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SERBIA AND KOSOVO BETWEEN SECESSION AND NORMALISATION: EXPLORING MEDIA DISCOURSES ON THE WASHINGTON AGREEMENT (2020)

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ABSTRACT

The Washington Agreement on Kosovo and Serbia economic normalisation (2020) is the subject of this enquiry, while its aim is to examine the role of news media in Serbia in the discourse on normalisation between Belgrade and Pristina. The main hypothesis is that the Washington Agreement was manipulatively used for self-promotion of political elites that negotiated in Washington. The research relies on Critical Discourse Studies, instrumentalist approaches to secession, media framing and agenda-setting theories. We conclude that the issue of Serbia and Kosovo normalisation in Serbian media is mostly framed with aim to mobilises citizens' support for executive authorities. The media thus reproduce political hegemony within Serbian society, while pluralism is obstructed in a manner characteristic for competitive authoritarianism.

KEYWORDS: Washington Agreement, Serbia and Kosovo normalisation, secession, media discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

After Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia in 2008, Serbia did not recognize Kosovo as an independent state. Therefore, the normalisation of Belgrade-Pristina relations was defined as the key precondition for conflict de-escalation and for long term stability in the Western Balkan region. Already in 2010, the European Union took on the role of the main mediator within this process, as it proclaimed its intent to guide the two sides in their efforts to join the EU by insisting on the normalisation of their relations (Bashota and Hoti 2021). Brussels officials established the normalisation of Belgrade-Pristina relations as one of the main preconditions for both Serbia and Kosovo's accession to the EU, while 'normalisation' itself was defined as the process of improving the traumatised relations between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians through diplomatic, economic and other initiatives. In 2020, the Trump Administration managed to briefly overtake the mediating role from the EU, and in doing so it claimed that it was attempting to redefine the negotiating agenda, stating that 'Europeans can only take over the political aspects of the renewed talks once the US has sorted out the business of "economic normalisation"' (Bami 2020). As a result, the Washington Agreement on Kosovo and Serbia economic normalisation was signed in Washington on 4 September 2020.

This document colloquially called "The Washington Agreement", was signed separately by Aleksandar Vučić, the president of Serbia, and Avduallah Hoti, the prime minister of Kosovo, and given to the US president Donald Trump. The participating sides signed similar, but separate documents, stirring controversy and drawing criticism from political opposition in both Serbia and Kosovo, but also from legal scholars and experts on international relations. The two documents that Serbia and Kosovo signed listed a wide array of obligations; those related (but not limited) to religious freedoms, LGBT rights, 5G technology and even to Belgrade and Pristina's relations with Israel (with the two sides controversially agreeing to relocate/establish their respective embassies in Jerusalem). On the other hand, the economic dimensions of the Agreement focused on issues related to infrastructure, commerce and energy. Once the document was presented to the public, it became rather obvious that many of provisions concentrated on issues that were more important to president Trump's election campaign than to Belgrade-Pristina relations per se. Moreover, the provisions that did address the issue of Belgrade-Pristina relations directly did so by taking geopolitical and ideological considerations into account more than issues relevant to the lives of everyday citizens, which previously were covered by binding provisions from the Brussels Agreement (2013).

Being that the Serbian government formally treats Kosovo as part of Serbia, while its representatives simultaneously participate in de facto bilateral talks with their Kosovo counterparts, the public in Serbia is intrigued by the position of its negotiators in the normalisation process. However, the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue has been characterized by non-transparency since its inception in 2011. This fact has kept the citizens of both Serbia and Kosovo far away from being well informed about the dialogue. Yet, the media have the potential to influence the process of normalisation because they form public opinion on this issue. Since Serbian media (both public broadcasters and privately owned tabloids) are strongly influenced (and indirectly controlled) by the ruling party (Repucci 2020; Milutinović 2021), they in a certain way participate in the process of construction of public discourse on the normalisation process. Media framing processes always take place in a certain social context, in which different political, economic, ideological, and other agents compete for their position in reproduction of social power (van Dijk 2008). Therefore, the Washington Agreement on Kosovo and Serbia economic normalisation (2020) is the subject of this enquiry, while its aim is to examine the role of news media in Serbia in the discourse on normalisation between Belgrade and Pristina. In order to achieve the specific goals of this study, we use an interdisciplinary approach.

REMARKS ON THE PROCESS OF NORMALISATION

The negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina – informally referred to as the ‘Brussels dialogue’ – concentrated on technical issues at first, once they commenced in 2011. This approach was needful due to the fact that the Government of the Republic of Serbia did not recognise Kosovo as an independent state, while it exercised no sovereignty over this territory. The ‘Brussels Agreement’, which was signed in 2013, outlined the initial obligations that the involved sides agreed to, as well as the path that their efforts to improve their mutual relations should follow when resolving security and energy issues, but also those issues concerning their legal, public health and education systems. Due to the signing of the Brussels Agreement, Serbia was allowed to start its formal accession negotiations with the EU in 2014. One of the major negotiating chapters – Chapter 35 – formally set the normalisation of Serbia-Kosovo relations as a task that Serbia has to achieve in order to become eligible for EU membership, with the signing of a new (all-encompassing and legally binding) agreement between Belgrade and Pristina being defined as a crucial indicator of its fulfilment.

However, since the signing of the Brussels Agreement in 2013, the Belgrade-Pristina negotiations have not been nearly as fruitful as EU repre-

sentatives initially hoped they would be. The European Union insisted on positioning itself as the key facilitator of Belgrade-Pristina talks, with the aim of establishing itself as a global actor capable of managing regional conflicts and political crises, while vaguely defining the ultimate aim of the negotiation process (Bieber 2015). The prospect of EU membership was set forth as the reward for such an outcome. Yet, it was clear to the negotiating parties from the very beginning that even if they managed to reach a mutually acceptable solution to the problems derived from Kosovo's declaration of independence (which itself is a highly unlikely outcome), the EU would still not be able to guarantee membership to either party before they achieve all other accession requirements, and before each EU member state approves their admission independently. Being that the promise of EU membership seems distant due to the manner in which the EU accession process is structured (which has especially become apparent in recent years, after the EU itself took a more reserved stance regarding its potential enlargement), the rational strategy for both of the involved sides is to formally keep negotiating without making any tangible concessions to the other party. In such a way, political leaders/representatives of both Belgrade and Pristina strive to seem firm in their stance not to make concessions to the opposing side (which helps them secure votes at home), while also formally continuing the negotiation process (in hopes of maintaining good relations with EU officials, while waiting for the opposing side to grow tired and ultimately concede). Thus, regardless of their formal willingness to participate in the negotiation process, both Belgrade and Pristina have done little to reach an actual compromise. This has created fertile ground for escalation of the rhetorical conflict between the two, as they keep blaming each other for the stalemate, thus risking an outbreak of a political/security crisis.

