



ORIGINAL PAPER

Media in the Political Context of Post-communist Montenegro

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Abstract:

The Soviet press model was characteristic for Montenegro during the period of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The fall of communism affected on the media system and media market in Montenegro. After the adoption of the Law on Public Information, the new private media have appeared on the media market, which was a significant change comparing to the previous system. Ten years after the fall of communism, the changes continue to happen on the market, so the ex state media *RTCG* transformed into the public service, and with the support of the international institutions the legislative framework was adopted, as well as the first ethics code of journalists. Furthermore, during that period, the first self-regulatory media body was established, while the formal education of journalists has started, through the Journalism study programme at the University of Montenegro. After gaining the independence in 2006, the trend of increasing the number of media has continued, as well as improving the legislative framework. However, despite of the mentioned changes, Montenegrin media still haven't got the high level of media freedom. Nevertheless, they still possess all the characteristics of the Mediterranean media system.

Keywords: *Media System; Montenegro; Post-communism; Legislative Framework; Political System.*

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Introduction

After gaining independence on 21 May 2006, Montenegro went through changes at the governmental and political level that also reflected on the media system. The changes of a largely formal character have brought the media into a position where they are still dependent on the legislative and executive power that use various forms of leverage to exert pressure and establish control on the market primarily through the legislative framework and advertising. The position of the media is further aggravated by the fact that in a country with 620 029 inhabitants (Monstat data from the last census in 2011) there are as many as 5 daily newspapers, two weekly newspapers, 34 electronic publications, 18 TV channels (two national, 4 local public service broadcasters and 12 commercial ones) and 53 radio stations (two national, 14 local public, 35 commercial, 2 non-profit broadcasters) fighting to attract their target group. These figures best illustrate why the Montenegrin media are focused on mere survival. The economic crisis that has affected the entire world since 2008 has a great impact on media operation and the level of media freedoms. Under the conditions of economic dependence, contemporary Montenegrin media are forced to accept various “compromises and concessions” just to survive, which leads to manipulation of the public in reporting on daily topics. It is evident that economically dependent media no longer think of preserving credibility with the audience, but rather become “flexible” by adapting to the rules of the game imposed on them, while the citizens’ trust in the media is constantly declining.

Bearing in mind all these problems, in this paper we will analyze the situation in the Montenegrin media market and abstract the factors that influence the functioning of the media and the work of journalists. In addition, on the basis of the classification of the media systems by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini, we will identify the common characteristics of the Mediterranean media system and the Montenegrin media market.

Development of Montenegrin media in different historical circumstances

Montenegro is still remembered in the history of culture and journalism by the founding of the first state-owned Cyrillic printing house in 1493. The ruler Đurađ Crnojević bought the first printing press in Venice and together with hieromonk Makarije printed books of religious type (Đurić, 2003:492). But, Montenegro couldn’t develop publishing activity due to the constant wars with the Turks, so all subsequent publishers, Božidar Vuković Podgoričanin and his son Vicenco, printed books abroad, and delivered them to Montenegro. It was only during the time of Petar II Petrović Njegoš that a new printing press was purchased in 1833, and after two years in the period from 1835 to 1839, the yearbook *Grlica* (Turtledove) started to be published, with texts from literature, discussions on the history of Montenegro, and various geographical and statistical (Miljanić, 2001:26). However, historical circumstances did not favor Montenegro this time either, which in the absence of ammunition in the fight against the Turks was forced to melt this printing press and make it into bullets. However, Prince Danilo promised that as soon as Montenegro is liberated from the Turks, he would buy a new printing press. He fulfilled his promise in 1860 and after the end of the war he bought a printing press in Vienna. However, compared to the European countries in which the first weekly paper appeared as early as in 1605, the first printed newspapers in Montenegro appeared relatively late. It was not before 23 January 1871 that the weekly newspaper *Crnogorac* (*Montenegrin*) was founded by Prince Nikola (this day is celebrated in Montenegro as the day of journalists). The

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aforementioned weekly was published until 1873, when it was discontinued under the pressure of Turkey and Austria-Hungary, and in 1873 the newspaper *Glas Crnogorca* (*The Voice of the Montenegrin*) was established, and was used by the Montenegrin ruler to inform the population about his decisions, but also for the propaganda of the ideas of liberation.

