

# Montenegro's Mediatization of Politics: Election Campaign Coverage on RTV Vijesti and RTCG

Nikola Mladenović\*

## SUMMARY

*The paper examines the media's moulding of political communication in the Montenegrin's 2016 parliamentary election campaign. Habermas' view of the interrelation of commercial media and the state provides the background for the examination of the tension between media and political logic. It is a political conflict where the winner makes the rules of society. Mediatization of politics is the result of this conflict, and commercial media logic is shown as based on the market actors' interests. The media belong to the civil society; therefore, the article introduces a normative aspect of media logic, which reconstructs the political confrontation. The paper then turns to Montenegro's social context. While the mediatization of politics needs a critical upgrade in the case of developed countries, in less stable states social contradictions should influence media logic the way Reinhart Koselleck's theory suggests. Koselleck's thesis is that the Enlightenment's critique, embodied in the commercial media of Habermas' liberal public sphere, produced the crisis of the absolutist state, whose purpose was stopping the European civil wars. It created a path to new social conflicts and the disorganization of civil society. Montenegro's multi-ethnic, post-socialist society in the process of neoliberal transition is complementary to Koselleck's pathogenesis of modernity. Citizens handled social insecurities by rehabilitating the absolutist principle. Comparative frame analysis of commercial RTV Vijesti and the public service RTCG found the principles of Enlightenment and Absolutism in media logic of both channels, which excluded political parallelism as the only possible cause. Vijesti, steered by audience involvement, represented Milo Đukanović both as a tyrant and as a guarantor of social stability.*

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\* Nikola Mladenović, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade, Serbia, nmladjenovic@yahoo.com

*Instead of neoliberal policies, Vijesti defended the public sector. It embraced both the Enlightenment's critique and left wing statolatry. Integration of Habermas' and Koselleck's theory with mediatization of politics was therefore proved adequate.*

Key words: mediatization, political communication, media logic, election campaign, public sphere

## **Introduction**

The concept of mediatization is used for the analysis of the interrelation between media/communication and social/cultural change (Lundy, 2014: 19). It allows us to describe the media's moulding of social interactions (McQuail, 2010: 563), and therefore political communication. But how dialectical mediatization really is? Even though mediatization should theorize the interplay of the media, society and culture (Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby, 2015), it is usually reduced to a theory of the media's influence on the society. The media are examined primarily as an independent variable (Mazzoleni, 2008), and the interplay is neglected. Researchers often avoid theorizing the historical context because of regional differences, but maybe we need a more complex theory than the linear relationship between media and political logic?

We will try to examine the critical deficit of mediatization (Krotz, 2014: 156). Critical theory's premises could reconstruct mediatization of politics: critique of value neutrality, domination, social struggles, ideology, critique of political economy, as well as questions of emancipation and de-reification (Fuchs, 2013: 13). Critical mediatization of politics must embrace the paradigm of social conflict and examine the historical background of ideological domination. Mediatization is a contextually sensitive process (Peruško, 2017). However, the critical aspects of the context cannot be so different so that we would need to avoid theorizing the interplay. Actually, globalization and mediatization are meta-processes, therefore, the context is not just local.

The first section shows that the context can be theorized and universally applied. Habermas understands the relation of commercial media and the state as a political confrontation. Mediatization of politics results in the triumph of the commercial logic, which belongs to the one side of the conflict. Its unilateral nature should be overcome by a public communication media logic. Media are civil society actors positioned between the market and the state. Second section turns to Reinhart Koselleck's theory in order to conceptualize the Balkan context, although I believe it is applicable to Brexit's UK and Trump's USA too. The developed world is also a field

of neoliberal transition and ethnic conflicts. Mediatization theory needs to integrate the critical paradigm in order to examine the countries with significant social contradictions.

There are many states whose experience is complementary to Koselleck's portrayal of social disorganization. The Enlightenment's critique, embodied by the commercial media of Habermas' liberal public, identified the absolutist government with corruption and hypocrisy. It forgot that absolutism was a method of stopping civil conflict. Citizens today seek to resolve the crisis through the state. As the public, they supplement the commercial, the Enlightenment's media logic, with the absolutist principle. I will demonstrate this on a case study of Montenegrin parliamentary election.