Sporadic confrontations escalated in 2018, when further negotiations were brought to a halt after Kosovo introduced high tariffs on goods from Serbia, as a response to Serbia's strengthening of its diplomatic initiative (which it has been implementing since 2008) to convince countries that have previously recognised Kosovo as an independent state to withdraw their recognition.¹ In July the following year, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron organised a summit dealing with Serbia-Kosovo relations, aiming to restart the negotiation

1 Between 2017 and 2020, Serbia led a successful campaign aimed at stopping further recognition of Kosovo's independence, as some countries even decided to withdraw previously made decisions to recognise Kosovo. At the time of the signing of the Washington Agreement, Kosovo had established bilateral relations with about 100 states (with Pristina claiming that this number goes as high as 115, while Belgrade maintains that it is much lower). Kosovo also managed to become a member of several international organisations (MMF, World Bank, FIFA), but not the United Nations.

process. However, their attempt was to no avail, as both sides maintained their maximalist and mutually exclusive stances; Kosovo kept demanding that its territorial integrity and constitution must be respected, insisting on a seat in the UN and on international recognition from Serbia, while Serbia denounced such requests as ultimatums that it cannot take into account, still claiming that it is open to holding talks about different ways in which Belgrade-Pristina relations could be improved (Petrović 2020).

US President Donald Trump's administration was the first to successfully end the stalemate, once Washington became directly involved in the negotiation process ahead of the 2020 Presidential Elections. Talks continued in the White House, promptly resulting in the Washington Agreement being signed in September of 2020. The documents signed by the two parties are identical in formulations and content,² other than Art. 16 that deals with relations with Israel. Beside the stipulated obligations concurred by the both sides, Pristina has unilaterally agreed to place a one-year moratorium on seeking membership in international organisations, while Belgrade separately agreed to a one-year moratorium on its campaign of derecognition of Kosovo as an independent country. The Art. 16 has been differently formulated for two sides: Serbia has agreed to open Chamber of Commerce's office and state office in Jerusalem on by 20 September 2020 and to transfer its embassy to Jerusalem by 1 July 2021, while Kosovo took a step of mutual recognition with Israel.

Trump's administration has praised the agreement, calling it a "historical determination" and "great step" in the Kosovo-Serbia relations (Mason et al. 2020). Special Presidential Envoy for Serbia and Kosovo Peace Negotiations, Richard Grenell, claimed that Serbia and Kosovo reached a creative agreement that 'demonstrates the achievements of President Trump and his administration's sound engagement throughout the world' (Grenell 2020). Yet, while it must be acknowledged that by signing the Washington Agreement Serbia and Kosovo finally did reach some sort of compromise, it remains unclear whether the Agreement is legally binding and whether or not the two sides must fulfil the obligations that they declaratively took upon themselves. According to many legal and international relations experts, the Washington Agreement cannot be considered a bilateral

2 For the both parties the Agreement related to: the application of previously signed bilateral agreements on highway and rail connection between Belgrade and Pristina; cooperation with the US IDFC and Exim Bank; Kosovo's entry into the "Mini-Schengen zone"; mutual recognition of diplomas; cooperation with the US Department of Energy on the study of lake Gazivode/Ujmani; diversifying energy imports; ban of 5G equipment from the untrustworthy vendors; using information and screening systems supplied by the USA; protection of the freedom of religion; restitution of the Holocaust victims; permanent solutions for the refugees and internally displaced; lobbying for decriminalisation of homosexuality in 69 countries that still penalise it; designating Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation (KoSSeV, 2020).

or trilateral agreement, because Serbia, Kosovo and the US each signed separate documents that technically represent similar (but independent) letters of intent, but no more than that (BBC News 2020b). It therefore seems that the involved sides only took on a moral (and not a legal) obligation to respect the Washington Agreement.

Therefore, most analysts sided with the stance taken by Deutsche Welle, which described the facilitating role of the US as ‘a one sided and privatised approach, typical for President Trump, who relies on deal-making in the widest sense of the word’ (Maksimović 2020). In other words, the Washington Agreement could be perceived as a publicity stunt orchestrated by President Trump with the purpose of presenting himself as an internationally respected arbitrator (one more capable than his EU counterparts), just as he did when facilitating the normalisation agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (BBC News, 2020a). This explains the diverse repertoire of subjects that the Washington Agreement encompassed, as they were directly derived from Trump’s presidential campaign. Consequently, the initial assumption of our research is that the Washington Agreement was manipulatively used for self-promotion of political elites that negotiate or take part in concrete negotiations in Washington (not only for President Trump), while the media discourse supported this manipulation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main theoretical and methodological basis is the selected CDS (Critical Discourse Studies) approaches and instrumentalist explanatory theories of secession, while agenda-setting and framing media theories were used as auxiliary concepts.

Our theoretical background is rooted in van Dijk’s concept of news as a form of public discourse: “In general, mind control is indirect, an intended but only possible or probable consequence of discourse. Those who control discourse may indirectly control the minds of people. And since people’s actions are controlled by their minds (knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms, values), mind control also means indirect action control” (van Dijk 2008, 9). Therefore, the main subject of this research is media discourse on the Washington Agreement (a case study chosen as the most exemplary of Kosovo related discourses utilised by the Serbian media). We intend to examine whether Serbian media act independently when framing this topic, or whether they are instrumentalized as mere mouthpieces of the Serbian authorities agenda.

The main theoretical premise is that citizens are subjected to the influence of the media; the media set the agenda of social issues and provide the public with patterns for interpreting them, both by selecting

and setting the hierarchy of topics they cover on a daily basis (Coleman *et al.* 2009, 149–150; McCombs and Shaw 1972), as well as by emphasising and repeating certain topics, i.e., by framing and reinforcing them (Weaver *et al.* 1998; Berkowitz 1984). By emphasising certain ‘frames’/aspects of current events, while simultaneously diminishing the importance of other aspects – through carefully picked thematic and lexical choices, stylistic and rhetorical figures, headlines, and visuals, etc. – the media can influence the manner in which message recipients react to a particular subject (Goffman 1974, 21). Furthermore, Robert Entman claims that the act of media framing involves selecting and highlighting bits of information: ‘To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described’ (Entman 1993, 52). Framing represents the processes through which societies reproduce meaning. Balanced/impartial frames are those that use alternative narratives and counter-frames when reporting on a topic. When discussing the problem of frames dominating most discourses, Entman comes to an important conclusion: ‘Frame parity is the exception, not the rule’ (Entman 2003, 418).

