



ORIGINAL PAPER

25 Years After - The National Day on the National Radio

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Abstract

Over 11 million Romanians listen to the radio be it on the classical radios set, on the computer, laptop, IPod, telephone, in the car, at home or at work. For example, the Romanian Public Radio has a continually growing audience in last years, according to the latest radio rankings, being the second most listened radio station in Romania, both at national and urban level. Considering the fact that so many Romanians listen to the national radio station this paper aims to find what how the National Day of Romania was presented on the public radio 25 after the fall of the communism. The study analyzes the major newscasts aired on November 30th, December 1st and December 2nd at Radio Romania Actualități and Europa FM, two radio stations with national coverage. Thus, *25 Years After – The National Day on the National Radio* wants to discover if the public radio carries out its declared functions to inform and educate the audience and also that of maintaining the Romanian collective identity and memory.

Keywords: *radio, news, commemoration, collective memory, identity*

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Commemorations, collective memory and media commemoration

The age of nationalism and post-collaborative nationalism brought many changes and challenges for the national identity and collective memory of nations. In this time of globalization, national identity seems to lose ground and starts to fade out. "Recollection of the past is an active, constructive process, not a simple matter of retrieving information. To remember is to place a part of the past in the service of conceptions of the present" (Schwartz, 1982: 374). Collective memory is a system of signs, symbols and practices (Funkenstein, 1993) and in order for it to work in the social groups it must be materialized through various commemorative practices. They consist not only of rituals (commemorative ceremonies, military parades, laying wreaths of flowers and so on), but also in building physical structures (monuments and other memorials commemorating activities) or propagation of commemorative narratives. In *Social Memories: Steps to a Sociology of the Past*, Eviatar Zerubavel (1996) talks about "mnemonic communities" which cannot exist without being maintained by "mnemonic traditions" and what we remember we do it as members of those communities rather than individuals.

Collective memory does not naturally occur, but is actually built and strengthened continuously and sometimes it can be challenged, negotiated, redesigned and rebuilt by different groups of communities (Watson, Chen, 2015). Thus memory and history are not the same concept, but on the contrary, they sometimes seem to be in opposition. Pierre Nora (1989) believes that memory is life born in societies that still exist and that it "remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived [...] Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present" (Nora, 1989: 8). On the other hand, states Nora, history is only a reconstruction, problematic and incomplete of something that no longer exists. Precisely in this regard media proved to be a crucial element in shaping and building national identities and journalists whether they know it or not act as commemorative agents and narrators of the collective memory (Zelizer, 1992). Through media reports members of a community are exposed at the same time to the same commemorative narratives, sometimes even in real time. Thus, "while acknowledging that collective memory takes shape through the interaction of multiple sources across various channels, media scholars have started to argue that journalists play a significant role in communicating, shaping, reinforcing, and sustaining the collective memory of historical events" (Watson, Chen, 2015: 3).

Many radio and television stations, newspapers or online publications present a daily calendar of commemorations. Whether it is a simple presentation of important historical events, whether it is the commemoration of the birth or death of a national personality, these commemorative references became something usual in the media space. This daily calendar is "a cycle of "holy days" specifically designed to commemorate particular historical events, the calendar year usually embodies major narratives collectively woven by mnemonic communities from their past. Examining which particular events are commemorated on holidays can thus help us identify sacred periods in their history" (Zerubavel, 2003: 30). Elisia L. Cohen and Cynthia Willis (2004), analyzing the Sonic Memorial Project state that the National Public Radio managed to create a digital aural memorial and to reinforce national identity without implicating the politics. The two researchers emphasize the fact "radio audiences seek out the medium

following national trauma as a way in which to help bridge the gap between self and others, local and distant, and to create and identify with interpretive communities of listeners through attention to a unified message” (Cohen, Willis, 2004: 595).

Nearly 90 years after the radio has appeared in Romania it continues to be a highly important medium. The radio has managed not only to survive, but it managed to adapt and flourish in the age of television and Internet. Approximately 11 and a half million people listen daily to the radio in Romania. The large number of listeners proves that the radio is not in decline, on the contrary, it continues to be a force. Radio audience has continued to grow also because the listening process is not strictly related to a device anymore. People can now to the radio in their car, on their computer, tablet or phone. The radio was always considered a friend of the listener because it addresses to each individual. Having no images support as TV does, the radio challenges the listeners’ imagination. “Radio can engage the imagination to communicate ideas and images that create a kind of narrative experienced by each individual listener [. . .] to make personal connections, paint pictures with sound, and indeed create scenes that would be impossible in another context” (Dubber, 2013: 101).