During the rule of Prince Nikola in addition to weekly newspapers, daily newspapers appeared as well on the media market, and the first Law on Media was passed. And while the first daily newspaper in Europe was published in 1702, the first daily newspapers in Montenegro: *Dnevne novosti*, *Telegrafske vijesti*, *Najnovije telegrafske vijesti*, *Dnevni list*, were not established until the time of the World War I (Vojičić, 2016: 35). From the founding of the first weeklies, the press was in the hands of the ruler and served primarily his interests, while the opposition media were harshly oppressed by Prince Nikola. The first media law, adopted in 1905 during his reign, guaranteed freedom of the media only on paper. In accordance with this Law the press was free, and censorship and administrative measures, as well as different sanctions, were prohibited. Limitations in the freedom of press existed only with regards to insulting the ruler, call for armed rebellion or changes in the order of succession. Also, media had to publish a rectification submitted by the authorities or the person mentioned in the text because otherwise the newspapers could suffer financial penalties (Vojičić, 28-29). Each newspaper had an editor-in-chief who was a Montenegrin national with permanent residence in the territory of the Principality of Montenegro. However, the conduct of Prince Nikola testifies that the Montenegrin ruler was not very benevolent and democratically inclined towards the opposition press, which is best illustrated by the discontinuance of the newspapers *Narodna misao* (*Thoughts of the People*) and *Slobodna riječ* (*The Free Word*). The first one criticized the work of the Montenegrin government in a direct or indirect manner by ridiculing the members of the political elite of the time, while the other one was also publicly declared as an opposition newspaper, so the Montenegrin authorities took over control over the newspapers considering that these two opposition-oriented newspapers could threaten political stability of the country (Vojičić, 32- 33).

During the rule of prince and later king Nikola, Montenegro was constitutional and parliamentary monarchy. After the First World War in 1918, at the illegal and illegitimate so-called Podgorica Assembly, backed by official Serbia, Montenegro lost sovereignty, although it was on the winning side as an independent country which had suffered great losses. During the entire 20th century Montenegro was a part of wider state unions, more precisely from 1918 to 2006. After illegal annexation to the Kingdom of Serbia, it became a part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, reduced to a geographical and administrative concept, deprived of national and state subjectivity. In the Second World War Montenegro stood out in the fight against fascism and incited the first mass-scale antifascist uprising in the conquered Europe on 13 July 1941. In 1944 as an equal federal unit it became a part of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia which was later renamed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In that period, the "new media of the 20th century" were founded in Montenegro, i.e. the first radio and television station. The first radio station *Radio Cetinje* started with a one-hour program broadcast in 1944, and after five years it moved to Titograd and changed its name to *Radio Titograd*, while the year 1964 when a report recorded on Montenegrin television was broadcasted on the news program of *TV Beograd* (*TV Belgrade*) is considered as the

start of the television program broadcasting (<http://www.rtcg.me/rtcg/istorija.html>, 2018).

The influence of the political system on the media system until 2006 and after gaining independence

After the fall of the socialist system, Montenegro underwent a process of democratization with a two-phase transition. The first transition was in the period from 1989 to 1997 and it is characterized by the victory of reformed communists on the first multiparty elections. In this period the work of opposition parties is hampered, level of civil and media freedom was limited, so it was characterized by hybrid, semi-authoritarian regime with elements of oligarchy (Vukićević and Vujović, 2012: 55-56). It should be noted that the 1990s are remembered after the civil war in Yugoslavia, during which all former republics exited the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, with the exception of Montenegro. The second phase of transition starts after October 1997. In this period there is observance of international standards during parliamentary elections, but despite the progress, there are evident pressures from Belgrade due to unsolved state and legal status and open aspirations of Montenegro for independence (Vukićević and Vujović, 2012: 57). Till 2003 Montenegro was the only republic of the former Yugoslavia that joined the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. However, after three years, Montenegro also exited the union with Serbia.