Unlike Goffman, Entman and other sociologists, who examined framing as a process through which societies reproduce meaning, Teun A. van Dijk, Norman Fairclough and other Critical Discourse Studies theorists, locate the frames on the deeper cognitive levels. Teun van Dijk’s (2018) approach of Socio-Cognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) and Norman Fairclough’s (2018) Dialectical-Relational Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are similar in their three-dimensional notion of media discourse: text, news production, broader social context. This paper attempts to consolidate the elements of Fairclough’s CDA with Van Dijk’s schematic approach. Namely, SCDS distinguishes two levels of media discourse analysis: the macrostructure (thematic organisation of text) and microstructure (language structure) of a newspaper article. For CDA, media text remains the central element in media discourse analysis, and it includes three analytical dimensions of the media text: Linguistic analysis (equivalent to Van Dijk’s microstructures), Discourse practice and Sociocultural practice (Fairclough 1995, 55–60).

Explanatory approaches to secession that rely on instrumentalist theories of ethnic conflict also assume that citizens are prone to being influenced by media discourses. They tend to argue that print, electronic and digital media are used as channels of political manipulation through which separatist elites aim to secure mass support for their agendas. For example, Philip Roeder (2018) and Erin Jenne (2007) observe that regional

politicians and leaders of ethnic communities operationalise and instrumentalise secession as a political theme once they conclude that it can help them achieve their political goals related to improving their poll ratings and election results, or to other ambitions such as increasing their blackmailing potential for political bargaining between the centre and periphery whenever necessary (Roeder 2018; Jenne 2007). Likewise, central authorities must reject any secessionist claims as invalid in order to improve their negotiating position. Filip Ejdus offers a relevant analysis of how the Serbian government manages to reject secessionist claims (as a part of its Kosovo master narrative), while simultaneously negotiating with Kosovo politicians over certain issues (within the normalisation process). He provides a good overview of the disharmony between Serbia's EU integration objective and its rejection of Kosovo separatist agenda. Although these policy goals are not complementary, the political elites in Serbia chosen to implement "a form of anxiety-controlling mechanism of avoidance" (Ejdus 2020, 128), which they apply through media discourses. Having this in mind, it becomes clear why it is very important to study discourses that appear in Serbian media, as they can be indicative of political ambitions that go beyond the attempt of keeping Kosovo within Serbia.

In addition to forging frames while interpreting current events, the media also act as intermediaries or transmitters of frames shaped by other public or communication actors (Brüggemann 2014, 64). John Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) is especially useful in this regard, as it understands agenda setting through three separate streams: problems, policies, and politics. Kingdon discusses various actors and processes that influence government programmes, decision-making agendas and 'specify alternatives' (Kingdon 2014, 15–16). In democratically stable societies, strong institutions play a key role in the government agenda-setting processes; they set forth the available/legitimate instruments of exercising power and influence the ways in which governments make choices and specify their alternatives (*ibid*). The media also play a key role, since – according to the liberal-democratic paradigm – they represent a free and independent link between the citizens and elected authorities, providing the former with information that helps them understand issues of public concern, while simultaneously drawing the latter's attention to some of these issues and encouraging debates on subjects of public importance, in a way that allows for different views, opinions and interests to be exchanged, (re)considered or challenged. Thus, the media can play a dual role in relation to government agenda. On the one hand, it can be proactive – by delegating some of the public issues to the government and by exploring and critically reviewing the manner in which the government handles those issues. On the other hand, the media in that sense can act

passively – acting as proxies to political agenda, and even instrumentally – as one-way mobilizers of public support for certain government decisions of for the political leaders (Kingdon 2014, 57–61).

Andreas Schedler's concept of electoral authoritarianism is also significant for our analysis. According to Schedler (2013), electoral authoritarianism can be competitive and hegemonic; and competitive authoritarian regimes combine democratic rules and autocratic methods of governance. Thus, they do not exclude democratic rules, but use them to legitimise the existing autocratic leadership. At the same time, democratic procedures become a 'facade', being that their violations are so frequent and systematic that they produce unequal conditions for competition between the government and the opposition (Levitsky and Way 2020, 52). Although elections are held regularly, even without major fraud, 'incumbents routinely abuse state resources, deny the opposition adequate media coverage, harass opposition candidates and their supporters...' (Levitsky and Way 2020, 53).

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The focus of this research is on the role of the media in normalisation process; that is, its main goal is to examine the role of news media in Serbia in the discourse on normalisation between Belgrade and Pristina. The narrower goal of this research is to identify the dominant discourse patterns through which the Serbian media frame the issue of Washington Agreement. The Washington Agreement is taken as a case study because the researchers' premise was that this act does not discard the Brussels dialogue on normalisation nor contributes to Brussels talks (which, unlike the talks in Washington, have the binding character to formalize/normalize Serbia-Kosovo relations). We believe that this (media) discourse is worth exploring, especially since Serbian pro-government media sensationalized the Washington Agreement (whilst simultaneously forming a unified narrative on the issue), just as it has done when covering other politically sensitive and controversial events (for other examples, see Vladislavjević 2019). In doing so, they demonstrated specific mannerisms of framing when it comes to: a) the politicians involved, b) the international actors involved, c) the EU (as an actor that supposedly failed where Trump allegedly succeeded), d) the inconsistent attitude of the Serbian authorities towards the Kosovo issue. Thus, we consider media discourse on the Washington Agreement indicative also of illuminating some political motives of negotiators during the normalisation process, including those eventually hidden and not transparent in official statements. The main hypothesis of the paper is that the Washington Agreement was manipulatively used for self-promotion of political elites that negotiate or take part

in concrete negotiations in Washington, while the manipulation in Serbia is technically carried out through political instrumentalization of media that are loyal to President Vučić. Our auxiliary hypothesis is this: media discourse on the Washington Agreement on Kosovo and Serbia economic normalisation in Serbian media mainstream was framed under the strong influence of the political agenda.

To test our hypotheses, the research relies on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. In order to obtain relevant empirical data that will enable us to develop arguments and conclusions about the characteristics of media discourse, we first performed an 'objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication' (Berelson 1952, 18), by using categories such as genres, authorship, section, pseudo-events (Results chapter).