However, radio news analysis is still an underdeveloped area especially in Romania and even less in connection with the commemoration phenomenon. I chose Romania's National Day because it is one of the most important moments in the country's history, representing the Union of the three Principalities. The commemorated events always bear some factual significance and the celebrations of national holidays perform an integrative function because they offer the audience a chance to reflect on their national identity (Kaftan, 2007). Furthermore “national commemorative days provide a rare opportunity to explore such themes, because they illuminate the role of the media in shaping the ways in which social groups understand their past through the years and under changing circumstances” (Meyers, Zandberg, Neiger, 2009: 456 - 457).

On December 1st, 2014 Romanians commemorated 96 years since the Great Union in 1918. The National Day was at the beginning of the week, on a Monday. It is very important to mention the political context in which the National Day was celebrated. The commemorative events were held shortly after the presidential elections (the second round was held on November 16th, 2014). So, on December 1st Traian Basescu was still president and the new president Klaus Johannis was be sworn into office three weeks later, on December 21st.

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Radio Romania Actualități is the public radio station, founded in 1928 and in the analyzed period it had nearly 2 million listeners daily (14.5% market share, being ranked second national wide). Radio Europa FM is a private radio station, it has almost 1.5 million listeners and 7.5% market share in the period under review, being ranked 5th by the number of listeners. At both radio stations, the main newscasts are broadcast at 7 a.m., 1 p.m., 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. on week days. I decided to analyze the news broadcast one day before and one day after the National Day to see if the two radio stations only pay attention to the exact time when there are organized events or the National Day is interesting for a longer period of time. The analyzed newscasts had 75 minutes and 45 seconds, but only 21 minutes were dedicated to the commemorative activities and ceremonies. 14 minutes were broadcast at Radio Romania Actualități and 7 minutes at Europa FM. The most information was broadcast exactly on December 1st. On November 30th there were broadcast just two news copies and none on December 2nd. This lack of information before

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and after the National Day can be explained in connection to one of the main features of radio: the immediacy. On the radio, the news is disseminated almost in real time. In order to broadcast again a piece of information it should be updated or at least differently written from the first newscast. As Paul Chantler and Peter Stewart put it "radio is probably at its best when it is 'live' or reacting to an event happening 'now'. Because there are relatively few technicalities, a news story can be on the air in seconds and updated as it develops. Radio works best with news stories which require a quick reaction. There is a flexibility which exists in no other media because comparatively few people are involved in the process" (Chantler, Stewart, 2003: 10).

Any radio station, private or public must always take into account the profile of its listeners. Public broadcasters have certain legal obligations and, as stated in the document about Radio Romania's vision, values and principles, the public station has six types of missions: educational, cultural, competitive, social, democratic and national. The latter refers precisely to promoting and sustaining the national identity, while the democratic plan aims to stimulate the civic spirit and the listeners' involvement in public life. By contrast, although private stations must also abide audiovisual rules and The Code of Ethics, they don't have the same strict mission to inform and educate. Their mission may be just that of entertaining. "Commercial radio survives on advertising revenue. In order to attract advertising, a commercial station has to attract a large audience and cater to the largest potential market. Therefore, most commercial stations play different sorts of music supplemented by local news and information." (Chantler, Stewart, 2003: 4). This explains the fact that Europa FM broadcast less news about the National Day than Radio Romania Actualități.

On November 30th Radio Romania Actualități has previewed the National Day and has broadcast two pieces of news about the commemorative events. There are two simple news copies, one of 32 seconds and another 39 seconds and both were broadcast in the second part of the newscast. They present a general overview of the events that have already taken place: "The celebration of the Romanian National Day began today both internally and abroad. The national flag was raised in the Flag Square from Alba Iulia and other cultural and religious events are organized in Covasna, Buzau and Sfantu Gheorghe. Also different shows are organized in Italy and Spain, countries with large Romanian communities" (Radio Romania Actualități, November 30th, 2014, 6 p.m.). The two news copies also present some of the events that will take place the next day, their role being to tempt the listeners to come and take part in the events: "Tomorrow over 25 thousand employees of the Ministry of Domestic Affairs will be on the field nationwide since a large audience is expected at the commemorative ceremonies, military parades and shows. At the military parade in Bucharest will also take part soldiers from Rep. of Moldova, France, Poland, Turkey and the United States" (Radio Romania Actualități, November 30th, 2014, 6 p.m).