Comparative frame analysis of RTV Vijesti and RTCG campaign coverage will show what interpretations were emphasized and what worldview was constructed on the basis of specific Montenegro's media logic. The research is focused on the evening TV news shows of commercial RTV Vijesti and public service RTCG. I will seek both critical aspects and the interplay of Enlightenment and Absolutist principles in the media narratives. The frames of conflict and economic consequences, as well as treatment of *raison d'être*, personified in the most important Montenegrin politician Milo Đukanović, will be my main guidelines. The narrative techniques that connect the disorganized civil society and absolutist solution to the crisis will confirm the validity of Koselleck's theory for the study of mediatization of politics.

## Critical mediatization of politics

Mediatization of politics implies an independence of the media from political institutions, due to commercialization and the development of media professionalism (Stromback, 2008: 242). For Stromback, the public service is not seen as a part of mediatization but could actually "reverse the process". However, Hjarvard (2013: 49) argues that public services are cultural institutions that lay the groundwork for the media's institutionalization. That is, the autonomy of institutions does not depend on commercialization (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 289). Therefore, Hjarvard (2013: 26) uses *media professionalism and user/audience involvement* to describe media logic, which can lead to a different kind of mediatization.

The logic indicates which actors routinely perform to achieve the purpose of the institution, its interests and values - one's *modus operandi*. Political logic has been associated with power allocation, deliberation, partisanship, responsibility, policy and implementation (Landerer 2013: 246). For Esser and Stromback (2014: 16) it has three constituents: politics, polity and policy; and the first one is the most vul-

nerable to mediatization. Polity and policy, as the rules of the political system and the problem solving/creating area, seem less affected by the media logic. Esser and Stromback find that the purpose of the first constituent is in publicity and power gaining. However, the political subsystem is not the only one carrying these functions. Power is present in the whole society, and deliberation belongs to all citizens. Deliberation about policy and polity.

Critical theory connects the problem of power to social conflicts. In order to allocate power or implement a policy, people's interests and values collide and the media become a field of struggle. Commercial media have a special interest in this struggle. As Habermas (1989: 69) shows, the public sphere is created by entrepreneurs in order to criticize the state. In the liberal period there was a tension between the rising bourgeoisie and absolutist state, the new economic power and a financially dependent and fading power. Public sphere was a place of "political confrontation... against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor" (Ibid: 27).

*Mediatization was the result of this political confrontation.* Commercialization established the media autonomy with a specific task: setting up social and market rules and reconstructing the polity. Mediatization of politics is reflected in the "tension-charged field in which authority and publicity (as the principle of critical control of the cabinets) confronted each other" (Ibid: 73). There was never a universal public sphere, only particular private interests. Public sphere's constructed universality hides ideological domination. Mediatization is therefore political in itself. It is not a deviation that taints the normative political logic (Landerer, 2013: 251). It rather has to be explained as a part of political confrontation. We should not forget commercial media logic came with deregulation, which was a political decision. Public services are not the defenders of political logic, but instead they belong to the civil society. They have a public purpose, a logic that belongs to neither political nor commercial logic.

However, that is not entirely connected to the ownership structure. Commercial media could serve a public purpose too. There are two ideal models of the media: *the theatrical and public communication model* (Mormont & Dasnoy, 1995: 51). The first is inclined to dramatic conflicts and not focused on serious issues (polity/policy) but on spectacular struggles. Public communication model should show reasonable care for citizens' interests. Expert opinion and debates should carry more weight. There is no reason that the idea of public communication should be considered as reversion of mediatization. The view that the media logic can only be commercial is an ideological construction that hides *political confrontation of authority and publicity*.

### **Pathogenesis of the Balkans**

If the media is driven by the audience, the experience of the citizens determines their participation in the media system. Their experience is marked by socialism, civil war and current neoliberal transition. First, "socialistically expanded public sphere" (Habermas, 1989: 128) is not entirely gone. Even commercial media have to adapt to the fact that the memory of the worker's participation in the public sphere is still alive. The market actors cannot just impose the rules, and commercial media cannot solely maintain a pro-corporate position. Actually, media have to serve the audience. And non-owners have different socio-economic demands.

Disappointment with socialism is therefore ambivalent. Although socialism did not meet expectations, neoliberalism failed too. The Montenegrin experience is therefore Hegelian. Private owners constructed their particular interests as general interests, which in turn created even more antagonisms and inequality. Hegel saw an "unorganized opinion", the sum of individual interests that lead to "a powerful bloc in opposition to the organized state" (Ibid: 119). In the Balkans, when each party has its own view of the truth and justice, this parallels the situation of Hobbesian wars. Zoran Đinđić (1997: 12) points to the importance of "integration of all sides of war. It could be done only by suspending the contents that create conditions for constant renewal of social conflicts... The power that breaks its opponents, in order to establish social peace, is the absolutist state".