Within Discussion chapter, we presented dominant media discourse frames. The coding units were the formal characteristics of the text, or the schematic structure categories of the text, as described by van Dijk (title, lead, main event, background, consequences, verbal reactions, evaluation, and expectations) (van Dijk 1988, 52–59). In order to reach a more complete and a deeper understanding of the media discourse, we simultaneously conducted descriptive linguistic analysis and interpretive intertextual analysis of sampled media texts, following Norman Farklaff's CDA. The key analytical concepts of this research are coherence and intertextuality. This study of media discourse involved an analysis of choices: included vs. excluded from text; explicitly vs. implicitly omitted; emphasized vs. marginalised; thematised vs. dethematised. By understanding the relationship between discourses within published texts, we aim to reveal discourse hierarchies, that is, to point to potential social and political hegemony (*ibid.*). Thus, by reconstructing the discourses that frame the phenomena of secession and normalisation in the Serbian media, we expect to reveal political attitudes that surpass formally proclaimed policies and goals of the Serbian Government. In doing so, we intend to broaden the existing academic and other literature on the Belgrade-Pristina normalisation process (i.e., Gashi and Musliu 2017) with new empirical insights; insights that further demonstrate why 'normalisation of Belgrade-Pristina relations' remains an ambiguous and distant goal to this day.

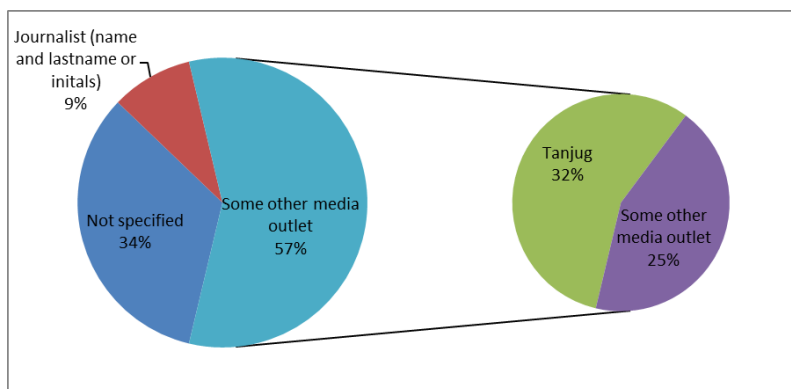
This analysis was conducted on a representative sample of 276 media texts dealing with the signing of the Washington Agreement, with the code list being utilised as an instrument and each media text as a separate unit of analysis. The sample was collected using online archives of 12 most influential Serbian media outlets: *Blic*, *Kurir*, *B92*, *Telegraf*, *N1*, *Večernje novosti*, *Informer*, *Danas*, *Mondo*, *RTS*, *Politika*, *Pink* (Milutinović 2021).

Therefore, the sample consists of the online texts by the traditional media on their official pages and of texts by the native digital media that are within the group of media with highest penetration. This sample adequately represents different editorial orientations: with exemptions of *Danas* and TV N1 that are pro-opposition, all other media are pro-government, and *Informer* and *Kurir* are distinctly pro-government. Also, the online sample that we used adequately represents the news covered in print and electronic media, because the 12 media outlets that were selected portray same frames in all of their publishing forms, which also includes online content. In other words, their content does not differ editorially, regardless of the platform used. We gathered relevant material published 7 days before and after the signing of the Washington Agreement.

RESULTS: MEDIA FRAMING OF THE WASHINGTON AGREEMENT DISCOURSE

The media discourse on the Washington Agreement is mainly formed in the politics section (for 71% of published articles), while a certain number of texts are situated in the section dedicated to economic issues, with only a few portals assigning special sections just for this topic. The largest share of media texts on the mentioned Agreement was published by web portals of daily newspapers: (pro-regime) *Kurir* and (pro-opposition) *Danas* (13% each), followed by *Informer*, *Večernje novosti*, then *TVN1* and the daily *Blic*. Authors of media texts were identified in only 9% of all contributions analysed in the sample. This percentage is not an indicator of the reporting credibility per se, but it can be indicative of a lack of professionalism. More than half of the sampled texts (57%) were not originally published by the online outlet which uploaded them. *Tanjug*³ is most often cited as the source of all news stories regarding the signing of the Washington Agreement, as 32% of all the sampled texts name it as their source (Figure 1). *Tanjug*'s texts are frequently taken over by other outlets and integrated into the final output of their online platforms, most often without any changes being made to the original content, which is why the intertextual processing of media texts habitually lacks any transformative qualities (Fairclough 1995, 58–60). Furthermore, the discourse we analysed is dominated by factual journalistic genres: the largest share consists of articles published in the form of news (60%), followed by reports (25%), while analytical genres (articles and columns) are not as frequent (7.6%).

3 Despite legal provisions that do not allow state ownership of media in Serbia, *Tanjug* news agency operated in a semi-legal status from 2014 to 2020, highly dependent on the Government, but privileged in relation to the other two (independent) news agencies in Serbia.

Figure 1. The distribution of authorship of media texts

Source: The authors' findings.

The absence of journalistic evaluation – which represents an important unit of the schematic macrostructure of any text (van Dijk 1988, 35–54) – in as many as 62% of the analysed texts, also suggests that interpretative hegemony exists. By reducing media discourse to official statements and to ‘word-for-word’ coverage when reporting on the verbal reactions of the political actors involved, the media deprives the audience of a deeper analytical and critical approach to the events it is describing, thus denying the public the chance to learn about diverse views and attitudes about the subject. Furthermore, rare pieces that did take on an evaluative approach were most often published with the aim of expressing support for President Vučić, the main Serbian negotiator. This evaluative statement of a *Tanjug* journalist – which was published in its original form by several pro-regime tabloids – is a good example:

‘President Vučić’s assessment that the Agreement signed in the White House is very important – and that Serbia should not be ashamed of it – is validated by every term specified within the Agreement itself, and one should not forget that Serbia’s negotiators managed to secure those favourable terms regardless of the pressure exerted on them by the representatives of the world power that facilitated the Agreement and that, by the way, recognises Kosovo’s independence’ (pink.rs).