The fact that before the National Day the public station aired only two simple news in the second half of the newscast proves that the events were not considered important enough. Paul Chantler and Peter Stewart (2009) thought of a culinary parallel and talked about a daily menu in the case of a radio newscast and the first and most important radio dish is the first news, the lead story. Events such as the resignation of an important politician, the arrest of a minister, the outbreak of an epidemic or a major accident will automatically become the first news in a radio newscast. So "there will be days when a very important topic will be, without any doubt, the lead story. There will also be days with more than one important topic and then you will have to choose between

them. The criteria are relevancy and interest for the audience" (Mușeteanu, 2009, in Coman: 281).

However, selecting the news and placing them in the newscast also depends on the time of day. The news analyzed in this research were broadcast in the afternoon, while the prime time for radio stations is considered to be between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. As for Europa FM, it does not broadcast a newscast at 18 o'clock during the weekends. „The audience available between 4pm and 6 or 7pm is called the „Drive Audience” because many of those listening will be driving home from work. It is a tricky audience. On the one hand they want a roundup of the news so far that day and developments on the stories they went to work hearing about, but on the other hand, they also want new news, too. Some stories are important but necessarily develop naturally during the course of the day. That is when your skill comes in of re-writing, refreshing and devising new angles of comments to keep the story fresh” (Chantler, Stewart, 2009: 155).

Very important for every radio stations and especially for commercial ones is programming the news and daily shows. This is done with the help of a clock, which is „a circle that represents an hour broken down into segments. Stations generally program each hour similarly to enable audience members to know what they will hear at a certain time” (Perebinossoff, Gross, Gross, 2005: 239). However, the three authors emphasizes that, in the case of public radio programming should not matter so much as in private ones because public broadcasters must consider the content first and less the advertising or profit part. The situation changed on the second day and on December 1st almost the entire newscast from the public radio station was dedicated to the National Day (11 minutes and 30 seconds out of 16 were about the National Day). But, listening to the newscast showed that most of the time was actually dedicated to Traian Băsescu's speech. This was his last celebration of the National Day as the president of Romania and Radio Romania Actualități broadcast his entire speech which lasted for 8 minutes. Besides this speech, the other 3 and a half minutes there were dedicated to one simple piece of news and two features. As one can easily notice it is a great imbalance: the news copies about the commemorative events lasted only 3 minutes and a half, while the speech of a politician has lasted more than double. Still this is not surprising. Many researchers (Nora, 1996; Rosenfeld, 1997; Roudometof, 2003) talked about the politicization of commemoration and about how politics dominates this ritual. In the case of Europa FM the situation was more balanced and politics did not monopolize the newscast. The private radio station has also broadcast fragments from the new president's speech, but its duration was much smaller.

The first flash of Radio Romania Actualități newscast was about the National Day events. Flashes are an important part of a radio newscast because they are meant to draw the public's attention, but at the same time they try to tempt them to listen to the news. "The flashes must synthesize what the newscast will present. [...] The first flash is not necessarily to be the lead story. Some days there are more important topics and the first flash can be about one of them, but the lead story would be another one" (Mușeteanu in Coman, 2009: 281). The Radio Romania Actualități newscast began with the information that on the occasion of the National Day a reception hosted by President Traian Băsescu is scheduled to begin at Cotroceni Palace and that the president was to deliver a speech that the radio station intends to live broadcast. The choice of the verb "to intend" is not accidental. Professional experience teaches reporters and editors that problems may occur, especially when dealing with live broadcasts. Using another verb or a different tense (such

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as "we will broadcast") would have meant expressing a certainty that couldn't have been assumed in this situation.

Radio Romania Actualități newscast had a strong beginning on December 1st. It is a feature story recorded in Bucharest at the military parade which takes place every year in the Constitution Square. It is an independent feature, which is "gives the listener the impression of a live broadcast and creates the sensation that the listener is present at the event. It gives the news a different look, representing the broadcast of the background sound, but filtered through the studio [...] Thanks to voice inserts the listener gets out of the monotony of the simply read newscast, having the feeling that he's being talked to, that he is involved in a reality" (Joanescu, 1999: 206).