The absolutist state was a solution to the civil war, a guarantor of stability (Koselleck, 1988: 16). Citizens identified change with terror and order with the state. "The civil war that was experienced as a threat to life came to rest in the state... a mortal god" (Ibid: 32). In the 18th century, the state was confronted with Enlightenment, a Habermas' liberal public. Koselleck's thesis is that the Enlightenment's critique of absolutism due to corruption, religious hypocrisy and the desire to change the social and market rules, removed the privilege and taboos along with guarantees for social peace. Critique, therefore, led to social conflict and the crisis of modernity. From that perspective, Balkan's nationalisms are not just irrational and destructive but also have a stabilizing function.

This should change our perception of mediatization of politics. *It is not just a confrontation of authority and publicity but also a reconstitution of the Hobbes' civil war.* Especially in multi-ethnic Montenegro civil conflict has a class, religious and ethnic aspect. The danger of apparent or real conflict gives symbolic legitimacy to the absolutist principle. States today can hardly be absolutist like pre-revolutionary France, but the attitude of citizens towards the state is complementary to Koselleck's (1988: 18) description: "Forbearance, it proclaimed, was more dangerous than stringency, more than cruelty even, for the consequences of clemency were bloodier and

more devastating than those of instant severity”; the monarch “*must subjugate* all or no one would be subjugated. The sovereign’s responsibility required and presupposed his absolute domination of all subjects”.

This is a paradox. The utopian thinking created social contradictions that lead to a crisis. “They encourage moral judgement over the world because they believe the logic of history is on their side” (Đinđić, 1997: 20). Crisis is a path towards a better future. The Balkan nations have seen through this in their own specific and contradictory way. They are aware of the bad rulers but are sceptical of change. “In the eyes of the hypocritical proponent of Enlightenment power is identical with abuse of power... a good monarch was worse than an evil one because he prevented the oppressed multitudes from seeing the injustice of the Absolutist principle. The Enlightenment unmasked the King as man, and as man he could be nothing but a usurper... a brutal tyrant” (Koselleck, 1988: 119).

Hegel’s answer was that the state should organize particular interests to prevent disorganization of the civil society and accumulation of inequality. Subjective opinions should be integrated into an objectivity, a state, from above (Habermas, 1989: 120), because the liberal public is naturally destructive. Certainly, these are ideal types. Few countries are really apologetic of absolutism and consider the Enlightenment abnormal. The average citizen does not despise the liberal public. No one wants to live in a corrupt state. However, legitimizing the absolutist principle is not merely a goal of state officials, but at least a subconscious reaction of citizens due to crisis.

### **Media frames**

Maybe media logic should be examined primarily through content: *selection, categorization and presentation of information* (Hjarvard, 2008: 107). The theatrical and public communication model process the information differently. The first one simplifies, polarizes and intensifies the event. Its model of reality is highly stereotypical (Landerer, 2013: 243). According to Todd Gitlin, “news concerns the event, not the underlying condition; the person, not the group; conflict, not consensus; the fact that ‘advances the story’, not the one that explains it” (Castells, 2010: 379). Being profit-oriented, its content seeks to find a large audience, but also to impose the social/market rules that serve the commercial media best. On the other hand, the aforementioned model of public communication will not avoid complex and abstract issues, it will fact-check information and provide explanation. It will also monitor the political actors through political commentary (Hjarvard, 2013: 73).

It means that *the content is always ideological*. It frames certain issues according to the interests of the market, political or civil society actors. Framing is the process of

“selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to *promote a particular interpretation*, evaluation and/or solution” (Entman, 2003: 417, my emphasis). *Frames organize the message through noticeable and emotionally charged words* (Castells, 2009: 158). Prominent media frames are *human interest story, conflict frame and economic consequences frame* (de Vreese, 2014: 143). Human interest story can bring certain political processes closer to citizens, so that politicians cannot implement abstract decisions that would affect people's lives without people's conscious consent. Of course, if we have in mind the political confrontation, this is a way for the market actors to use emotional narrative for their own interests. Therefore, conflict is not just within the conflict frame, even though facing dishonest antagonists is the best way to send the desired message (Mazzoleni, 2014: 48). Conflict frame presents different opinions and is often intertwined with economic consequences frame, because politicians always find someone else's platform bad for citizens. With a more balanced account of rival parties, the public communication media model could provide the audience with a full report.

