# The process of political reconciliation in the former Yugoslavia

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## Abstract

*The paper deals with political hate speech in the media in the former Yugoslavia, with a special focus on Montenegro. The smallest of all ex-Yugoslav republics, Montenegro has gone through turbulent times of political conflicts, wars and economic problems. After years of conflicts with the authorities in Belgrade, it was able to regain her independence and improve relations with its neighbors. After several missed opportunities for dialogue and cooperation and after ignoring global changes, neighbors have turned to a shared future. Reintegration of the Western Balkan countries into the international organization should be a political, economic and social priority for the region, focusing on similarities and neglecting their differences.*

## Keywords

Politics; hate speech; nationalism; the Western Balkan; media; reconciliation

## 1. Introduction

Politics is a complex and multidimensional activity and it is in unbreakable connection with the struggle for power, establishing and maintaining. The power is undeniable imposition of will on behalf of the community, the state. In the present time it is difficult to clearly delineate where information stops and where it starts persuasive activity, because the informative and publicity activities in the modern age are often in symbiosis. Talking about a political problem, as well as media information about an event, regardless of the intent, effect on humans and to some degree shapes their attitude toward political reality.[1] Propaganda represents the kind of communication that is performed to convincing the message recipient. The ultimate goal of political propaganda is to induce individuals directly or indirectly to participate in political activities of a certain political entity, in a manner and to the extent

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1 „Communication is the basis of all social and cultural processes, and media in various ways, changing forms of communication" – Friedrich Krotz, „Aconcept with which to grasp media and societal change", *Mediatization: Concept, changes, consequences* (2009): 21-40.

determined by the very political subject.[2] The power is a means of authority in politics, where the carrier of authority concretizes power and affixes it by activation of power jurisdiction. Power is the ability to influence the behavior of other members of society. The authorities must be powerful and legitimate, be accepted as justified. Politics as a practical activity deals with regulating the relations among people that they realized their wishes, needs and interests. The previous electoral practice often shows a tendency that the creators of the electoral rules through legislation, through legal means, modify or manipulate the will of citizens. Changing social values as a result of the shocking events, the breakup of the Yugoslav federation, civil war, hyperinflation and rising crime, has been a fertile ground for various forms of manipulative activity. The formation of political parties of different ideological orientations, the collapse of the economy and previous social values created overall confusion in the Montenegrin public. Because, it is easiest to manipulate those who think they are at risk or that they will be potential victims of their neighbors or political opponents, so the national theme in the political discourse will be dominant, while the Montenegrin politicii elite as the ruling thus the opposition, it is useful. Montenegro's political legacy as one of the general characteristics had indisputable authority and the will of the ruler, whether it was personified by the secular face (the period of the church Metropolitans of the 17th to the mid 19th century), by the form of authoritarian monarch (the period of Princedom and Kingdom of half of the 19. century), or the period of communism after 1945.[3]

Upon coming to power, after the political changes of 1989, the new ruling Montenegrin political elite has set specific rules of the political game in an atmosphere of new-established political pluralism. Although only up to that level that the participation of other political parties in the elections was not brought into question, but a real possibility that another party won the elections and take power was very small. One of the causes of conflicts and wars in the former Yugoslavia was the fact that nationalist, or in the most cases communists who manipulated nationalism, managed to impose cult of the past in the public and thus to lead nations to turn the nation's history as a myth, to revive old hostilities and continue the ancient wars. It may be noted that yesterday's communists, supporters of the Yugoslavs idea brotherhood and unity, recognized in the previously repressed nationalism new „power", and the field to win or maintain power. It is evident that for decades, „Tito's time, ,' Tito's paths of freedom," the idea of brotherhood and unity, non-alignment and the like, represented a strong cohesive factor that is induced by daily propaganda in the Yugoslav public. Weakening of Tito's cult and his ideas there has clearly imposed a need for a new „magnet for the masses „ in the form of several political centers, around which by promoting ethno-nationalisms it tried to form a critical mass, homogenized strong enough to preserve or coming to power.

