

## **Abstract**

This diploma thesis is thematically oriented towards early theories of public opinion of the late 19th century. Concretely, it deals with the theories of Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill and James Bryce. The thesis presents an analysis, interpretation and a comparison of these three thinkers and concentrates on the following topics: the definition of the term “public opinion”; the formation of public opinion; the influence individuals, groups and society as a whole have on public opinion; and the role the media play in public opinion. Further, it shows how these authors’ thoughts are continued in selected 20th century theories of public opinion, namely in Walter Lippmann’s concept of public opinion, the Two-step flow model developed by Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann’s Spiral of Silence, Irving Crespi’s theory of the Public Opinion Process and Giovanni Sartori’s “cascade model” of public opinion.

**Key words:** public opinion, media, Two-step flow model, Spiral of Silence, Public Opinion Process, cascade model of public opinion, Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, James Bryce, W. Lippmann, E. Katz, P. Lazarsfeld, E. Noelle-Neumann, I. Crespi, G. Sartori