We should acknowledge that this harmonistic doctrine is another ideological construct. Balanced reporting does not produce the truth. Political commentary does not seek balance. Media coverage never follows these ideal frames perfectly, especially in developing countries. The political confrontation is still there. Commercial media logic, driven by profit, influences the policy-making with its infotainment approach. All political affairs are seen as equally destructive for the social order, which can create an attitude of permanently corrupt political system (Blumler, 2014: 37). This is what market actors actually want – to propose the roll-back of the welfare state due to corruption. However, as we shall see, the commercial media in Montenegro do not do everything previously mentioned. RTV Vijesti does not seek to neoliberalize the state, which would be a goal of entirely profit-oriented media. Comparative frame analysis of these practices should show a specific Montenegrin formula. There are many other ways to frame the message, to reconnect specific parts of events or issues so they could be interpreted in a particular way. *Framing is therefore twofold, as choosing the words for public to think with, but also as a promotion of a certain form of thinking*. The media do not just reduce the object of thinking but manipulate our way of thinking as well.

## **Methodological remarks**

I will follow the theoretical framework and present the campaign thematically. I will examine twelve TV news show episodes both for RTV Vijesti (“Vijesti u 18:30”) and RTCG (“Dnevnik 2”, 7.30 p.m.), in the period between 3rd and 14th October

2016, which were the final days of the campaign (election day October 16th). Seventeen parties and coalitions participated in the parliamentary election and, apart from minorities, only six gained the seats in the parliament. Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) maintained the leading position (36 out of 81 seats) and formed the new government with the help of minorities and its partner Social Democrats (SD). Opposition parties (Democratic Front, Key Coalition, Democrats and Social Democratic Party) continued to express a longstanding critique that DPS uses the state's resources to control the outcome of the election. This includes RTCG as a state resource. RTCG is indeed facing pressure from the political system, and its director could be relieved of his duties while this paper is in print, but the frame analysis of both commercial *Vijesti*, an independent media organization for decades, and the RTCG public service, does not provide enough evidence that clientelism is a sufficient explanation of DPS' election success.

If we follow Hjarvard's idea that media professionalism and audience involvement steer the media content production, we have to acknowledge that the audience around the world is populist and therefore seeking a secure environment and a strong leader, a state that could protect them from neoliberal globalization. The themes that are chosen by editors, and frames in which they are presented, show these concerns of ordinary people. It shows that polity questions are what citizens are most interested in. Kosseleck's narrative, that conflictual content has to be suspended, that absolute power has to break its opponents, is at the narrative heart of media logic in the Montenegro's case study. For Andreas Hepp (2013: 144), media-tization research has to have in mind the relation between power and cultural patterns, because media culture is a field where ideological hegemony is constructed. Therefore, the critical interpretative approach is highly qualitative and multi-perspectivist, because media's texts "require *methods of reading and critique that articulate their embeddedness in the political economy, social relations, and the political environment within which they are produced, circulated, and received*" (Kellner, 1995: 4, my emphasis).

## **Campaign's Frames**

The most important message of the election was the state and its future development. Every problem refers to the state. The opposition presented it as a continuation of corruption and criminal activity under dictatorship, while the government insisted on stability and police intervention in case of electoral turmoil and attempt to seize power on the streets. Whether the state is really that corrupted or its opponents are really dangerous is beyond the scope of this paper. Actually, critical frame analysis presented here advances an argument that finds both questions irrelevant for the final outcome of the election. For the sake of this analysis, these are just nar-



rative techniques that construct the idea of a corrupted country or the state under attack, and as such they influence the public. That is, *the opposition used the usual neoliberal narrative of the state's corruption, while the official relied on an absolutist rhetoric*. Future Prime Minister Duško Marković said the state will maintain law and order (Vijesti 04.10.), although the Interior Minister Goran Danilović (opposition's representative in the "government of electoral trust")<sup>1</sup> argued turmoil allegations were false and a part of an emotionally charged campaign (Vijesti 03.10.). Actually, according to the leaders of DF, the opposition is preparing a celebration of victory, not violent protests. However, Marković was not covered in the frame of conflict, while Danilović's assertion stands opposed to the police director's statement about possible unrest during the elections. That is, the frame of conflict is on screen until a higher official gives a statement. Vijesti covered the issue as a conflict between the police director and opposition leaders, while Marković's statement was shown later in a different segment of the programme.

