Peaceful Media Communication in Post-Conflict Societies 1999-2007

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Abstract

The dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, which started in 1990, led to the formation of seven new states. Societies of these states went through periods of war and post-conflict developments. Media and public discourse could not avoid being an active part of conflicts and later of post-conflict environments. Kosova, as the youngest state (since 17 February 2008) that emerged from the former federation, experienced a process of war and en masse exodus, and later a peaceful post-conflict transition. The *peaceful media* model has been an essential part of the transition, which is not over yet, just like is not over the process of building of political democracy. There have been frequent debates on the topic of the responsibilities that may be attributed to the media in a conflict, on the one hand, and the positive role the media and journalists can play in post-conflict societies, on the other. What is the public rhetoric that accompanied the wars and what is the rhetoric that is used in building democratic societies?

Key Words: period after the conflict, media and public language, media for peace, transition, parliamentarism, tele-revolution, tele-dictatorship, ghettoization of media.

The social and political crisis in the former Yugoslavia during 1980s had an important impact on the pubic communication language. Political and social destabilization involved all units of the former Yugoslav federation, thus hindering the establishment of the institutions that were supposed to be the result of a legal process of changes in the political system. The basis of a new

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society and new system were shattered as a consequence of conflicts and the domination aspirations of the Serb nationalism, which produced non-sustainability and wars with tragic consequences to Southeastern Europe. In a situation of extreme rivalry for domination and ethnic hegemony, the dominating communist rhetoric, which had been formal rhetoric for over 40 years, was replaced by informal language and nationalistic rhetoric. Transition from the communist to parliamentarian society turned out to be more difficult in the territories of the former Yugoslavia than in all other countries of the Eastern bloc.

The wars in the former Yugoslavia (1990-99) encouraged further the use of hate speech and rhetoric of the past, and also stimulated local nationalisms. Media became an active and important tool in distracting the common citizens, since the desire for new information, which had been denied for decades, made them be not very critical in consuming the media product that was offered. The source of poverty and the citizens' misfortune was not being sought in the mistaken policies and the media as promoter of corrupt political discourse but rather in the other nations or ethnic groups. That atmosphere is described as abuse of "freedom of expression," and this can be noticed in the analyses by Croat scholar Ivan Roro on the atmosphere of such communication. He noted that "polarization in our media and dangerous media policy have lead to the formation of a erroneous perception that everything can be written and said to create an atmosphere of alleged free communication, which in fact has never existed".[1]

The Belgrade media propaganda grew even more powerful before and during the wars in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosova. The civic virtue disappeared, while the transformation energy was focused on military mobilization. The Serbian Army attacks, in addition to policy, were encouraged in particular by the Serbian public television (RTS), Tanjug,[2] and Belgrade dailies *Politika* and *Vecernje Novosti*.

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[1] Ivan Rora: "Mediji i Demokracija", *Dom i Svijet,* br. 229, Hrvatski Informativni Centar, Zagreb, 1999.

[2] Tanjug is state news agency established by Yugoslav communists on 5 November 1943.

Idolizing one's nation and denying all the others was achieved through (ethnic) community politicization. Headlines and article with aggressive content dominated the Belgrade media. In one single report of state agency Tanjug, which is known for supporting totalitarian regime, one could find two negative attributes about the Albanians: "Honest Albanian traders" who "closed their shops in Peje/Pec, and whose shop window were smashed" (by Serbs, authors note) and "Siptarke" (derogatory name for Albanian women) demonstrated demanding "international support." So the word "Albanci (Albanians) is used in positive connotation, while the term "Siptar" in the derogatory form. Some newspapers in Belgrade wrote for many years the word "Siptar" with small "s".[3]

Hate language as model of public and cultural communication makes hatred a "normal" behavior and part of everyday communication.[4] Analyzing extreme polarization of Serbian press also highlights a longstanding role of the media in paralyzing alternative opinions. For 10 consecutive years, the RTS not only played the main role of promoting warmongering propaganda from the center, but it also involved its network on the ground through local radios and televisions. The positioning of Serbian media in support of the war would homogenize the "national conscience," on the one hand, and made the mechanisms of social control inefficient, on the other.