Political changes during the 1990s reflected on the media system as well. Until 1990, in Montenegro, as a semi-authoritarian system, there were only state-owned media whose reporting was directed by the interests of the party. In fact, according to the classification of media systems by Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm in their book “Four Theories of the Press”, Montenegro could be classified under the Soviet media model. After analyzing the situation on the media market in the 1950s, Siebert, Peterson and Schramm classified media systems as authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and Soviet-totalitarian.

Table 1. Media systems according to Siebert, Peterson and Schramm

Authoritarian	Libertarian	Social responsibility	Soviet-totalitarian
Initiator – Britain – 16th and 17th century	First applied in Britain in 1688	America – 20th century	USSR
State and private entities establish media	Mostly private entities	In the hands of private entities until the government takes over the media	Solely in the hands of the State
Function – to serve the politics of the ruling party and the State	To inform, entertain, gain profit, and also to control the government	To inform, entertain, gain profit, and initiate discussions	To promote success of the party
Media are established solely upon approval (royal decree)	Anyone with initial capital	Anyone wishing to make a statement	Loyal and devoted party members
Government	Impropriety,	Violation of human	Party criticism

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criticism is prohibited	warmongering is prohibited	rights is prohibited	is prohibited
Media are controlled by way of censorship	Left to the market, and to the courts	Professional ethics	Political and financial control by the government

Source: Table taken from Malović et al. (2014), *Masovno komuniciranje (Mass Communication)*, p.79

As can be seen from the table above, the Soviet media system is characteristic of the USSR, but it was also adopted by other communist countries. This model is based on Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist teachings with the elements of Hegel's philosophy, and of the Russian philosophers of the 19th century. Under such conditions, media are exclusively state-owned and glorify the achievements of the ruling party. The media companies employ loyal members of the party, and criticism of party tasks is strictly forbidden (Malović et al., 2014: 79-80). Naturally, in comparison with the Soviet communism model, the socio-political system in the SFRY was much less rigid, but the government used the communist party's methods in relation to the media. Until the 1990s, two mainstream media played an important role in informing the citizens, i.e. in state propaganda, in the socialist republic of Montenegro: the oldest daily *Pobjeda*, which was founded in 1944, and the state-owned media company *RTCG*, which started broadcasting the radio program in 1949, and television in 1964.

The first changes that brought hope that things are moving for the better on the Montenegrin media market occurred after the fall of the socialist system, i.e. in 1993, and the reforms reached their peak in 2002. During the 1990s, after the adoption of the Law on Public Informing, the country experienced privatization of the media, media pluralism, inflow of foreign investments on the media market, while the state media remained in hands of the ruling political party. First private media such as *Vijesti* (1997), *Dan* (1998), *Radio Elmag* (1994), *Radio Antena M* (1994), as well as private TV channels emerged on the market. With the Law on Public Information from 1998, media were partially freed of domination by political parties. However, realistic transformations of the media system started from 2000 when Montenegro set out on the journey of European integration and accepted the Media Freedom Charter within the regional table of the Stability Pact (Ružić, 2017: 21).

Owing to the reforms, the Montenegrin media system assumed different characteristics, but despite the establishment of private media and the adoption of the legislative framework and the journalists' code of ethics, and the education of media professionals, Montenegro still has the features of a system that is characteristic of countries with a low level of media freedoms. After Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, a new classification of media systems was presented by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini. Based on the analysis of the market, media relations and political parties (political parallelism), the level of professionalism (autonomy, education and respect for the code of ethics), as well as the degree and nature of government intervention in media, they identified three media systems: Mediterranean, North-European and North-Atlantic models. These three models were created under different historical conditions that reflected the relation of the ruling structure towards the media and the market itself.