The public service presented the campaign differently, though. While Vijesti (03.10.) accentuated the possible dangerous unrest and official statements that some hypothetical chaos will be stopped, RTCG (3.10.) chose more abstract terms of sacrificing national interests, which do not have to imply any kind of street riots. The leading party wanted to portray the opposition as enemies of the state and not just of the leading party's programme. The message is actually addressed to the people that allegedly work for foreign governments and want to stop Montenegro's progress (Vijesti 07.10.). RTCG does not follow Vijesti's frame. It is not just about foreign interference. DPS was always at the forefront of change and it will never create a "quagmire of power", because the new leadership would not be progressive (RTCG 07.10.): they would sacrifice the socialist heritage. Their opponents are just some "village scoundrel" Milan Knežević and "chetnik duke" Andrija Mandić (both radical opposition - Democratic Front), ideological descendants of those who murdered the communist national hero Ljubo Čupić (Vijesti 10.12.). Even though we could argue DPS is not a leftist party, it represented itself as such. It relied on both nationalist and leftist framing, and this was accentuated on Vijesti.

RTCG (12.10.) shows a less provocative Đukanović, who says he does not see anything patriotic or knightly in his opponents, who are probably guided by foreign people's money. That is similar to Trump's case, where the American commercial media focused on his statements how China is "raping" the USA or that the Wall will stop the criminals from coming to the USA, while the public TV PBS translated

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<sup>1</sup> Several months before the election, three oppositional parties (SDP, and future Key's members URA and DEMOS) became a part of DPS' government in order to control the use of state resources, which they believed is the greatest cause of DPS' election victories for decades.

that into a critique of globalization and bringing back the jobs from abroad. This is repeated in Montenegro's case when Vijesti (14.10.) strongly connected the seizure of a small number of illegal weapons with possible unrests, while RTCG (14.10.) showed less interest in this story and presented only Danilović's contention that there is no need to sow fear and that everything will be all right. It turns out the story about some future riots was more pronounced on Vijesti, which corresponds to its commercial logic. Whether it is the corruption of the officials, possible riots or preserving socialist heritage, it is Vijesti's commercial lens that always highlights certain features of events or issues to make them more conflictual. The goal is to get more audience, but the result is an imaginary construction of an endangered state.

Vijesti was highlighting the corruption, antagonism, possible unrest and caution about electoral fraud. Apparently, the police plan to put pressure on citizens in order to manipulate the will of the people (Vijesti 03.10.). First, Danilović suspected the electoral register had many doubles (Vijesti, RTCG 04.10.) and refused to approve it for the election (05.10.). Then the Democratic Front appeared with a claim that Bulgarian mafia was creating an army of voters made of foreigners with fake documents that would support DPS (Vijesti 11.10.). RTCG does not mention Front specifically but presents it as "media allegations of some parties", which will be dealt with by the special prosecutor. Prime Minister Đukanović closes the segment by saying that those are "old charges" that were never proven true. Vijesti (12.10) also found questionable the organization in Gusinje, where DPS activists offered students to pay for them to come home on election day and offered some convicts to get an early release in exchange for their votes. Finally, NGO "MANS" showed a recording of a telephone conversation about possible vote buying. MANS claimed there was a massive abuse of state funds for election campaigning (Vijesti 13.10.). RTCG broadcasted only the second part of the controversy. The Government denied the charges a day later. We can see that Vijesti always intensify the events. Whether it is the riot or the fraud, one helping the leading party's and another the opposition parties' campaigns, *the commercial media is always portraying the incidents as large as possible*, while RTCG has a milder approach.

The economy was shifted aside and came into focus only within the framework of general state of affairs. Ranko Krivokapić (SDP) focused on the dangers of the "Plunder of Montenegro", implying some politicians want to own the state, while he wants to be its servant (RTCG, Vijesti 03.10.). Both channels showed some level of concern about the privatization of state property and possible corruption of the people involved (05.10.). However, Vijesti (07:10.) allowed the opposition to attack the officials for their irresponsible behaviour and possible involvement of Đukanović's family members in the alleged looting of the state. The first thing that was aired on Vijesti's news programme were news stories such as secret auctions of state's property (07.10.), worker protests in front of the Government's building (10.10.) or the

privatization of healthcare (12.10.). RTCG focused on more abstract messages, mostly made by Krivokapić, about how even the strongest will surrender to the rule of law, and that harmful privatizations will be examined (Vijesti, RTCG 09.10.). The new government would make DPS-friendly companies pay their tax debts (RTCG 12.10.), because the state is not a shelter for such people but a “sanctity” for everyone (Vijesti, RTCG, 14.10.).