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2  „In this way the propaganda turns into skill and the art of political action, through a deliberate attempt to alter, control or create the attitudes of individuals or groups". Terence H. Qualter, *Propaganda and Psihological Warfare* (NY: Random House, 1962):27
3  In the book „Montenegrin themes" Z. Andrijasevic gives a picture of governmental technologies and Montenegrins mentality and their relation to the authority of government in the late 19th and early 20th century. – Zivko Andrijasevic, *Montenegrin themes* (Podgorica:IICG, Podgorica, 1998), 88-91. As the Prince and King Nikola loved to express his political forms by the lyrics, here it is „song" about principle of his reign Montenegrins: *„In the cramp hold Montenegrins / so gently, so skillfully / and chastise and cherish/ and you will do with them everything ... „*- Radule Knezevic, *History of political culture in Montenegro* (Podgorica:CID. 1998), 274.

Statement by former high officials from Kosovo F. Hoxha from 1986 had a negative effect and response in the former Yugoslav public.[4] This statement has launched an avalanche of protest gatherings in Kosovo, was the subject of a large number of newspaper articles, and represented a „further top up the oil on the fire" to the already seething and tense atmosphere of the interethnic intolerance. Through the media mutual hatred was induced and increasing differences among nations.

Period of disintegration of the socialist systems reflected also on Yugoslavia, in the form of economic crisis, poor economy, rising inflation and rising nationalist tensions. Montenegro, as a spatially and numerically smallest of the six federal republics, went into the process of multi-party system, the atmosphere of populism, civil wars and hyperinflation, as the main feature of the first half of the 90s. Slobodan Milosevic expected by the Montenegrin leadership the „fourth voice" that was necessary for him to control the decision-making in the Yugoslav federation (Serbia had one vote, plus one of each of its two provinces, along with Montenegro it was four, like all other republics together- so he could block any decision on the federal level of Yugoslavia).

Propaganda represents the kind of communication that is performed to persuade recipients of messages. In the war environment, in an atmosphere of growing national passion, the territory of Montenegro clearly not escaped the wave of war propaganda, media preparation, support and justification for the war. However, Montenegro has demonstrated the certain specificity, because on the territory of the republic there were no real armed conflicts, except for occasional incident situations. Armed conflicts in southern Herzegovina, Dubrovnik and Banija area, where participated mobilized soldiers from Montenegro, induced in the Montenegrin public psychosis of xenophobia and nationalism of all kinds. It was followed by an adequate propaganda preparation and aggressive war propaganda.

## 2. The decade of the media hate speech

### 2.1. War by means of words and pictures

Armed conflicts in Croatian territory were reflected in the political life in Montenegro. During a rally in support of the Serbs in Croatia, held on 2 October 1990 in the former Titograd city, thousands of people were chanting: „Yugoslavia, Yugoslavia", „We will kill Tudjman," „Serbia, Serbia", „We will kill the Ustashas". Statements by senior federal officials (B. Kostic) have pointed to the idea of change of previous republican borders. The deputy leader of the ruling DPS, S. Marovic causes of the Yugoslav crisis seen in the „continuity of aggressive imperialist Catholicism". In 1st October 1991, after media preparation and an incident on the Montenegrin-Croatian border, the Yugoslav People's army (JNA), according to official media, „has moved from passive defense to offensive action", and as those days specified newspaper „Pobjeda", „started to hail Ustasha's positions with artillery tools". On 30 September 1991, the JNA command in Kumbor place in Montenegro announced a naval blockade of Dubrovnik. Exactly one year later, on October 1, 1992 in Geneva, an agreement was reached that the FRY Army withdraws from Prevlaka peninsula. The official balance of the Dubrovnik operations, according to official data, was 165 killed soldiers from Montenegro. B. Kostic, former vice

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4 F. Hoxha then said: „There are individual cases of rape in Kosovo. I think the private cafes in Kosovo should be allowed to bring, to employ women from other parts of Yugoslavia. Then these individuals, who rape women of other nationalities, could brutalize on such places". – Nebojiša Popov, *Serbian Side of War (Srpska strana rata).* (Belgrade: B92, 2002), 210.

president of the SFRY Presidency, speaking on the character of the Dubrovnik operations, pointed out that the Montenegrin soldiers was doing preventive work in the area around Dubrovnik in defense of the JNA and Montenegro and to prevent any spillover of the conflict in the area of Boka bay. So even then the Montenegrin political leadership has not been immune to the events at the Dubrovnik battlefield.

