion of Ukrainians, including associations that represent them, and at the time (2016) there was also the participation of Russians and other people born in other countries of the Former Soviet Union. The coexistence between these peoples has been peaceful and constructive; and it demonstrates that it is possible to share knowledge, cultural perspectives, and other humanist values. I continue to believe that this will be possible, and the current invasion of Ukraine will not undermine the human cooperation between different peoples of the world!

Without wishing in any way to relativise the seriousness and intervention – invasion – unacceptable of the Russian government in the invasion of



Ukraine, certain exceptions in the application of sanctions should be considered, as has already been justified. These exceptions should be enshrined in the areas of culture, journalism, and the arts as they are central to preserving the identities of people and preserving European memory, even when it comes to moments we don't like and which should embarrass us as human beings, as is the case with the war/invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

In fact, sanctions in the cultural, journalistic and arts area contribute – as they do – to erasing the memory of Europe and reducing the pluralism of information (although we may disagree with some narrative orientations); moreover, these sanctions totally diverge from the objectives of European policy (preserving the memory of Europe) and the human rights charter enshrining freedom of opinion and information. Therefore, the cultural peculiarity must be preserved, as it is part of European diversity and culture, which extends to Eurasia.

Similarly to the cultural policy of France that defends the idea of the cultural exception of the country to protect and promote its culture and the European culture, the sanctions that have been applied should also follow this exceptional principle and exclude culture, arts, and journalism. The sanctions applied in the cultural and creative area could contribute to a blackout of the European memory from the East, even if they are still part of the Soviet legacy. History is not erased, memories are revived, nor should the new iron curtains be created – even if it is hard – but we must reflect how we – human beings – remain barbaric!

And we must continue to fight to strengthen the humanity and incorporate the values that promote human dignity and cultivate the common good, while acknowledging the individual and collective merit of persons and institutions, but this also requires having a more holistic view and not making generalizations – that is: we have to look at the trees in the context of the forest without being sure of which trees are the “sick” ones and that should be cut down to let others grow that can help give more oxygen to breathe better in the world, especially in the east of the European continent.

Therefore, this volume (8) of the Journal of Creative Industries and Cultural Studies (JOCIS), although it has no article specifically related to communication, culture and journalism in Russia, nor in Eastern European countries (by chance it even has some authors born in Eastern European countries), it provides some themes that directly or indirectly are crucial to share knowledge on fundamental areas that underpin media regulation, cultural, informative, and creative pluralism. However, we welcome authors from Eastern Europe to submit their work to the next issue of JOCIS and their works will, of course, be evaluated by peers without ideological dogmas and where quality, rationale

and scientific rigor prevail.

In this context, this issue focuses mostly on matters of regulation, influence, and the impact of algorithms in the media of the digital era, at the same time as showcasing the economic importance of creative industries for the global economy. It consists of four articles approaching such subjects; the review of three books, which also analyze many of the problematics presented in the articles; and the presentation of the report on the impact of creative industries on global economics.

Minna Horowitz, Hannu Nieminen, and Esa Sirkkunen co-author the article *Assessing Media Platformization in Small Nations: A Rights-Based Approach*. They explore how platformization is revolutionizing the participation of small nations in the global economy. However, they also reveal that it does not come without costs, having as consequences the disruption of the business model of journalism with great political impact due to viral misinformation. The authors also pointed out the fact that algorithmic recommendations diminish content diversity culture-wise. A possible response to solve these challenges is a rights-based approach to regulate content on platforms.

Bissera Zankova wrote the article titled *Media System and Media Eco-system: Regulatory Aspects of the Media System in Bulgaria*. This article sheds light over the influence that political regimes have on the media system. Bissera Zankova explains how the transition from a communist totalitarian regime to a democracy has led to a higher diversity in the media system. It shows how regulation is a relevant tool for the creation of media channels and the independence of the media system, thus proving the effectiveness of the law in strengthening the media system.

Florian Kumb and Reinhard E. Kunz present "*Winner-Takes-All*": *Influencing Factors of Post-Theatrical Supply and Demand in Motion Picture Exhibition*. This article examines the effectiveness of post-theatrical exhibitions for the success of motion pictures. It highlighted the influencing factors in supply and demand which the authors analyze and that leads to a comprehensive supply and strong demand. They develop the "Winner-Takes-All" theory by expanding the already existing success-breeds-success approach. The results can help understand the relevance of the sequential release process for the motion picture industry.

Asa Royal and Philip M. Napoli co-authored *Local Journalism Without Journalists? Metric Media and the Future of Local News*. This article showcases what is, perhaps, one of the greatest threats to journalism these days. It is a case study of Metric Media as an example of the devastation of journalistic jobs in order to give way to an algorithm-based media system. While many newspapers in USA shut down, networks of online local news sites

bloom. These networks compromise the democracy of journalism via the use of pre-established algorithms. As a result, this only leads to negative consequences for journalism, and the authors question if this should, in fact, be called journalism, and point out the need for higher scrutiny of these networks.

JOCIS 8, always presents a report summary. In this issue we have a highly relevant and timely report: Creative Industries – Trade Challenges and Opportunities Post Pandemic. It was based on research written by The Economist/Intelligence Unit, with a foreword by Andrew Mitchell, General Director of Exports and UK Trade of the Department for International Trade. This report states and presents results revealing the growing capacity of creative industries as a large contributor, if not one of the largest, to the global economy.

As always, the book reviews come along in each issue of JOCIS. In this issue we reviewed the *Platforms and Cultural Production*, by Thomas Poell, David B. Nieborg, and Brooke Erin Duffy. The authors explain how platforms have risen in times of crises as a solution for many cultural industries. Then there is *Social Media, Law and Ethics*, by Jeremy Harris Lipschultz. He reinforces the importance of law and ethics to go together to regulate content, as freedom of speech has become a double-edge sword, for hate speech has drastic consequences and misinformation. Eli Noam, one of the world's most fruitful media experts in the world, is the author of *The Technology, Business, and Economics of Streaming Video* and *The Content, Impact, and Regulation of Streaming Video*. While one book points out the rising of streaming platforms and the challenge of creating new business models, the other one reveals the threat they represent in terms of content distribution and the impact they have in society.

Overall, JOCIS 8 brings to you an enlightenment of how the digital era can be both beneficial both for the creative industries and the global economy, as well as it can be prejudicial in terms of content distribution and social impact given its fast development, the legislation around the world still have to keep up with the pace of these media developments.