That is, both channels covered the potential “plunder”, and opposition candidates’ calls for a war on corruption and crime were not significantly overlooked by the public service, but only covered in more abstract terms. Opposition statements on RTCG were more generalized, rarely personalized, but they were present nonetheless. Both commercial and public television considered corruption a major problem. *When an issue is framed as a thing that could hurt the state itself, both commercial and public television channel will respond to that.* The difference was not in what was said but the manner of the statement, the selection of the terms. Vijesti (03.10.) presented opposition claims that Đukanović and Marković would certainly go to jail after the elections, where their “mate” Svetozar Marović already resides. RTCG (03.10.), on the other hand, focused on general announcements of the war on mafia and organized crime, but not on the people behind it. The only exception is when Marković called the opposition leader a “loan shark” (Medojević, DF). After that, DPS appeared more cautious even in the commercial TV news.

In fact, opposition attacks were primarily directed against Đukanović, “the godfather” of the “organized criminal group” in Budva (Vijesti 06.10.). RTCG (04.10) covered moderate criticism, such as that the Prime Minister is not in touch with reality and wants to portray life in Montenegro as better than it is. Personalized criticism was a commercial news trait. Đukanović is a “true patriot of his own pocket” (Vijesti 08.10.), whose associates are buying state’s property (09.10.). He is the most responsible person for the bad political decisions, crime growth and corruption. The opposition leaders were sending very emotionally charged accusations against Đukanović, which provided a scandalous infotainment content on Vijesti. Those kinds of statements, where the opposition leaders became very personal and talked directly to Đukanović, e.g. that he could face charges after the change of the state’s leadership, created a great polarization among the voters, and this tension was maintained on Vijesti until the end of the campaign. Commercial TV did not seek a way to reconcile the conflict between the leading party and the opposition, but it did exactly that within the opposition itself.

Đukanović was a target throughout the campaign, but he was “saved” by a strange confrontation among the opposition leaders. After the arrival of the American diplomat, Front expressed concern that the new government would be formed in the US Embassy. Front called on the Key coalition to reject the plans of NATO countries

(RTCG 03.10.). Key shied away from inter-oppositional conflict at first, because “all our voters are victims” (Vijesti 04.10.). Front demanded from the Key to guarantee they would not vote for a NATO membership and absolve Đukanović of his crimes (Vijesti 05.10.) and offered an agreement for Key leaders to sign (RTCG, Vijesti 06.10.). Even the third opposition actor, the Democrats, gave a statement that it is “monstrous” to accuse them of potentially forming a coalition with DPS and betraying other parties (Vijesti 06.10.). Vijesti showed this in a frame of conflict until the leaders reconciled. Afterwards Vijesti (09.10) easily switched to celebrating the upcoming election victory of the unified opposition (Vijesti 09.10). However, RTCG did not really find this confrontation interesting. It was the only one presented without the frame of conflict. Sometimes, the coverage of Front was about women’s working rights and not about the possible coalition of DPS and Key (RTCG 07.10.). Instead of opposition rejoicing, RTCG showed only a short statement by Miodrag Lekić (Key) that the new government will be formed without Đukanović.

It seemed at first RTCG ignored the united opposition force because it was overwhelmed by political logic, while Vijesti could not stop celebrating the ruling party’s imminent defeat. On the contrary, Vijesti made Đukanović’s job easier. By focusing on an inter-oppositional conflict and its subsequent reconciliation, Vijesti emphasized that the Front, the most radical DPS’ opponent, is leading the entire opposition. Đukanović could now identify all his opponents within the Democratic Front, which was already presumed to be a Russian agency in Montenegro. Now everyone in the opposition for Đukanović lacks vision and would not know what to do with power if they acquired it and would sell the country’s independence for a handful of Russian rubles (Vijesti 08.10.). They all wanted to induce Montenegro’s bankruptcy and prevent its NATO application (RTCG 08.10.). Đukanović’s answer to Key’s claim that the system protects the crooks is actually an answer to the Front: they are the fifth column that will auction Montenegro for the crumbs from the Russian table (Vijesti 09.10.). Vijesti emphasized this conflict, which RTCG couldn’t because of avoiding the frame. Vijesti (10.10.) stressed the opposition warnings about turning the country into North Korea and promising the rule of “Kim Jong Milo” to be over. This was accompanied by Đukanović’s assertion that now, before joining NATO, national values are under the most dangerous and powerful attack ever, but the state will preserve stability and economic development.