The old rule is that the war first hurt truth. So immediately after the start of the siege of Dubrovnik, its Mayor P. Poljanic in 12 October 1991 told the TV cameras that on the city fell as many as 15,000 grenades. That news went around and upset the world. The shelling of Dubrovnik excited much of the world public, especially since the city was under the protection of UNESCO. Sharpening of the complex political situation, primarily induced Serbo-Croatian tensions and conflicts, was contributed by members of other religions and nationalities. They used cultural and religious events held in Montenegro for the dissemination of hate speech and thereby contribute to the deepening of the atmosphere of mistrust extremely suitable for various forms of manipulation and propaganda. Having regard to the war on the borders of Montenegro and the fact that it represented a small political and economic system that is impossible to put in isolation outside the context of economic, political and war events in the wider area of Yugoslavia, it is necessary to present in basic lines propaganda activity in an environment that is to spread also on the territory of Montenegro.

Political propaganda in the war differed from that in peace. The media then highlight the stories of victims and culprits, of „them" and „us", and the images are becoming bloodier and crueler. The language and images become more emotional in order to awaken reaction. In these tragic events of the civil war the media of all parties involved have raced in hate speech and raising tensions. Propagandists apply stereotypes; manipulate emotions, and the myths associated with the past and present, wanting time to convince people that the created stories are part of their history. By the hate speech in the media they influenced the creation of general psychology, dominant opinion that it is necessary for the functioning of the desired political system. In the media it was broadcasted comments full of insults, and the ruling circles of this or that side, and even entire nations, without gaps proclaimed as Chetniks or Ustashas or Jihadists, genocide etc.[5] Hate speech used also the wrong pronunciation of the name of opponents or giving the names that members of other nations considered abusive and inappropriate (such as „Shiptari" for the Albanians, „Balije", „Mujahedin", „Poturice" or „Turks" for the Bosnian Muslims, „Viennese stable boys" for Slovenes, „Serbo-Chetniks", „Chetniks", „Byzantines" for the Serbs and the like.)

Beginning the conflict in the former Yugoslavia engrossed hitherto unseen international media attention. It seems that the Balkans region has become an experimental ground for trying out different media manipulations that have attained the desired results, combined with insufficient information flows and finesse to elaborate various propaganda techniques. Journalist P. Brock in the American quarterly „Foreign Policy" writes about reporting of the Western press on the events in

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5  „Asked why his newspaper called Croats „Ustashas", one of the editors of the Bosnian „Ljiljan" N. Latic said: *„I had to do something to guide my people to wage war and thinks with their own head."* There were various other extremist publications, such as „Zmaj od Bosne" in Tuzla, and the weekly „Bosnjak" which called for revenge against the Serbs and to a lesser extent against Croats. *„Every Muslim should have his own Serb to execute him"*, wrote Z. Ključanin. Zenica Committee of the Islamic Religious Community printed its own Manual of Islamic fighter, which was signed by Halil Mehic and Hasan Makić, concluding that it was to the military command to decide whether it is more useful and more in the interests of our stuff to release, exchange or liquidate enemy prisoners". – Kemal, Kurspahić, *Zločin u 19 i 30: Balkanski mediji u ratu i u miru*, (Beograd: DanGraf, 2003), 109.

the Balkans, falsification of facts, unilateral commenting, on the great ignorance of things and concludes that the world's journalism in the Balkans has collapsed. In Western media, S.Milosevic was characterized as butcher of the Balkans, the Balkan Hitler, and Saddam Hussein of Europe. During the Croatian-Muslim conflict in Bosnia, F.Tudjman was described as an apprentice of Butcher of the Balkans, overt racists and anti-Semites, despicable villain.[6] It was noticeable recourse to kind of spiritual violence against the values of the past.