Table 2. Media systems according to Hallin and Mancini

Mediterranean model	North-European model	North-American model
France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain	Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland	Britain, USA, Canada, Ireland
Low level of media freedoms	High level of media freedoms	Evident commercial pressures
State has the role of the media founder, regulator and financier	State provides media subsidies	State allocates small subsidies
Development of commercial media started rather late	Early development of mass-circulation media	Early development of mass-circulation commercial media
State model of the public service broadcaster	Strong public service broadcaster with autonomy	Strong public service broadcaster
Low newspaper circulation	High newspaper circulation	Medium newspaper circulation
instrumentalization by the government, political parties and industrials	State bears responsibility for the conditions under which the media operate	State influence on media is limited
Journalism focused on commenting	High level of journalist autonomy	Journalist autonomy limited due to commercial pressure
Problem with self-regulation	Developed media self-regulation	Insufficiently developed self-regulation
Low level of professionalism among journalists as a consequence of political pressure	High level of professionalism	High level of professionalism
Formal education of journalists started rather late	Journalist education started in the period from 1920 to 1960	Journalist education started already in late 19th century

Source: Table taken from Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing media systems*, 2004, pp. 67-68

Why is Montenegro classified into the Mediterranean media system? We will answer this question through the analysis of the situation in the Montenegrin media market. First of all, the mentioned media system is characteristic of countries with low level of media freedoms. From the moment of establishment, the Montenegrin media have been exposed to political pressures. As already mentioned, the media were under political control even in Prince Nikola's time, but the situation regarding this matter did not change significantly in the post-communist era, and has not changed even today. According to the organization "Reporters without Borders", the press freedom index in Montenegro has constantly been decreasing since 2009 till 2015. In 2009 Montenegro was ranked 77, whereas in the following year it fell to 104. In 2011/12 it dropped three steps lower and in 2013 it was ranked 113. In 2014-15 it was ranked 114th, and during 2016-2017 it was at the 106th place, and today it holds 103rd place (<https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2018>, 2018). The assassination of the editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *Dan*, Duško Jovanović, physical confrontations with journalists Mladen

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Stojović, Tufik Softić, Lidija Nikčević, Olivera Lakić setting the cars owned by the media concern *Vijesti* on fire, attacks on the editorial office of the opposition-oriented media contributed to these ratings. It is clear that journalists and media in Montenegro are exposed to pressure from the state or the owners who, through the media, realize their interests and confront their enemies. A survey by CEDEM from 2011 on a sample of 147 journalists showed that over 55% of respondents rated the level of media freedom in Montenegro as negative (Bešić, 2011: 10)

The legislative framework in the countries of the Mediterranean system needs to be improved as political structures always find a way to establish control over the media. Montenegro started the process of extensive media reforms in 2001 when a working group led by the national Secretariat for Information was formed, and worked for as long as eleven months to establish the first legislative framework. International organizations Council of Europe, OSCE, IREX and European Agency for Reconstruction had an important role in this process. The representatives of the Government, Montenegrin civil sector, professional associations, state and private media participated in the working group. The work on the transformation of the media sphere began after the analysis of European experiences, the experiences of countries in transition, the preparation of expert reports, and resulted in the adoption of a set of media laws: Law on Media, Law on Radio-Diffusion and Law on Public Radio-Diffusion Services “Radio of Montenegro” and “Television of Montenegro” (Ružić, 2017: 28). The said laws were adopted in accordance with the international conventions and recommendations of the Council of Europe such as: International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Council of Europe Declaration on Freedom of Expression and Information, European Union Directive “Television without Frontiers”. According to the adopted legal regulations from 2002 Montenegro committed itself to privatization of the oldest newspaper *Pobjeda* and transformation of *RTCG* into a public service.

The adopted media laws of 2002 were supposed to result in changes in the media market regarding the level of media freedoms. Many media experts explain that all these transformations in the media market were the result of compromises of the government who needed the EU support on the road to Montenegro’s independence. However, as of 2006, the position of the media and the conditions under which they operate on the Montenegrin media market have deteriorated as the government tries to limit media freedoms through media laws.