RTCG allowed another personalization with Key leaders’ claims Đukanović will help Montenegro with his departure, or that he could have been de Gaulle but chose the role of Sanader instead (Vijesti, RTCG 10.11.). However, this is an exception that proves the rule for Vijesti, which predominantly underscored Đukanović’s responsibility for all the wrongdoings. He apparently turned Montenegro into a private state, but Key will provide the end of the “period of North Korea”. *But the*

*approach of the commercial Vijesti suited Đukanović better.* He was now seeing Front leaders in everyone. They are all “cawing” Front’s slogan “We or Him”, but what they are really saying is “Them or Montenegro” (Vijesti 12.10.). Đukanović indicated he was the only one who would defend the integration of Montenegro into the Western world from the greedy whose place is on the political margins. While the opposition maintained that it was “over” for Đukanović, and that he would not “kidnap” Montenegro for a “truck full of smuggled cigarettes”, Đukanović insisted they were attacking the very freedom of the state, and that this was not a question of who will be in charge but whether Montenegro will survive (Vijesti 13.10.). *Đukanović responded to all of his opponents’ accusations as if he was talking exclusively to the Democratic Front* with the exception of Krivokapić, former Đukanović’s partner, who argued he is the biggest problem of the state (Vijesti 14.10.). Being a symbol of the opposition, the Front was the embodiment of Đukanović’s favorite enemy, the one that will cause chaos on the streets on the election night, take power by force and change state decisions in favour of foreign interests. The entire opposition became hostage to its radical wing, which helped Đukanović claim another election win.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Milo Đukanović managed to get the majority of seats in the parliament. Imaginary or real terrorist attempt controversy<sup>2</sup>, planned for the election day, reduced the turnout only by few percent, which means everything that was said about Đukanović during the campaign has not changed the minds of a significant number of citizens. The usual explanation for this is that a party state uses all its resources to get the votes. Maybe it needs a different kind of inference. Comparative overview of commercial and public service media coverage has given us additional insights. *RTV Vijesti confirmed the assumption about connection of commercial logic and Enlightenment*, which highlighted antagonisms and disorder, corruption of the state, possible unrest and electoral fraud. Politics is presented as a dramatic conflict, in which the opposition serves as a disorganizing actor and Đukanović as a corrupt usurper. The necessity of change is emphasized, but it does not only bring hope to the viewers: they are also frightened by it.

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<sup>2</sup> A certain “terrorist attack“ was apparently stopped on 16th October 2016. The leaders of DF are among the people accused in the court of law that they were the organizers of the “attack “. It is not known whether this is true to this day, it is a theme of many jokes, but the only thing that could be said is that it did not significantly change the election results.

*RTV Vijesti deviates from the enlightened commercial logic when problems in the economy and questions of state survival are present. Instead of endorsing neoliberalism, Vijesti is governed by leftist standards. There is a certain socialist “political unconscious”, as a remnant of the previous era, that doubts the privatization of state property is well intended. Commercial logic would be more sceptical of the welfare state, it would support the tax cuts and free market, but Vijesti fights for the public sector. Second paradox is the specific position of Đukanović in Vijesti’s narrative. Vijesti’s manner of reporting increases antagonisms and polarization and creates a semantic death field for Đukanović. However, Vijesti is also a media organization steered by the audience. If they want attention of all citizens, they need to frame the content that would attract Đukanović’s supporters. While it was expected RTCG will suspend most of aggressive content, especially directed against Đukanović, it was surprising Vijesti amended the opposition critique by Đukanović’s narrative of stability and organized state. *Vijesti emphasized critique and used frame of conflict, but it also respected the state as a mortal god.* Đukanović had a stabilizing function even in the content of the commercial television. He subjugates all, even oppositional subjects. *The principles of the Enlightenment and Absolutism are equally present in this commercial logic.* Đukanović is both a tyrant and the only one who can stop the social disorganization. He integrates “subjective opinions into the objectivity assumed by the spirit in the form of the state” (Habermas, 1989: 120).*

The frames proved useful for the analysis of media coverage of the election campaign. A certain model of reality can be constructed by stressing different narrative aspects. Vijesti intensify, polarize and simplify events. RTCG is not that analytical and investigative as we should expect from the public service. Expert opinions are mostly introduced in trivial cases of the electoral register and similar technical problems, while candidate platforms are rarely dealt with. There were no human interest stories that would connect abstract policies with real citizens. The problem of corruption was presented through politicians’ statements, but the responsibility for the charges was rarely personalized. This impersonal critique suggests mediatization of politics is rather weak. Public service seems overwhelmed by political logic, staying close to the state power, mostly attacking perceived enemies of the state with potential Russian ties. Democratic Front was portrayed as a fifth column which may endanger social peace on election day. However, RTCG news would usually start with a warning about possible chaos and end with a firm belief the state will take care of it. It does look like abandoning Enlightenment’s media logic by believing the institutions can do no wrong and that the official narrative is always right, which actually makes even the commercial media’s journalists a part of the establishment (Jamieson & Waldman, 2003: 136).