In 30% of the texts, thematic-organisational categories – such as the background of the event that was covered – are not visible, while the consequences of the event are not visible in 24% of the texts. Spatial-temporal decontextualization (van Dijk 1988, 54) of the covered event is often noticeable, as is the fact that the event is being displaced from its generic or initial context, indicating that the process of creating media content is

prone to manipulation. When it comes to reporting on the outcomes and consequences of the event that was covered, journalists tend to emphasise words such as ‘future’, ‘peace’, ‘stability’ and ‘development’, distancing the discourse from the nationalistic metaphors used to describe Kosovo, such as ‘holy Serbian land’, ‘the most expensive Serbian word’, ‘entrance to the kingdom of heaven’. Although utilised frames set Kosovo’s secession in a context that is more in line with civic rather than nationalist sentiments, much of the media discourse is still shaped by rather confrontational slogans, such as the one launched by President Vučić: ‘Surrender is not an option.’ In such a way, Serbian media reproduce a discourse that represents him as a flexible but firm negotiator, with the main message being that the citizens of Serbia need not worry about the outcome of the talks as long as Vučić is in charge of them. Such a discourse essentially masks the fact that Serbia’s leadership acts rather inconsistently when dealing with the issue of Kosovo’s independence.⁴

When the analysed texts are classified in accordance to the events which prompted journalists to write and publish them, pseudo-events – or events reported on merely for the sake of the publicity they generate (Boorstin 1962) – are much more prevalent than actual newsworthy events (70% vs 8% respectively). Most articles conveyed information gathered at official press conferences or from *ad hoc* public statements made in Washington, from official social media accounts of the involved actors, from their press releases, as well as from statements made by government representatives that were not present in Washington, but that non the less conformed to mainstream discourse on the topic. When setting the agenda for the Washington Agreement, the media usually relied on following persons: the leader of the Serbian negotiating team and the President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić (who was identified as the source or the key communicator in 34% of all media texts), then Special Presidential Envoy for Serbia and Kosovo Peace Negotiations, Richard Grenell (with a 20% share), followed by Albanian team leader and Kosovo’s then Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti (who’s direct statements were not conveyed nearly as often as he was referred to, 10%), the US President Trump (9%), and other Serbian Government officials (6–7% each), who mostly supported and reproduced the statements made by President Vučić. The structure of sources and interlocutors mentioned in most of the observed media reports is uniform, which explains the predominantly affirmative stance that the media conveyed when covering the signing of the Washington Agreement. An attempt to

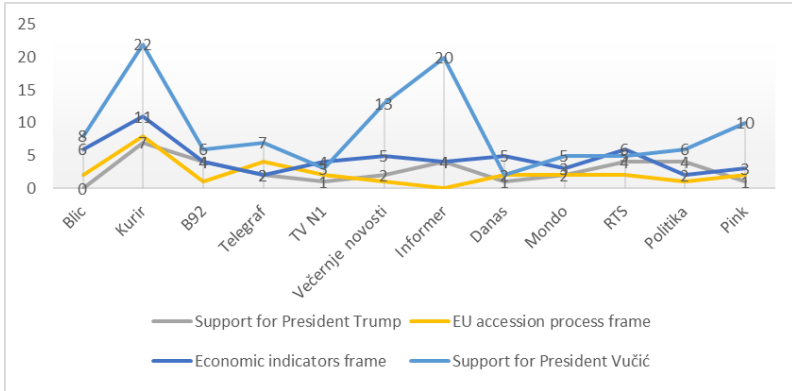
4 This inconsistency is best proven by the fact that Vučić secretly met with the then President of Kosovo Hashim Thaçi in June of 2020 in New York to discuss a potential land swap, which goes against his ‘surrender is not an option’ stance. The meeting was later uncovered by investigative journalists.

diversify those communicators who shaped the discourse on the Washington Agreement was undertaken by two pro-opposition portals – *TVN1* and the daily *Danas*, as they avoided *Tanjug* agency news by relying on various independent columnists and commentators. Their texts (that approached the issue critically) make up just 12% of the total share of the articles dealing with the signing of the mentioned document, while an all-encompassing reporting approach (i.e., balanced representation of conflicting interests and arguments) is visible in 23% of the texts in the overall sample. This practically means that most of the media discourse conveyed a consistent/uniform stance regarding the Washington Agreement, one which is articulated by government representatives and which is primarily processed in the *Tanjug* state news agency and from there distributed to other media platforms.

DISCUSSION: DOMINANT MEDIA DISCOURSE FRAMES

The signing of the Washington Agreement was covered by the Serbian media with the use of several dominant frames (Figure 2). The media affirmation of the Agreement was evident in 63% of sampled texts, within which it was framed in three quantitatively dominant discourses: support for President Vučić (present in 39% of media texts), support for President Trump (12%) and economic benefits (12%). Balanced reporting is noticeable within the discourse that frames the process of Serbia's accession to the European Union (10%), while critical takes on the Washington Agreement (most of which concentrated on issues related to constitutional and international law) were marginalised to only 7% of articles, all of which were published by the two pro-opposition portals. It is especially interesting that the research result shows the absence of interest of Serbian media for the Albanian side. Namely, Kosovo negotiators are mentioned in less than 15% of media texts of the whole sample, and in negative or critical context even less – only about 8% of texts frame the negative or adversarial discourse on Kosovo government. In this analysis we have focused on the dominant discourse frames, on those that have stood out by the largest percentage of the media texts framed in a certain matrix, as shown by Figure 2. In that sense, discourse frame on the relations with the USA is also marginal in the sample; except the frame of the support for President Trump, that we have selected and described in the paper.

Figure 2. Dominant discourse frames (and the number of articles they were spotted in)



Source: The authors' findings.

1. THE DISCOURSE FRAME OF SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENT VUČIĆ.

The discourse offering support to President Vučić (39% of sampled media texts) is based on the following media narrative: (a) Washington negotiations began once it was requested that Serbia establish bilateral relations with Kosovo (Article 10 of the proposed Washington Agreement). The initial draught of the Agreement was thus characterised by the Serbian side as 'the worst possible document' (Telegraf_03 / 09), while article 10 was framed as the 'Trojan horse' article (Kurir_04 / 09). (b) 'Enormous pressure' was the term used to describe the gravity of the situation in which the Serbian delegation found itself in Washington (Pink.rs⁵), as it was even implied that the Serbian delegation faced physical danger at some point: „twenty people reacted to our delegation's every word very aggressively, and some of them aren't even Albanian” (Pink.rs). (c) The Serbian delegation refused to sign the initial version of the Agreement, as that version stated that Serbia must recognise Kosovo's independence. In such a way – the narrative continues – members of the delegation demonstrated 'firm statesmanship' (V.novosti_04 / 09), with President Vučić leading the way and resisting each and every challenge against Serbia's national interests and state sovereignty. The media thus proclaimed that the Serbian President achieved a 'diplomatic victory'; a victory most often explained *ad hominem*,