Both Montenegro and the Mediterranean media system are characterized by a state-owned public service broadcaster. Today it is evident that the Montenegrin public service created in 2002 by transforming the former state media has not undergone any significant changes due to political pressures and financial dependence. Control over the public service broadcaster is gained, among other, through the legislative framework, through the appointment of administrative bodies and financial dependence. For example, amendments to the Law on Public Service Broadcaster after 2002 were focused on weakening of the position of the public broadcaster (amendments to the Law on Public Broadcasting Services of Montenegro were passed in 2008, 2012 and 2016). In 2008 first amendments to the Law on Public Radio-Diffusion Services of Montenegro set back the level of media freedom because the funding of the public broadcaster via radio-diffusion subscription and a part of fee for radio receivers in motor vehicles was canceled. This amendment was rather radical because it led the public service to a complete financial dependence from the state. According to Article 15 of the Law on

Radio-Diffusion Services of Montenegro, the public broadcaster is funded from several sources: budget, marketing, production and sale of audiovisual works, from endorsement of program content, organization of concerts and different types of events.

Another type of political pressure is that the amendments to the Law on Public Radio-Diffusion Services of Montenegro, which proposed a new manner of funding of the public service, were adopted by the Parliament only after almost two years. According to Article 16 of the Law on Public Radio-Diffusion Services of Montenegro from 2008 the state is committed to allocate 1.20 percent from the budget on annual level with a view of funding *RTCG*. Due to the economic crisis, it was proposed to amend this article, i.e. that the state is to allocate 0.3 percent of GDP, which would contribute to the stable financing of the public broadcaster. However, from October 2014 until July 2016, the Assembly could not adopt the amendments to the Law because they were blocked by the opposition parties which wanted to take over control over the public broadcaster. In 2016 prior to the parliamentary elections, the opposition parties conditioned the authorities that the resignation of the director of *RTCG* was the basic prerequisite for signature of the Agreement on Free and Fair Elections. By using the blackmail method, the public service broadcaster fell into the hands of the opposition.

Pressures on PSB are visible through appointment of the managing director and the members of the Council of *RTCG* (Administration and Management of *RTCG* is prescribed by the Law on Public Radio-Diffusion Services of Montenegro (Article 20 to Article 54). They are reflected by the fact that the members of the Council of Public Service are appointed and dismissed by the Assembly according to Article 27 of the Law on Public Radio-Diffusion Services of Montenegro. This article of the Law is quite controversial because in 2007 the work of the Council was blocked for the reason that the Parliament did not want to confirm the appointment of five members of the Council. Only after following appeals by the OSCE and the European Commission, a term was confirmed to one of the members.

Last year, the political fight for the public service broadcaster became open. In November and December 2017, the Parliament dismissed two members of the Council due to conflicts of interests which drew great attention from the public and was perceived as a type of political pressure and an attempt by the ruling party to regain control over *RTCG*. In addition, the Council voted for the third consecutive dismissal of the Director General of the public service broadcaster. This situation testifies to the unsuccessful attempt to transform the state-owned media into a public service broadcaster.

Political pressures are closely linked to financial pressures. As we have already said, a large number of media outlets that cannot survive without alternative sources of funding, including, among other, assistance from the state, are fighting for their place in a small market. Marketing stake totals from 9.5 to 10 million Euros, a small amount considering the number of media on the market. The state provides financial aid to media through the Law on the Control of State Aid. For example in 2017, the state provided aid to broadcasters in the amount of 1,847,189.16 Euros (Nenezic and Vukovic, 2017: 20). This kind of assistance influences the editorial policy of the media and the method of reporting on important political issues. Montenegrin government has the ability to influence the media not only through state subsidies, but also through advertising. A non-governmental organization Centre for Civil Education accused state institutions in its annual reports "Equal Chances for all the Media" of non-transparency regarding advertising, marketing and media financing from the state budget.