But maybe it is still a certain kind of mediatization. Problems of social stability and statehood usually get media attention, and this is not just a case of public service.

Protecting Montenegro from plunder is a common feature. The media love their country. *Statolatry and leftist defence of welfare state are important for commercial and public service media.* Even Đukanović, as the undisputed “Master”, finds his place in the midst of Vijesti’s critical noise. Is this an indicator of the low level of mediatization of politics? Within this theoretical framework it does not have to be that way. In spite of everything, Đukanović has a stable support. Commercial media must respect that, even if it does not understand it. Doubts that the country is so corrupt you can actually buy the votes to gain the parliamentary majority cannot be supported by this analysis. It cannot be confirmed by the commercial media production during the campaign. That kind of explanation is clearly insufficient. Maybe something like that is possible, but it needs a supplement. The critics of the regime have to accept the fact that systemic corruption argument cannot fully describe the situation.

The assumption that the nation has lost its moral compass falls flat on the fact *there is no Habermasian political confrontation.* In the West, the narrative of corruption is linked to the neoliberal calls for deregulation. Commercial media emphasize the inevitability of starving the state beast, like Ronald Reagan once said. Commercial media increases the perception of corruption in order to privatize state property and create free market. But “socialistically expanded public sphere“ (Habermas, 1989: 128) is another thing. *Montenegro's Vijesti is a commercial television that defends the welfare state. Also, its Enlightenment logic is amended by an Absolutist principle. Vijesti produces statolatry.* Is this a sign of strong political dependence? Only if Hegel was a philosopher without integrity. The argument of this paper is based on the contextual circumstances that shaped Montenegro’s mediatization of politics in a specific way. If developed countries need critical mediatization perspective, states with questionable sustainability and contradictory socio-economic development need even more imaginative dialectics. Habermas’ and Koselleck’s theories seem like a constructive way to do it.

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# Crnogorska medijalizacija politike: izborna kampanja na RTV Vijesti i RTCG

Nikola Mladenović

## SAŽETAK

*Ovaj rad istražuje medijsko oblikovanje političke komunikacije u kampanji za parlamentarne izbore u Crnoj Gori 2016. godine. Habermasova ideja o međusobnoj povezanosti komercijalnih medija i države dala nam je teorijsku pozadinu za ispitivanje napetosti između medija i političke logike. U tom političkom sukobu pobjednik određuje pravila društva. Rezultat tog konflikta je medijalizacija politike, ako uzmemo da se logika komercijalnog medija temelji na interesima tržišta. Mediji pripadaju civilnom društvu, stoga, ovaj rad uvodi normativni aspekt medijske logike, koji rekonstruira politički sukob. Rad se zatim osvrće na društveni kontekst Crne Gore. Dok medijalizacija politike zahtijeva kritičku nadogradnju u slučaju razvijenih zemalja, u manje stabilnim državama, društvene kontradiktornosti trebale bi utjecati na medijsku logiku na način kako sugerira Reinhart Koselleckova teorija. Koselleckova teza jest da je kritika prosvjetiteljstva, koja je sadržana u komercijalnim medijima Habermasove liberalne sfere, stvorila krizu apsolutističke države, čija je svrha bilo zaustavljanje europskih građanskih ratova. To je otvorilo put ka novim društvenim sukobima i dezorganizaciji civilnog društva. Crnogorsko multietničko, postsocijalističko društvo u procesu neoliberalne tranzicije nadopunjuje Koselleckovu patogenezu modernosti. Građani rješavaju društvene nesigurnosti rehabilitacijom apsolutističkog načela. Usporedna analiza okvira komercijalnih RTV Vijesti i javnog medijskog servisa RTCG pokazala je načela prosvjetiteljstva i apsolutizma u medijskoj logici oba kanala, što isključuje politički paralelizam kao jedini mogući uzrok. Vijesti, koje ovise o postotku gledanosti, predstavljale su Milu Đukanovića kao tiranina, ali i kao jamca društvene stabilnosti. Umjesto neoliberalne politike, Vijesti su branile javni sektor. Prihvatile su kritiku prosvjetiteljstva i statolatritiju lijeve političke struje. Zbog toga se integracija Habermasove i Koselleckove teorije s medijalizacijom politike pokazala primjerenom.*

Ključne riječi: medijalizacija, političko komuniciranje, medijska logika, izborna kampanja, javna sfera