There is ample truth in the thesis that after the "tele-revolution" of end of 1980s the Serbian state media created "tele-dictatorship," respectively, the war media, by justifying it as necessity, because it was seen worthwhile and as the only way for results and a future for the Serbian people. Hate language, as an extension of national and religious hatred and other forms intolerance, which is a practice of totalitarian states, dominated the media content of that regime. Even worse, the journalists not only encouraged manslaughter but in a way they were murderers themselves.[5] Fear also led to the changes in professional ethics, leaving no room for solidarity of

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[3] Milos Vasic: "Jezik mrznje u zvanicnim medijiama" *SE*,15 Mart/Ozuljak, 1998.

[4] Miroljub Radojkovic: *Media Transition in Serbia*, doc 2000 (Media online).

[5] Mirko Galic, *Arhiva*, Sarajevo: 2000, (electronic publication, www.aimpress.ch).

professional organizations during that time when persecution, liquidation, and prosecution of independent journalists would take place. This prelude of authoritarian communication model can serve in explaining the language of media communications in other republics of the former Yugoslavia. In the name of fighting back the Serbian propaganda before and during the war, the media of non-Serb peoples would favor patriotic folklore, pathetic language, and community (ethnic) pride.

In this constellation of communication, the Kosova case has its own specifics dissimilar from the former Yugoslavia republics, because the media in Kosova were under the Serbian state pressure since 1990. While before, during, and after the Serbian aggression both Croatia and Bosnia could maintain an active government-citizens communication through national media in Croatian and Bosnian languages, this was not possible in Kosova. Albanians did not have electronic media, and they could not make national or beyond-national media impacts due to the poor broadcasting infrastructure, since the mainstream mechanisms were controlled by the violent regime. An additional and more detailed analysis is needed here to explain how the Albanian-language media in Kosova, which had operating for 40 years, were closed after an arbitrary intervention by Serbian regime police.

The media in Kosova operated in accordance with the laws of the former Yugoslav federation until 1990. According to the 1974 constitution of the former Yugoslavia, Kosova was one of eight federal units, and based on that constitution it was entitled to autonomous media, including a central radio/television broadcaster with local network of radio stations. The media systems in other seven federal units were built on the basis of that same model. In 1990, the military and police intervention of Milosevic regime in Kosova led to the closure of institutions and the media.[6] Albanian language was banned in the only public television, even though Albanians

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[6] Radio and Television of Prishtina, or RTP, was the first television in Albanian in Kosova. The broadcasting of its programs was violently interrupted by the Serbian Government in 1990. Radio Prishtina started work immediately after the World War II, in 1945.

made 92% of Kosova's population. Multiethnic broadcaster RTP, which in addition to Albanian, aired programs in Serbian, Turkish, and Roma languages, was turned into a broadcaster of Milosevic regime, by editing programs only in Serbian language. The communication language and system were dominated by insult language and extreme propaganda against the Albanians, as well as their culture, language, and identity in general. For nine years, (1990-99), the RTP, as a "public media outlet" in Prishtina, produced and aired contents against non-Serb people, it revived medieval myths, exclusion of the others, and encouraged conflicts aimed at boosting the "military spirit of Serb nation" as "victim of all neighbors."

The Kosovar society was a specific case also when it came to the transformation of the media since it could not have a process dominated by positive balances. Media in the language of majority population could not produce alternative information. Media "ghettoization" had sought cutting of communication in Albanian not only within the old political borders, but also within the cultural and language borders. Hence, the media in Kosova did not have the opportunity the other post-totalitarian societies had to follow a process of transformation, which was not easy in other countries either, because those countries managed to overcome quicker and easier the consequences of nationalistic conflicts, in which the media were not spared from severe conflicts between political groups within states. [7]

The years 1998-99 saw a Serbian military aggression in Kosova, which left over 14,000 people dead and over 70,000 households destroyed. During that time, a pragmatic response was needed in terms of communication models, especially with the Serb minority, whose members were to a great extent identified with actions of the army and police during the war. The policy that was applied by Albanians and internationals after 12 June 1999 (entry of NATO forces in Kosova) had to do with avoiding arbitrariness and adopting non-confronting policies. The OSCE, an international organization that