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Low level of media freedoms and high degree of instrumentalization of the media also affects the level of professionalism. Journalism is focused on commenting instead of informing citizens. The most common form of manipulation is media framing, where the interlocutors are selected in accordance with the editorial policy of the media, and it is already known what they will say. The disempowered position of the journalists and the pressures they face in the editorial office are vividly illustrated by the research of the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro for 2016 (the sample comprises 54 journalists from various media companies, and 12 qualitative interviews with journalists, lawyers, media experts) which found that 55% of the respondents indicated that censorship did have a great impact on their work, and journalists often resort to self-censorship (Camović, 2016: 20, 18). Journalists employed in private media are not free of pressure either, so respondents explain that media owners do not accept critical reporting on powerful business people.

Political pressures also reflected on the level of professionalisation. Since 2002, the ethical norms and self-regulation of the journalistic profession are in the focus of the media community. During that same year the first Journalists Code of Ethics of Montenegro was adopted, and one year later the first media self-regulatory body was established with the help of OSCE. However, due to market polarization, in 2012 three self-regulatory bodies were established in Montenegro. Members of the Media Self-Regulation Council include nineteen media companies that favour the government, while the opposition-oriented media established their Council that did not become reality so they decided to engage an Ombudsman in the editorial office. In addition, the Local Press Council was established, consisting of media, i.e. weekly and monthly newspapers from local Montenegrin municipalities.

In comparison with European countries, Montenegro started formal education of journalists rather late. It was not until 2003 that the Faculty of Political Sciences, where future journalists are educated, was founded. Until the establishment of the mentioned university unit, journalists were educated mainly in courses organized by the Institute for Media.

Journalists are the weakest link of the media chain and not only that they suffer from pressure, but are also poorly paid. Their position is constantly worsening, of which the Trade Union of Media in Montenegro is continuously warning. It is therefore not surprising that many journalists see their profession as a springboard for political career and social engagement. It is enough to have a look at the current Parliament's session where among delegates one can find former journalists from the public service or opposition media. Because of socio-economic status, journalists are leaving the journalistic profession and establishing their own non-governmental organizations. According to the research of the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro, the average journalist salary in Montenegro is EUR 470, and it remains unclear how many journalists have signed an employment contract and how many of them work informally without insurance and pension contributions.

On the basis of all of the above, we can say that the situation on the Montenegrin media market best illustrates all the characteristics of the Mediterranean media system: low level of media freedoms which is a direct consequence of the connections between political parties, businesses and political centres of power, as well as financial dependence; media are not owned by the state, but due to connections with business, they have the ability to control publishing and public manipulation; commercial media were founded only after the fall of socialism, i.e. after the 1990s;

failed attempt to transform the former state-owned media company into a public broadcaster model; self-censorship and censorship as a result of political and financial pressures; underdeveloped media self-regulation due to market division; the legislative framework needs to be improved because modern media laws leave space for public service control. This relates primarily to Article 27 stipulating that the Parliament appoints and dismisses the Council members on the proposal of the Administrative Board; development of formal academic education for journalists did not begin until 2003.

Conclusion

Bearing in mind all the listed problems in the contemporary market, we can conclude that during socialism the Montenegrin media system may be classified into the Soviet press model, while today's market has all the characteristics of the Mediterranean media system. Both systems are characteristic of countries with a low level of media freedoms in which the media are controlled by the ruling structures. In essence, the difference is only in the name, the increase in the number of media and formal changes, since the situation in the Mediterranean media system cannot be changed due to the historical circumstances in which the media developed.

The media in Montenegro are the object of political games and of the fight for dominance by the ruling and the opposition parties, which is particularly evident in the case of the public service broadcaster or they are toys in the hands of powerful individuals with political aspirations that are presented as "independent media". However, it is evident that the media market has not undergone significant changes even today because there is no real political will for change. Control over the media market is established through the deterioration in legislation, the state subsidies, and advertising in media favouring the government. In a polarized market, the media openly cheer for different political options, while the interests and the needs of the public are ignored. The contemporary market is characterized by the quantity of media in which journalists identify with the editorial policy of the media company and use their position to confront the opponents, while the dissatisfied citizens have developed a sceptical attitude towards the "fourth branch of government".

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