5 Each individual media text represents a unit of analysis, and it is encrypted. Each code contains: the name of the news outlets that published the text (e.g., Blic), the date of publication of the text (e.g., 04/09) and a letter that refers to the order of coding (a, b, c...). The pink.rs portal omitted all the dates of its publications.

by describing his decisions as 'smart and wise' (Kurir_07 / 09), and by utilising the epithet 'patriotic' and the hyperbole 'lion' when referring to him. At the same time, the negotiations were often described as a 'fight' (Kurir_03 / 09, Kurir_04 / 09a). Framing the President as a heroic leader culminated with him being portrayed as the symbol of self-sacrifice: 'Vučić would rather die than leave Serbia hanging' (Kurir_03 / 09, V.novosti_03 / 09). His opponents were metaphorically referred to as evil mythical beings, i.e., 'Scylla and Charybdis'⁶ (Informer_04 / 09b), which frames Serbia's negotiating position in a way that makes it seem that disaster is imminent,⁷ and that only a hero can save Serbia by navigating between many evils that threaten it. This framing technique thus relied on myths and legends in order to subliminally stress the significance of the event being covered. For instance, 'attacks' made by the opposing negotiating party were qualified as 'brutal' (Telegraf_04 / 09b), while – as opposed to the media construction of insidious and evil opposing side – the President of Serbia is framed as an outstanding person, by using the following lexical choices: 'determined', 'wise', 'brave', 'just' and 'capable'. For example, it was stated that he is: '... the only one who is able to fight for Serbia and its interests even in the most difficult of situations, and for whom Serbia always comes first and remains forever in his heart' (Kurir_04 / 09a). The tabloid construction of Vučić's exceptionality is reinforced by representative illocutionary statements (Serl 1976) which take on a persuasive form: 'one of the greatest statesmen in Serbia's recent history' (Kurir_04 / 09b, Informer_04 / 09a), 'A Serbian politician of extremely rare geostrategic capabilities' (Informer_04 / 09b), 'He is the best of all of us' (Telegraf_04 / 09a).

The media presented Serbia's decision not to sign the initial draught of the agreement – the one which supposedly requested that Serbia recognise Kosovo's independence – as a 'very hard, daring and risky move' (Kurir_07/09). The decision was attributed to the President himself, and was framed through the use of chess metaphors, such as 'a Fool's mate' (Telegraf_04/09b); 'the Serbian side played a grandmaster-like move in response to Pristina's offers and USA's pressure' (Mondo_04/09); 'wise political decisions resembling the moves of a chess grandmaster' (Informer_04/09b) and 'a brilliant diplomatic game was played in Washington' (Informer_08/09). The final/signed version of the Agreement was later framed through media-spins that only focused on the positive aspects

6 According to ancient mythology, Scylla and Charybdis are two sea monsters that are positioned on two adjacent cliffs of a sea strait, from which they lurk for victims who sail between them.

7 Such a frame basically conveys the message that 'no choice is wrong', and provides legitimacy to any political decision made by the government, including the unpopular ones, those that would include recognising Kosovo as an independent state in some shape or form.

of the document, without taking all the relevant factors into account. This frame described the Washington Agreement as ‘one of the best international agreements ever signed by Serbia’ (Kurir_04/09a), while Serbia-US relations were now reframed as ‘a renewed partnership’ (Kurir_06/09). The media also constructed frames to emphasise consistency in the political actions of the President: ‘Once again, he firmly confirmed that Serbia will not recognise Kosovo’s independence’ (Kurir_04/09c). He was described not only as the protector of Serbian interests, but also as a regional leader. Collective memory was also invoked, as the negotiations held in Washington were compared to historical events such as the Paris Peace Conference held after WWI and the Berlin Congress of 1878 (within which Serbia secured its *de jure* independence from the Ottomans).

A significant part of the discourse that provides support for the President also utilises the negative comparison communication strategy, as the signing of the Washington Agreement was instrumentalized with the purpose of smearing ruling party’s political opponents. For example: ‘was this possible back when Tadić, Jeremić and Đilas⁸ governed Serbia? At that time, no one negotiated with Serbia, no one wanted to talk to us, and we were not welcome at the White House’ (Kurir_04/09d). ‘Vučić will never make compromises regarding Serbia’s national interests. He is not like Boris Tadić⁹, who agreed to everything and apologised to everyone’ (V.novosti_03/09). Pro-government media used the technique of manipulating known as Manichean framing of reality to stigmatize government opponents. While the President was presented as the heroic saviour of the nation, critics of the Washington Agreement were framed with the use of following lexical choices: ‘haters’ (Kurir_04/09d), ‘anti-Serbian band of thieves’ (Kurir_04/09d), “Belgrade’s yellow scum-elite” (Informer_04/09b), etc.

A part of this discourse derives from the utilisation of self-promotion as a communication strategy, which relies on frames that highlight one’s own exceptionality, i.e.: ‘This is the pen that President Trump gave to me, and only he used it to sign documents’ (Kurir_04/09e); ‘President Trump gave me the keys to the White House and told me that I am welcome here at any time’ (Pink.rs).

2. THE DISCOURSE FRAME OF SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENT TRUMP.

The media started to form an affirmative discourse about President Trump (12%) beginning with the second day of the talks, after Article 10

8 Leaders of the opposition who participated in the government coalition which was defeated by the current ruling party at the 2012 elections.

9 Former president of the Republic of Serbia and one of the leaders of the opposition.

was excluded from the Agreement. During the first day of the negotiations, Serbian tabloids prepared expressed suspicion regarding US delegation's intentions. For example, the most influential pro-government tabloid depersonalised Richard Grenell by not mentioning him by name, instead choosing to refer to him as 'this guy', stating that he is 'up to something', in capital letters (Informer_03/09). However, the very next day, the same tabloid completely changed the tone of reporting when describing American officials. Serbian-American foreign relations were praised as excellent: "Serbia is a country that Washington listens to and the Trump administration has improved US-Serbia relations," stated Serbia's Prime Minister' (Informer_05/09). The success of the Washington Agreement was in large part attributed to President Trump, who was hailed by media interlocutors. Serbian media also mediate the frames formed by Trump's associates, referring to the Washington Agreement as 'a historical initiative made by President Trump', while Belgrade-Pristina relations prior to the signing of the Agreement were characterised as 'a nightmare', having reached a 'dead end' before the Americans took over (RTS_04/09). In such a way, Serbian media reproduced frames through which the White House Administration intended to present President Trump as a successful mediator of international political disputes ahead of the 2020 election (Blic_04/09).