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[7] The Case of Southeastern Europe - Media in Transition, Ljubljana, 2002.

encourages the development of media policies and democracy, together with the international civil administration (UN Mission, UNMIK) adopted the policy of building *peace media*. This notion became a trademark of public, political, and media language in Kosova. A society that emerged from a war with tragic consequences, started o install a totally different language from what the Serbian media had used in Kosova until then. The media in Kosova became a generator of tolerance and understanding, instead of instruments used to incite hatred and violence. The Kosova society under the UN administration and with security provided by NATO is regulated in a way to function on the basis of there main pillars: aspired multi-ethnicity, pluralistic religious tradition, and European standards of freedoms.[8]

After 1999, with the help of international donations, a dynamic network of electronic and print media was developed in Kosova. By the end of 2001, there were 48 radios in Albanian, 22 in Serbian, 2 in Turkish and Bosnian each, and 3 in Roma language. In addition to the radios broadcasting in one language, there were radios broadcasting in two or three languages, especially in the mixed municipalities with Albanians and minorities: 2 radios broadcasting in Albanian and Serbian, 2 in Albanian, Serbian, and Turkish, 2 in Albanian and Bosnian, 1 in Albanian, Serbian, and Roma, 1 in Albanian and Gorani, 1 in Albanian and Turkish, 2 in Serbian and Roma.[9] Fifteen televisions broadcasted programs in Albanian, 6 in Serbian, 1 in Albanian, Serbian, and Turkish, and 1 in Albanian, Bosnian, and Turkish.[10]

There is an explanation as to why this big a number of electronic broadcasters started working in the postwar Kosova in languages of all ethnic groups. Coordination in communication among the centers of power was sought -- in this case between the internationals and citizens, on the one hand, and between centers of local power and the citizens, on the other. The languages had to reflect the true structures of

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[8] Milazim Krasniqi: "Në çfarë Kosove do të jetojmë", *Zëri ynë,* Prishtina, 2008, f.215.
[9] Kosovo Temporary Media Commissioner (report 2000-2001), Prishtina,2002.
[10] Ibid.

Kosova, even though that reality is still complex. For this reason, the future, and not the past, was considered a priority. Even though the communication language is not based on full freedom, yet it is based on new political and responsible limits.

Even though the Serbs barely made 6% of the population, they had much more radio stations compared to the percentage of Albanians as a majority population, who in fact were the victims of the war that had just ended. Tolerance toward the Serbs became the guiding category of the public communication of the majority with minority population in Kosova. Individual and collective rights, although they functioned more based on the mechanical principle, provided for undeniable rights of communication in the languages of citizens of various ethnic background.

In order to explain more comprehensively the creation of a peace media in a post-conflict country, as is Kosova, one could illustrate it with the case of RTK (Radio and Television of Kosova). The RTK is a public broadcaster established through the financial, technical, and professional assistance from the international community. The OSCE, through European Broadcasters Union (EBU), launched it as an emergency media service with the goal of offering first-hand information in a country that was destroyed by the war and where the consequence of the war would be felt for a long time.

In September 1999, only two months after the departure of the Serbian army, the RTK started broadcasting two hours of programs daily. It started to operate in the facilities of the pervious media company, RTP (Radio Television of Prishtina), which, as it was noted above, until the end f the war had operated as a broadcaster under the Serbian control. Initially it was managed by the EBU, on the basis of a memorandum of understanding with the OSCE. In June 2001, pursuant to the UNMIK Regulation 2001/13, the RTK was formally recognized as public broadcasting service. Huge investments created advantages to this broadcasting service in relation to the others, and it became the main source of information to the citizens. Surveys show that 84% of the citizens in Kosova at that time

were informed from television, while 8% from the radio and 6% from newspapers.[11]

The RTK continues to operate today according the following rule: "Respect for human dignity and particularities, the principal of unbiased and accurate information, pluralism of thought and opinion, and religious and political pluralism". [12] It is worth noting that in mid-2007, the RKT broadcasted programs in Albanian and in the languages of four minority communities living in Kosova -- Serbian, Bosnian, Turkish, and Roma. If one would describe the normative motto if this broadcaster, then it should the following: "Tendency to express diverse political interests and language, religious and political pluralism".[13] Its program policies are based on diverse, high-quality informative, cultural, and educational and entertainment content.