### 2.2 Media sensationalism and media construction

The power of the media and their abuse was visible during the events in the Balkans. Drawing attention to social problems or seeking refuge from the burden of everyday worries and the desire to find in their life a certain value and meaning, people turn to the media. Publicity as a measure of gaining public attention has the function of directing the public to certain opinions, views, courts and issues which are current. A sensation is deliberately and intentionally provoked the reaction of the public, disclosure of incomplete or unverified but intriguing information. Media manipulation is an aspect of public relations in which participants create false arguments that contribute to their interest. The scandal and the low quality of the media supply are largely based on the growth in the media industry, as goods, which is easier to sell. Political sensationalism represents a negative phenomenon, when in the absence of real information media themselves create certain unverified stories and themes. Thus, the media have become a kind of resources in political games.

The media is indicated as a mean of communication provided by spreading messages from the sender to the recipient. The media therefore has the function of an intermediary, transferring messages and information. Mass media have created the possibility of immediate communication between any two points of the globe –  the global village, the famous metaphor of Marshall McLuhan.[7] The assumption that the media are responsible to the public and that the general interest is their underlying motive of existence and work, starts from basically utopian vision of mankind where it clearly known what is good and what is not. It is true that in such a conception of things should always be the first.[8]

Public opinion is very fluid, subject to change, control and manipulation of political and economic power centers. In the formation of public opinion particularly important role have the mass media. During their historical development the media was followed by, depending on social circumstances but more or less constantly present tendency of political structure to achieve a monopoly, and therefore the impact on the message and on the public. Media manipulation is an aspect of public relations in which participants create false arguments that contribute to their interest. Such tactics may involve the use of logical errors and intentional propaganda techniques. Most methods to manipulate by the mass media are the types

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6 „The one chauvinism „fed" the other in an atmosphere of growing nationalism and evoking memories of the past. The expansion of the heroes in times of crisis and war manifested through attempts to themes of war in former Yugoslavia exposed also with language of comics" –  Ivan čolović, Politika simbola, (Beograd:B92, 1997), 62.

7 „The relatively low level of concentration when watching a TV program seeks to replace by sound, via announcement of characteristic musical clip, melodies that are used to provide a certain level of attention, because the sound much better „holds" the attention of images". – Dejvid Mek Kvin, *Televizija,* (Beograd: Clio, 2000), 20.

8 „On the other hand, the practice has long been shown that in the basis of human actions are interests. They are primarily individual, group and only then common, general social". – Rade Veljanovski, *Politički identitet Srbije u regionalnom i globalnom kontekstu*, (Beograd: FPN,2011), 406.

of distractions, which are based on the assumption that the public has a limited attention span. The content of the regulations and principles of media ethics clearly indicate that sensationalism is not „invention" from our room, but also that is not unknown to people who deal with the media in our country. On the contrary, sensationalism and placing the public half-true and unverified information, often deliberately targeted –  takes on a disturbing trend. There are numerous examples of creating politics affairs by the media. Distortion and extracting from the context of one's statements, unverified and deliberately placed insinuations, deliberately spun and doctored numbers and statistics surveys, and other allied relations in political circles, scandals and love affairs, placed at a particular time and in a certain way, deliberately packed for public but rarely approved –  anyhow on someway have influence to the formation of political opinion. Political sensationalism represents a negative phenomenon, when in the absence of real information media themselves create certain unverified stories and themes.[9]

The role of modern media in the creation of daily politics is enormous. This approach to reality, which includes the relationship with the media and their role, he sublimated into several theses. Technology was perhaps speed things up but did not change human nature. Many domains of human activity are imbued with ethical issues today.[10] Since public opinion is becoming subject to the inspections, it is increasingly moving away from what it should be –  the result of confrontation of arguments, illuminated correct information that always appears then when knowledge eliminate ignorance.[11]

After the war events, it is approached to developing of new media in ex-Yugoslavia area. The media were used as a means of directing the desired policy, to control and attract voters in the elections, to create or suppress political and economic affairs. Sensationalism, political spectacle, media design and manipulation – are becoming appearing in all new states of the Balkans. By the establishment of new TV stations, the spread of the Internet and social networks, it is established the communication between the opposed peoples and reconnect broken relations.