3. THE DISCOURSE FRAME OF ECONOMIC BENEFITS.

Discourse frames related to economic indicators (12% of media texts) interpreted the Washington Agreement through the perspective of economic benefits. The Agreement was framed with the use of metaphors and hyperboles: 'a giant step', 'a historical day for Serbia', 'it guarantees a safe future', 'unprecedented success', 'a milestone that will influence the future of our state and our children'. This frame highlighted the potential economic benefits of USA's intent to open an American Development Fund office in Belgrade, but also the potential economic benefits of the mini-Schengen (a.k.a. Open Balkan) initiative¹⁰ (Blic_05/09, Kurir_06/09). The main message of this discourse can be summarised with the following statement: 'The US aims to empower Serbia through infrastructural interconnections'(b92_03/09). Yet, while Serbian delegates emphasised the economic aspects of the Agreement, the Albanian side conveyed its support for the agreement in more political terms: 'This is a giant step in reaching a final

¹⁰ Mini Schengen represents the Western Balkan version of a single market, which emerged as an option after the European Union declined to announce the start of accession negotiations with Albania and Northern Macedonia in October 2019, while other countries of the region were making little to no progress in their attempts to join the EU.

agreement with Serbia', with the international recognition of Kosovo being set forth as the ultimate goal (Blic_03/09). In such a way, both sides framed the signing of the Washington Agreement in a manner which suits their political interests and which is acceptable to their citizens.

4. DISCOURSE ON THE ACCESSION PROCESS TO THE EU.

In 10% of the sampled media texts, the Washington Agreement was interpreted from the perspective of Serbia's EU accession negotiation process. The media formed this Agreement related discourse by relying on statements made by Serbian and EU officials. In this context, the Washington Agreement was framed as a segment of the wider Belgrade-Pristina talks, which were defined as the key component of 'the EU accession process and further Serbia-Kosovo negotiations facilitated by the EU' (N1_07/09). This discourse was a part of the most balanced reporting on the talks held in Washington. While US officials claimed that the Washington Agreement was a historical agreement, EU representatives made statements that were of a more critical and reserved nature: 'We acknowledge that the document was signed' (Telegraf_04/09, Blic_07/09); '[...] any diplomatic initiatives that move away from EU members' mutual stance on Jerusalem are saddening and concerning' (Blic_07/09). While messages coming from the EU were consistent, statements made by Serbian representatives were often in contradiction with one another: '...we want to join the European Union and we have to trust our European partners' (Kurir_06/09) versus: 'I understand why the EU is not too happy with this Agreement. We can expect many good things from the EU, but not when it comes to the issue of Kosovo's independence' (Politika_05/09). Pro-government media kept in line with official statements made by Serbian representatives, interpreting EU's dissatisfaction with the Washington Agreement by relying on Euroscepticism, claiming that the EU itself is responsible for the stagnation of Serbia's accession negotiations. As in other cases, this frame was intertwined with support for President Vučić: 'Some EU member states will do anything to harm Serbia and Vučić, as they don't want to see Serbia become the leader of stable and peaceful Western Balkan region.' (Kurir_07/09).

5. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ON THE WASHINGTON AGREEMENT.

Critical media discourse frames were detected in 7% of the sampled texts, all of them coming from *TVN1* and *Danas* portals. The topics that were isolated within critical media discourse are: (a) whether the President of Serbia has constitutional authority to sign agreements such as the one signed in Washington, (b) whether the Washington Agreement is legally

binding from the perspective of international law and (c) what security risks the signing of the Agreement entails.

The first critical stance frame is based on the interpretation of Article 112 paragraph 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, according to which the President of the Republic represents Serbia within the country and abroad, but does not act on behalf of it, i.e., he does not have the authority to sign international agreements or binding political agreements. This responsibility is reserved for the Government, as the Constitution states that it must 'determine and conduct policies' (Article 123). In this sense, the Washington Agreement is framed through the use of contrasts which emphasise the importance of rule of law. For example: "It is at this point that a division emerges between democratic states characterised by rule of law, and those other states that do not care about rule of law. In the former, it is inconceivable that a body of power usurps competencies that do not belong to it [...]" (Danas_10 / 09). The frame that the President is acting outside of his legal bounds is emphasised by the fact that Serbia's Prime Minister Ana Brnabić is not even informed about his political decisions. For example, just nine days prior to the signing of the Washington Agreement, she thanked Israel for being deciding not to recognise Kosovo's independence. However, 'something completely different happened, as the Prime Minister of Serbia had no idea what the Washington Agreement would entail [...] Israel recognising Kosovo, and Serbia seems to be compliant with this recognition as it promised to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem' (Danas_07 / 09). The ironic tone of this discourse culminated in the statement of an opposition representative: 'The whole world is laughing at us because of the decision to move the embassy to Jerusalem' (N1_07 / 09).

In a few analytical articles, the signed Agreement was interpreted by credible experts on international law. Such articles highlight the inconsistencies and contradictions evident in the actions of the executive authorities. For example, the daily *Danas* reports the position of opposing parties' legal experts and officials, who assessed that Serbia's consent to move the embassy to Jerusalem was 'frivolous', as it 'openly violates various UN Security Council resolutions while, demanding that everyone respect Resolution 1244 regarding Kosovo' (Danas_07 / 09). *N1* television broadcasted a similar assessment by the French weekly *Le Monde*: 'Most of the international community does not officially recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and believes that such recognition must be considered only once the decades-long conflict with the Palestinians is brought to an end' (N1_05/09). Therefore, the critical media discourse established the signing the Washington Agreement as controversial. At the same time, the instrumental purpose of the Washington Agreement (to provide poli-

tical backing to the actors involved) was fully unmasked. On the one hand, the motives of Trump's presidential campaign were pointed out, as it was stated that the campaign 'is trying to present these agreements as a diplomatic success after a series of foreign policy failures' (N1_05/09). In this context, the Agreement is framed by lexical choices and phrases such as: 'scandalous' (N1_10 / 09), 'bizarre event' (Danas_07/ 09), 'Trump's pre-election agreement' (Danas_05 / 09), 'support for Trump's election campaign' (Danas_09 / 09), 'another testimony on the use of diplomacy for the internal political party campaigns' (Danas_06 / 09), 'an unusual document, the likes of which were probably never before seen in the history of diplomacy' (Danas_06 / 09). Such critical discourse points to the possible deeper motivation of the Serbian authorities: 'Instead of normalising relations in the region and strengthening Serbia's position in the world, Aleksandar Vučić has been using the "Kosovo issue" exclusively to maintain international support for his personal government' (Danas_06 / 09). Namely, several facts disqualify the Washington Agreement as an integral link of the Belgrade-Pristina normalisation process, and they are: the fact that it is not obligatory, the fact that there is no mention of forming a self-governing Union of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo (which was a task set forth by the Brussels Agreement), the fact that it does not refer to indicators of democratic development, decriminalisation of society and the development rule of law in Serbia and Kosovo, while the Brussels Agreement does. Thus, critical media discourse frames the Washington Agreement in a negative light by comparing it to the Brussels Agreement of 2013, as the interlocutors of pro-opposition media consistently emphasised the fact that only the Brussels Agreement is: 'in accordance with Resolution 1244 and the mandate transferred by the Security Council to the European Union' (Danas_05 / 09).