The RTK enjoyed the support of the local audience, but not to the same extent the support of all international institutions that developed policies in the country. An event in 2004 surfaced a conflict over the RTK between the European financial supporters and the media control centers (UN administration, UNMIK). The RTK was accused from the position of political conjectures. In March 2004, following some demonstrations and attacks on Serb property, Temporary Media Commissioner Robert Gillette accused the RTK of being accountable for the spread of protests on 16 and 17 March. After March 2004 events, the RTK risked being closed down on alleged charges of "inciting protests". Threats by Commissioner Gillette that the broadcaster would be closed made an effect on the editors and journalists in the form of increased censorship and auto-censorship, as protecting mechanisms to avoid external pressure and threads. Later on, Margaret Grebe, head of the OSCE Justice Department, justified those threats in political terms: Regulations do not present any censorship, respectively they do not differ a lot from the Code of Conduct that obliges the media to respect those regulations, and all

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[11] IREX: *Mediat dhe politika në Kosovë*, 2004, f.1.
[12] *Ligji për Radiotelevizionin e Kosovës*, 2006, f. 3.
[13] Ibid.

media are required to have fair and objective approach by avoiding hate language.

Which were those regulations that administered the media market in post war Kosova? It is worth touching upon some of the points that offer a clear picture of the structure, content, and effect of those regulations. Moreover, even the Constitutions of Kosova, as the highest legal act in the country, guarantees the right of media freedom and pluralism, and sanctions censorship. The previous legal act in Kosova (Constitutional Framework) defined the media as a segment of freedom of society, by specifying that they should guarantee media content to minority communities in their respective languages. The document obliged the institutions to adopt a law on the freedom of media, but by ensuring avoidance of language of insult and hatred. [14]

However there was obvious contradiction between the Constitution and regulations regarding the print and electronic media. Just like it was the case with all other affairs in Kosova after 1999, the media regulations provided for control by international institutions over the media. Bernard Kushner, Special Representatives of the UN Secretary General in Kosova, signed Regulation 2000/37, thus licensing control of media. This act was followed by other regulations promulgated by the Office of the Temporary Media Commissioner (TMC), now transformed into Independent Media Commission led by local experts.[15] The TMC assigned itself the right of ensuring that the media would respect the human right of free expression, diversity of opinions, non-biasness, and accuracy not only for print and electronic content but also with the case of advertisements. The TMC had the right to impose fines and punishment, up to suspension of the license of a broadcaster, if despite the warnings the editors continued with violations and abuse of broadcasters. When that regulation was promulgated, it prompted a wave of reactions, especially by the media

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[14] *Korniza Kushtetuse e Kosovës*. Kreu 5. Pika 5.4. 15 maj 2001.

[15] The independent media commission is an independent agency that licenses and regulates radio and television broadcasting in Kosova according to European practices.

representatives who described that norm as extremely constraining and which provided for censorship.

Regulations that were promulgated later also involved sanctions. The media authority was given enough legal instruments to intervene without any procedure in the media. Article 3 of the Regulation 2000/37 provided for a fine of not less than DM 1,000 and not exceeding DM 100,000, seizure of equipment and/or printed material, and finally suspension or close down of operations. In the legitimacy aspect, the Article 5.1, which regulated the field of public communication, was particularly problematic by confronting the ethics and professional standards. "Owners, operators, publishers, and editors shall refrain from publishing personal details of any person, including name, address or place of work, if the publication of such details would pose a serious threat to the life, safety or security of any such person through vigilante violence or otherwise".[16]

The relative peace in the media was judged through these articles, which placed the human aspect above the professional ethics, especially with the case of events related to the war and individuals implicated in the crimes that had taken place during the war. Journalists would be punished together with their media outlets in case they moved outside the limits provided for by the restrictive regulation. In case those principles were violated, the Media Commissioner would take action by asking accountability from the media. The Temporary Media Commissioner could also promulgate special rules in specific circumstances, whereas Special Representatives of the Secretary General could transform, through administrative orders (articles 1,2), all such regulations into laws and in those cases the media did not have any point of reference for possible complaints. The norms applied until 2007 did not provide for the necessary opportunity for critical and creative journalism.