### 3. Conclusion –  a decade of reconciliation and peace

After the political changes in Serbia in 2000, the whole region will go through the next decade of reconciliation. Under pressure of Western influences, there are established bilateral contacts, broken relations, unobstructed circulation of citizens and goods. Through a series of conferences, common declaration about reconciliation, public outspoken apologies, they begin the way of progress. Region emerged from the war rhetoric and media hate speech. The attractiveness of European integration has become a must. Montenegro continues on the path of further process and becomes a leader in the region when it comes to the effectiveness and

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9  „Thus, the media have become a kind of tool in political games against each other and are misused for political purposes. Opinions, on which the media products and the media themselves are goods like any other, are on the rise". –  David Croteau and William Hoynes, *The Business of Media, Corporate Media and the Public Interest*, (London: Pine Forge Press, 2006).

10  „This is the case with information, inter alias, whose importance in the modern society is so clear that it is not necessary to prove, because by the amount of time they are devoted by modern men, the mass media are in third place, just behind the work and sleep". –  Daniel Korni, *Etika informisanja*, (Beograd: Clio, 1999) 7.

11  „By more frequent celebration of the importance of public opinion in the media, market has introduced the rule of the multiplicity of voices which is a logical consequence of relativism in which everything becomes valuable, which means that at the end everything worth nothing, everyone has his own truth, his taste, i.e. there comes a state of hyper subjectivity" –  Frensis Bal, *Moć medija* (Beograd: Clio, 1997), 23

efficiency of adopting standards that require commitment in the implementation and monitoring. Montenegro in June 2012 opened chapters for negotiations with the EU. Serbia has begun the process of joining the EU in January 2014, while Croatia became an EU member. Visa liberalization for the Western Balkans has progressed. Experiences related to visa liberalization for the Western Balkans shows how much can be achieved by combining rigorous conditions and meeting the special benefits linked to progress towards EU membership. In some countries involved in enlargement process the reform momentum has slowed. All of them need to focus their efforts on good governance, improving the rule of law, speeding up economic reform and improving their capacity. However, there remain many challenges. Strengthening the rule of law, especially the judiciary and the fight against organized crime and corruption is a key challenge for most countries involved in enlargement process. There have been positive changes in the field of judicial cooperation in several Western Balkan countries. There have been completed new bilateral agreements on police cooperation, especially between Serbia and Albania, on mutual legal assistance and the implementation of verdicts in criminal cases. Croatia and Serbia went a step further signing an agreement that allows each other to extradite its citizens for the purposes of criminal proceedings or enforcement of prison sentences in cases of organized crime and corruption. The Commission encourages other countries in the region to follow this example. Judicial cooperation could be further improved by introducing the possibility of extradition of citizens in all cases of serious crimes, including war crimes.[12]

Freedom of expression and freedom of the media, as an integral part of any democratic system, remains a cause for concern in many countries. In some countries the problem is political influence on media independence. During the last decade, the Western Balkans countries have made significant progress in terms of stability and regional cooperation. However, a number of issues, that are a result of the conflicts in the region, remain open and affect the internal functioning of states and their mutual relations. The European Union, together with partners in the region, works to overcome these problems from the past. Long-term reconciliation requires an investment of effort at all levels –  at the level of government, the judiciary and civil society. It is also connected with resolving issues related to social problems. More recently, there has been recorded a number of positive signs. Serbian parliament adopted a declaration condemning the crime in Srebrenica, which was referred to the verdict of the International Court of Justice about Srebrenica. Non-governmental organizations have taken the initiative to establish a regional commission for truth and reconciliation. This so-called RECOM initiative is supported by the presidents of Croatia and Serbia, Montenegrin parliament and religious communities. Wider support in the region would contribute to reconciliation. The meeting of the Igman Initiative, held in May 2010 was attended by the presidents of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro, and it included more than 140 non-governmental organizations in order to promote and assist local and regional cooperation.[13] The prosecution of war crimes is one of the preconditions for reconciliation. Thus Montenegro prosecuted several cases, such as: *Morinj, Bukovica and Kaluderski Laz*. And from the Croatian side, it is prosecuted the Lora case, linked to the Montenegrin captive soldiers. Regional cooperation contributes to reconciliation, good neighborly relations and creates a climate in which it is possible to solve open bilateral issues. In the Western Balkan countries, this cooperation is crucial for economic development and reconciliation.

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12 The statement of the European Commission to the European Parliament –  Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges, Brussels, 9.11.2010. p. 9
13 The statement of the European Commission to the European Parliament –  Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges, Brussels, 9.11.2010. p. 10

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