The radio reporter must present to the public everything that he/she saw on the field and sounds are those that recall the atmosphere of an event. As Carmen Petcu (2009) states, the sounds used in a radio feature are intended to build an image in the mind of the listener. In this case, the reporter used specific sounds for the event (the sounds of cars that were involved in the parade, the crowd sounds, clapping, whistling, etc.). Moreover, „the length of a story is determined by the length of the newscast, the importance of the story, and the availability of news at that particular hour. If there is not much news to report, the stories may have to be longer than they would be normally. If there is a lot of news, most stories should be short to allow sufficient time for the major stories” (White, 2005: 100).

The first feature dedicated to the National Day lasted 1 minute and 44 seconds, very long for a radio newscast. For a printed press journalist, this duration can seem short. Yet, writing for radio is much more concise than writing for print because the attention of a listener cannot be maintained for more than 3 minutes. Let's not forget that radio is not a domain that requests 100 percent attention from its audience. Radio audience is often involved in other activities (at work, in the car, at the kitchen, on the street etc.) and their attention is distributed in several directions. Robert McLeish (2005) mentions the fact that a newspaper can cover a topic in approximately 30 or 40 de columns, while a 10-minute radio bulletin represents just a column and a half (because a news anchor can read about 160 - 180 words per minute). Thus, the feature presented at the beginning of the bulletin presents an overview of the events, without being able to go further into much detail. It is presented the fact that in Bucharest and other cities were organized religious ceremonies dedicated to the country heroes, military parades and other manifestations. Also, it is mentioned that the military parade held in the Constitution Square started with the Romanian national anthem and as homage 21 gun salvos were fired by the artillery squad of the Mihai Viteazu 30 Regiment.

The events dedicated to the National Day were depicted in a good light, starting with the great number of participants. The National Day is celebrated in winter, on December, 1st, which always brings in discussion the weather. The quality and the success of the manifestation are often correlated with the weather conditions. Generally, if the weather is good, the public is large, if the weather is bad, there are not too many participants (Matei, 2014). In both features broadcasted by Radio Romania Actualități there are mentions about weather and about the fact that, despite the cold, the public was large and delighted by the ceremonies. In the capital, “even if it snowed without break, ten thousands inhabitants of Bucharest came to the event” and in Alba Iulia, “despite the cold, hundreds of militaries and dozens of equipments of MAPN and MAI enchanted the ones coming to the parade, especially the children” (Radio Romania Actualități, December 1st, 2014, 6 p.m.). Unlike a newspaper, which can emphasize an important story by using

titles and subtitles, by changing or enhancing the font, radio can only emphasize the importance of a subject by its placing and treatment (McLeish, 2005). In this situation, the methods used by radio journalists to draw readers' attention are the vocal indications. "Modifications in voice inflections used by anchors offer oral indications to the listeners. They help stress certain words or expressions inside a text [...] Changes in accent add a lot to the audience's ability to understand the intention of the author" (Joanescu, 1999: 48 – 49). In this situation, the intention of the reporter was to underline the fact that the public appreciated a lot the quality of the commemorative ceremony: "Even if it snowed without a break, tens thousands of inhabitants came to the event. Children and elder people, they were all *very* excited" (accent on *very*; Radio Romania Actualitati, December 1st 2014, 6 p.m.). The dynamism of the feature is created by combining several voices because the reporter selected different ones belonging to kids and adults, men and women. They declared themselves thrilled by the parade they attended to:

Voice 1, male: Very beautiful, it is the first time that I came here. I went to Alba Iulia and this year I came to Bucharest. I think it was very beautiful, better organized and larger.

Voice 2, female: It was interesting, it was the first time I came in Bucharest. I used to go much more to Alba Iulia but this year I preferred to come to Bucharest.

Reporter: What did you like about the parade?

Voice 3, child: I liked the tanks and the police cars.

Reporter: Didn't you freeze?

Voice 3, child: I froze but it was worthy (Radio Romania Actualități, December 1st, 2014, 6 p.m.).

The Europa FM reporter noticed that fewer young people attended the event compared to the one last year. And yet, here also the accent is placed on the enthusiasm of the participants:

Reporter – Dressed in Romanian popular costume, she doesn't not show her 60 years age. She was born on December 7th and she never missed a December 1st manifestation.

Woman: Well, I came here because it is the National Day. Nobody asked us to come here. When Ceausescu was alive, we were obliged to come here. Now we come in good will. What does this mean? I say that it is going to get better. I am an optimist (Europa FM, December 1st, 2014, 6 p.m.)