The third critical way in which the media framed Washington Agreement questioned whether the decision to sign such an Agreement was a tactically wise move: 'The president of the People's Party claims that Vučić made "a huge risk" by supporting Trump's campaign just a month prior to the US election' (Danas_07/09). Security risks were also mentioned: 'He added that Serbia agreed to formally treat Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation, and asked whether we really need to involve ourselves in that conflict in such a way' (Danas_07/09). This frame emphasises security risks that Serbia has exposed itself to by signing the Washington Agreement, which is highlighted by the metaphoric claim that it has become 'a target for Islamic terrorists' (Danas_06/09).

CONCLUSION

The results of this research correspond to the recent reports and studies on media freedom and democracy decline in recent years in Serbia (Csaky 2020, 3–12; RSF, 2020; Vladisaljević, 2019), which indicate that the Serbian Government utilises all the methods cited by Levitsky and Way, especially those with which competitive authoritarian regimes seek to suppress independent media. Our research – even though it specifically concentrates on the Washington Agreement – sheds much light on the characteristics of key frames emerging from Serbian media newsrooms, as we found out in similar previous research: a) most influential Serbian media outlets consistently avoid critical journalistic genres; b) the main feature of their reporting consists of covering current events, by strictly relying on interpretations provided by government officials; c) the media prefer to convey the mainstream political agenda rather than to independently define their priorities; d) tabloids only interview those sources and communicators that openly support government policies; e) the media continuously polarise the public through the use of the ‘us versus them’ frame (i.e., Milutinović, 2020).

This study pointed out that almost all media portals create content by relying on government officials’ interpretations of the issue at hand; the signing of the Washington Agreement in this particular case. The role of political actors in shaping reports on events that they are directly involved in is therefore very prominent. Pro-regime tabloids utilise such reporting schemes more often than other outlets, most commonly by citing the President of Serbia without offering any interpretative qualities to his statements. They also interviewed only those analysts that supported the Serbian Government’s approach to the normalisation process. Most influential media outlets thus adopted the government’s political agenda, framing the discourse on the Washington Agreement in accordance with it, *de facto* turning the mainstream media into mouthpieces of the president and the government. Serbian media’s discourse practises are therefore generally not characterised by a two-way communication flow, as they often do not question or problematize the government’s agenda. The media played passive role in relation to the authority’s agenda – by acting as one-way mobilizers of public support for the authority.

The research showed out the main techniques of manipulative media framing on the process of normalisation, which excluded use of alternative narratives and counter-frames when reporting on the topic. The framing techniques that were utilised to shape the discourse on the Washington Agreement were: metaphors, positive and negative comparisons, media-spins, and the use of phrases. An important feature of such discourse is the predominance of factual and the subordination of analytical genres

that discuss the process of normalisation in an objective and qualified way. There was, therefore, no journalistic engagement in terms of deeper investigative processing. Pro-opposition outlets – Danas and TVN₁ – deviated from the described pattern of media framing, as they primarily tried to diversify their sources in order to compete with the dominant discourse patterns created by Tanjug news agency. The media discourse on the Washington Agreement was therefore evidently polarised, with dominant and all-encompassing (pro-government) media being on one side and the marginalised (pro-opposition) media being on the other side. However, critical voices remained marginalised in this discourse, which is why they were not able to stimulate democratic dialogue on the issue by (re)examining government agendas and decisions. Thus, the signing of the Washington Agreement mainly helped the government members further promote themselves, while problematic issues (such as the lack of transparency of the negotiation process) were suppressed. These arguments prove the hypotheses of our research, as they confirm that the governmental political discourse ranks first within the so-called ‘order of discourse’, which is in line with Entman’s frame parity claim. Such a disbalance within the order of discourse corresponds to the decline of media freedom in a competitive authoritarian regime, as media scenes of such political systems are characterised by a lack of balanced communicative power, and the narrowness of media pluralism reflects the state of political pluralism.

It is clear that the mainstream media insist on framing the issue of Kosovo’s secession as a constantly present and occasionally escalating crisis that the Serbian President, Government and its representatives are wholeheartedly trying to resolve (in order to normalise regional relations and continue Serbia’s accession to the EU), while their lack of success is attributed to the unwillingness of the opposing negotiating party to cooperate in this regard. Serbian media cannot be viewed as adequate facilitators of public dialogue. Almost all media reproduce official statements of a very limited number of communicators, those that are usually public office holders. Being that the media scene is highly polarised, a small number of pro-opposition media outlets that do seek to diversify the discourse on subjects such as the Washington Agreement are unable to do so, as they can only interview analysts who are critical towards the government, but who – at the same time – have no access to any information other than the information published by pro-regime ‘trust’ media.

In such a context, media discourse masks any indications of ‘true’ intentions of the government. However, it does unmask evident inconsistencies that exist within the government’s agenda on the process of normalisation of Belgrade–Pristina relations, including those inconsistencies that were exposed by the signing of the Washington Agreement. For example,

July 2021 marked the month during which Serbia was supposed to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, but no action was taken in this regard, indicating that the Serbian Government does not intend to stand by all the declared goals of the Belgrade-Pristina talks, regardless of who is facilitating the negotiation process. Such an outcome also implies that the signing of the Washington Agreement was not such an epochal event as it was made out to be by Serbian media. Taking this into account, we are careful to infer that neither of the involved sides truly intends to move forward in the Belgrade-Pristina negotiations. The costs of such a move could potentially be too big (as they could mean the loss of political support at home). Formally continuing with the talks – in hopes that the other side will eventually concede – has proven to be a fruitful strategy that will most likely also be applied in the time to come, as it offers the negotiators plenty of media space for self-promotion, with little to no imminent political risks deriving from the strategy of maintaining status quo.

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