Political Communication and Campaigning in South-East Europe

Communication is considered crucial in political processes because it makes possible the informing of the general public or the electorate, facilitates competition among the political candidates, and allows audiences to express their opinion (Maarek and Wolfsfeld, 2003). According to Gerstle (1993), elections are seen as instruments of communication between those who govern and those who are governed.

The seminal work of Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) showed the development of political communication through three successive periods of its existence, where Age 1 was characterised by firm political messages, poor access to media, and selective voter response; Age 2 featured the expansion of mass media in the 1960s; and Age 3 saw the rise of media abundance and cyber-politics in the 1990s. In South-East European (SEE) countries under communist regimes, these processes were, logically, postponed and overlapped greatly with each other in the 1990s. This is a distinctive mark of the development of political communication in these countries, and that is what makes them particularly interesting to study.

Comparative research in the field of political communication can be useful to provide insight into different traditions and applications in different countries, despite the constant evolution of political communication systems (Swanson, 2004). However, European countries have different political, media, and cultural systems, and consequently the role of advertising messages and the behaviour of the electorate are not the same. Thus political campaigns are shaped differently, which often makes comparative research difficult (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 1995; Lilleker and Lees-Marshment, 2005). Drawing upon similarities of political, socio-economic, and cultural contexts in SEE countries, we believe that significant insight can be gained by looking at the similarities and differences in political communication of these countries.

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The so-called third wave of democratization (Hutington, 1991), defined as the global expansion and multiplication of democracies that occurred after 1974 when Portugal stopped being a dictatorship, led to the expansion of political rights and civil liberties (Norris, 2004) and the transformation of political systems in many countries. The principle of freedom of expression, thought, and conscience brought about a pluralist platform of political expression and gave a role to mass media in

strengthening accountability, human development, and democratization (Norris, 2004). In the majority of SEE countries, the first democratic elections were held approximately 25–30 years ago. Since then, these countries have experienced significant political, cultural, economic, and social changes and challenges, such as the transition from communism to democracy, from one-party systems to multi-party systems, from censorship and media under constant political pressure to free media. In many of these countries, the process of post-communist transition and democratization coincided with the state-building process. The basis of democracy, rule of law, political dialogue, and human rights were relatively slow to being established.

This all led to the transformations of political communication and campaigning, as well as changes to media, audiences, and political elites themselves. Compared to the international development of political marketing, connected to the decline of ideological cleavages in modern societies and the growth of catch-all parties (Scammell, 1999), the situation in South-East Europe could be seen as rather different. In countries of the former Yugoslavia, many former communist leaders and former democratic dissidents grew into newly established nationalists and deepened the ideological gaps in these societies (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012). However, many world-famous political consultants and agencies were hired in these countries to organize political campaigns, help candidates win, and teach them the basics of political advertising. For example, a famous French political marketing strategist, Jacques Seguela, consulted political candidates in Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovenia, among other European countries, at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s.

Following world and European trends, political communication in South-East Europe nowadays is characterized by the extensive use of digital media and social networks by a variety of political actors, and by the growing significance of these new communications channels (Van Aelst et al, 2017). This is also due to the high Internet usage in these countries. Besides the use of social media in electoral campaigns, which are today unimaginable without it (like in other democratic countries), social media is also increasingly used for the organization of social protests and grassroot movements.

This special issue is looking at the development of political communication in the region of South-East Europe, especially in relation to electoral campaigning and advertising and the rise of digital media. For the purpose of this special issue, we use the 1996 EU definition of the term "South-East Europe" that refers to all countries that are geographically positioned between the Gulf of Trieste and the Black Sea (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012). The interrelationships between media and politics in this region are important and have broader consequences in understanding and comparing similar issues in Europe and more broadly. We feel that this region has not

been researched enough in the academic literature in the field of political communication and that we lack sufficient publications in English; this situation to date has precluded access to a larger academic (as well as non-academic) community.

The issue starts with a comparative analysis of political discourse on television during electoral campaigns in three countries of the region (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia). Borčić, Holy, and Čulo analyse the use of metaphors and national identity arguments in political communication of these three countries. The authors believe that the messages politicians send to audiences via media influence societal attitudes and discussions, so they decided to investigate the relations between linguistic realizations of the opinion patterns and the intention to stress specific political messages by referring to national identity. For this purpose, they analysed the use of metaphors in the national context of selected Croatian, Bosnian and Herzegovinian, and Serbian politicians during the election campaigns for local elections, as evidenced in the TV show "Pressing"*,* broadcast in all three countries on the N1 channel. In the article "Analysis of the use of metaphors in political rhetorics in local elections"*,* the comparative analysis shows that metaphors of personalization are most common among Serbian politicians and somewhat less so among Bosnian-Herzegovinian candidates, while Croatian politicians do not use them at all. Their rhetoric is, in fact, more positive than that of their colleagues in neighbouring countries. Negative arguments are most often used by Serbian politicians.

The impression that television is still a very important medium for electoral campaigning is further confirmed in Mlađenović's article that deals with TV campaign coverage. This article looks at the connection between media and the state. The author first uses Habermas' idea as a theoretical foundation for exploring the tensions between media and political logic during the 2016 electoral campaign in Montenegro. He places Habermas's views against the idea of Koselleck that the Enlightenment critique, embodied by the commercial media of Habermas' liberal public sphere, produced the crisis of the absolutist state, thus creating new social gaps and conflicts. The author considers contemporary Montenegro still in the process of neoliberal transition, which coincides well with the above-mentioned ideas, because its citizens often solve societal problems by reinventing absolutist principles in the public domain. In the article titled "Montenegro's mediatization of politics: Election campaign coverage on RTVijesti and RTCG", the influence of politics on commercial media has been researched with comparative analysis of electoral campaign reports of the election favourite and president of Montenegro on public and commercial TV channels. The author has shown that Enlightenment elements as well as those of absolutism are reflected in the content not only of public television, which is under direct governmental control, but also in that of the commercial channel.

The growing role of the Internet, as well as emotions in political communication, are well shown in the other two articles of this issue. While Matijaca (this issue)

gives an overview of the use of sentiment analysis of readers' comments as a way to predict elections, Adi, Lilleker, and Pekalski (this issue) show how social media can be used for social protests and expression of political dissatisfaction through strengthening emotions and solidarity among citizens.

The article "Emotions in citizens' comments on the Internet as predictors of election success*"* deals with a special form of public expression, enabled by the appearance of the Internet: reader comments on news portals, and in particular the emotions embedded in such submissions during electoral times. Sentiment analysis is one of the most popular current methods for exploring comments on social media and news portals. Matijaca reviews such research, done either online or offline. The review shows how readers, although diverse in their political opinions and attitudes, have mostly negative opinions about politicians, and analyses of these comments can be an interesting means of predicting election results.

The topic of the article "Rezist2017: Communicating dissent in hypermedia environment" shows political communication of conflicting parties during protests in Romania, caused by efforts of the government to exonerate politicians previously accused of corruption. For this purpose, it used national media that are under its (direct and indirect) control, while protesters relied on social media to send their messages to the public. This turned quickly into an alternative channel of communication that was able to compete with the government. By presenting the development of protests in detail and through the method of in-depth interviews with activists both in the country and the diaspora, Adi, Lilleker, and Pekalski explore and examine the role of social media in forming and strengthening emotions and solidarity. The research also shows that the acquired results were sufficient to attain short-term goals but not the long-term aims that would create a good foundation for transforming social movements into a serious political platform.

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guest editors

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