In newscasts analyzed at Radio Romania Actualități and Europa FM there are three vox pops. This is a type of material that shows "the voice of the people". Within vox pops, approximately 4-5 voices are grouped and the reporter asks a question or two concerning a current matter. Vox pops should not be mistaken for a sociological investigation because „while the aim is to present a sample of public opinion, the broadcaster must never claim it to be statistically valid, or even properly representative. It can never be anything more than 'the opinions of some of the people we spoke to today' (McLeish, 2005: 102).

Taking into account the fact that space is another important commemorative element, the news focused upon some of the big cities where events were organized. With Radio Romania Actualități, there were presented events taking place in Bucharest and Alba Iulia, while Europa FM presented the events held in Iasi. Alba Iulia is the town where on December 1st, 1918, the Great Unification took place. Time passed by and the city became a central place of the Romanian collective memory. The places of memory (*les lieux de mémoire*) are a symbolic proof of past events and „our interest in lieux de memoir

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where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn-but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists” (Nora, 1989: 7). Alba Iulia is a city that became a dominant place of memory, meaning a place where official ceremonies take place and people commemorate events considered triumphs of history (Nora, 1996).

2014 it was a year which brought a new element during the commemoration organized at Alba Iulia. This element was presented in the second feature of the news bulletin at Radio Romania Actualități. After 9 years, a military parade was again organized and 25.000 people were present. This second material is built just the same as the first one, with short descriptions of the events that took place. It was presented that the commemorative ceremonies debuted in the morning with wreath layings to the monuments dedicated to political and historical characters: Mihai Viteazul, Queen Mary and King Ferdinand the 1st, Iuliu Maniu and IC Brătianu. The feature included references to the past by depicting the way that delegates from the royal castles were received in the front of the “Unification Room from Alba Iulia, where was commemorated the historical moment of December 1st, 1918, when Romanians from all over the country requested the unification” (Radio Romania Actualități, December 1st, 2014, 6 p.m.). December 1st is presented differently by the two radio stations. Radio Romania Actualități broadcasted the speech delivered by Traian Băsescu while Europa FM aired the speech made by Klaus Iohannis, the recently elected but not yet sworn into the office president. Another difference is that with Radio Romania Actualități, the materials presenting the commemorative ceremonies are broadcasted first and only later the speech delivered by Traian Băsescu.

Europa FM does things differently and politics come first and only later on they presented information about the commemorative events. Analyzing the two politicians ‘speeches is not the purpose of this research, so I will not get into it. Also, in Europa FM news, the focus is not upon the commemorative elements but on the popular celebration elements. These “moments of popular joy” (Coman, 2008) generally take place at the end of the official ceremonies and have nothing in common with the solemnity of the commemorations. The reporter from Europa FM talks about popular music concerts and sausage bean, which “became a tradition” (Europa FM, December 1st, 2014, 6 p.m.). Anterior researches already proved that “beans parade is a significant ritual of the National Day, a food ritual that strongly competes with the commemorative ritual” (Matei, 2014: 144). This thing is also presented at the radio while describing commemorative events. A 2 minutes material includes a minute and a half discussion about beans and sausages. The reporter, the children and the elder talk about how good the beans are. Furthermore, the recipe is presented:

Old woman – you put these ones. You soak the beans into water, after that you boil it with an onion, some garlic, spices. You boil them altogether and there you have the best possible beans.

Conclusions

The analysis of the newscasts broadcast on Radio Romania News and Europa FM on the National Day in 2014 shows that the two channels have devoted little time and attention to the commemorative events organized. The analyzed newscasts had 75 minutes and 45 seconds, but only 21 minutes were dedicated to the commemorative activities and

ceremonies. The two stations broadcast only a few piece of news a day before, on November 30th and no news whatsoever the day after, on December 2nd. The news copies presented have referred only to the official ceremonies and to some of the popular celebrations organized after the official ones. They provided information about the time, place and participants, presenting the most important moments. The news but did not provide details about the historic event commemorated or about the importance of the moment and its implications for the national identity. The only references to national identity can be found in the politicians' speeches. As Florica Iuhas (2015) mentioned in a similar research radio journalism has rather an informative purpose than an educational one and that is why it doesn't take the time to present the context of the event. The news about the National Day respected the radio style: they were written in short sentences, with easy words so that any listener can understand. In the end I have to emphasize that we will have a more relevant image about the way the Romanian radio stations reflect the commemoration of the National Day after a more complex research encompassing the news for at least two or three years.

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