As to how this norm could work it can be illustrated with the case of the ban of Albanian language newspaper *Dita*. Polemics over the closure of that newspaper have not ended even today.

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[16] *Regulation 2000/37*, Article 5, Prishtina, 2000.

On 27 April 2000, *Dita* published an article headlined "When Petar Becomes Peter," by identifying a Serb working with UNMIK, Petar Topolski, as member of a Serbian military unit. The newspaper published his photo and personal details, including his home and work address. On 15 May 2000, Topolski was found killed only three weeks after the publication of the article in the Prishtina newspaper, which had not prejudged his guilt but had only offered material evidence on his past: photos showing him in together with a Serb paramilitary unit that had committed crimes around Prishtina.

On 30 May 2000, the Special Representatives of the Secretary General promulgated an executive order through which the *Dita* newspaper was to be closed. The decision initially suggested an eight-day suspension of *Dita*, by arguing that the newspaper and its editors had violated that the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999). On 20 July, the Temporary Media Commissioner delivered to the *Dita* newspaper another decision related to another article on Decan Monastery[17] and (Serb) priests who intended to block the life of Albanian residents around the Monastery. After a series of processes, the Media Commissioner reached the following decision: "By taking into account violation of Article 1, and pursuant to the rights sanctioned by Article 2/1C, we advise that the owner and publisher of *Dita* newspaper are individually or together are obliged to pay 25,000 DM (German Marks). The newspaper has been given until 26 July to reply by paying with a certified check before a sanction is imposed".[18]

After constant pressure and fines, *Dita* newspaper ceased publication on 28 July 2000. The *Dita* editors advised their reader that they had been ordered by the Office of the Temporary Media Commissioner to cease activity, and that in case the newspaper failed to do so, the order would be executed by legal authorities. The editorial staff disputed the Media Commissioner's allegations that *Dita* had threatened the life of

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[17] Decan Monastery is an Orthodox shrine of 13th century (Byzantine period), which is protected by the Kosova government. The Monastery is also under UNESCO protection.

[18] *Rasti Dita*, Prishtinë. KMLDNJ, Prishtinë f.220.

Orthodox priests in Decan Municipality, as it had mentioned them in an article published on 4 July 2000.[19]

Post-conflict transformation of the society in the context of the role of media was not quite easy in the sense of security of media and journalists. Ideas and facts showing a change from the public community judgment are associated with reactions and problems. The assessment of the role of the independent media in Kosova is different from other post-conflict societies. There were critical voices but not to the extent of stigmatizing independent media, as was the case in post-conflict Croatia, which is illustrated with a document of the Helsinki Committee. The independent media were in particular attacked and accused by party leaders of being against their respective peoples. Important media were accused of being paid by international factors, orchestrated by foreigners, or of being part of the international conspiracy against national parties.[20]

Conclusions

After 1999, Kosova was a typical post-conflict society. Social, political, and cultural contradictions confronted the conscience of guilt and forgiveness, by installing public peace in media communications. Hate language and incitement of ethnic violence were excluded. This no longer exists in the form of hate language on ethnic difference basis. Media Council (a body dealing with media complaints) reports covering the years 2006-2008 show that there were no cases of complaints by citizens or institutions over insults or attacks on ethnic basis.

Big credit goes to the media that Kosova was not hit by violence and a post-colonial conflict. They promoted a society with democratic values, by trying to preserve the balance between the humane and professional. However, such journalism had also its shortcomings by serving to or providing extensive coverage of the activities of institutions, UNMIK, KFOR (NATO peacekeeping forces in Kosova), political parties,

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Deklaratë e Komitetit të Helsinkit për të Drejtat e Njeriut, 2001, www.nh-hchr.org

leaders, offices or information officials. After the post-conflict norms (1999-2006), the Kosovar and international institutions established legal norms guaranteeing full freedom of press, based on practices of countries with a considerable level of democracy during transition. This norm now regulates the work of over 100 electronic media outlets and dozens of daily newspapers and weekly ad monthly magazines.

Translated by Hilmi Zogjani.

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