POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN (POST)CONFLICT SOCIETIES.
THE CASE OF KOSOVO

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Abstract:
Political communication is important in the development of political, social and historical processes of a country. Communication is perhaps a powerful tool that politicians have in their hands. They use it to fight political opponents, and to persuade the masses. This article will address the importance of political communication in post-conflict societies, with a focus on Kosovo society. Political communication and media are crucial for peacebuilding, democracy, and conflict resolution, especially in Kosovo, where emotional and harsh nationalist communication hinders socio-political transformation of deep-rooted conflicts. In this article, authors try to examine the correlation of hate-speech and violence in Kosovo. The results conclude that there is a positive correlation between hate-speech and violence. Without free and independent media, political communication will not be able to free itself from the past that has plagued it for decades.

Key Words: Political communication, post-conflict societies, peace, transformation, democracy

Titulo en Castellano: Comunicación política en sociedades postconflicto: el caso de Kosovo

Resumen:
La comunicación política es importante en el desarrollo de los procesos políticos, sociales e históricos de un país. La comunicación es quizás una poderosa herramienta que los políticos tienen en sus manos. Lo usan para luchar contra los opositores políticos y para persuadir a las masas. Este documento abordará la importancia de la comunicación política en las sociedades posconflicto, con un enfoque en la sociedad de Kosovo. La comunicación política y los medios son cruciales para la consolidación de la paz, la democracia y la resolución de conflictos, especialmente en Kosovo, donde una dura comunicación emocional y nacionalista obstaculiza la transformación sociopolítica de conflictos profundamente arraigados. En este artículo, los autores intentan examinar la correlación entre el discurso de odio y la violencia en Kosovo. Los resultados concluyen que existe una correlación positiva entre ambos. Sin medios de comunicación libres e independientes, la comunicación política no podrá liberarse de un pasado que la ha lastrado desde hace décadas.

Palabras Clave: Comunicación política, sociedades posconflicto, paz, transformación, democracia.

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1. Introduction

It is an acceptable fact that the principle of politics is based on collaboration, and this process is achievable through political communication. Political communication aims to convey the message, persuade and ultimately influence the recipients. The obedient are supporters, followers, voters and sometimes political militants. Political communication resembles a very complex industry of actors and factors, media and agencies, political parties and institutions, interest groups and propaganda that aim to influence people. This impact targets horizontal and vertical alignment. The larger the scope the more influential the political message. Politics through the media has consistently influenced people, especially in times of conflict and post-conflict. Prior to 1999, Kosovo had a media system completely controlled by the ruling regime. This state and fully centralized media system functioned according to the policy directives of the ruling party.

Independent media almost did not exist. News editors were agents of the ruling regime. The news was censored, and the propaganda was rampant. This unfortunately laid the foundations of a politically controlled media system. The main communication channel for Kosovo Albanians was Radio Television of Prishtina (RTP) and Radio Television of Albania (RTSH) which was broadcasted in analogue system in Kosovo. These were the most reliable sources of news for Kosovo Albanians, while Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) for Serbs. The division was deep and the disagreements noticeable in the society.

“...fragmentation of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and the ensuing outbreak of a civil war in the Balkans strengthened the authoritarian rule of Slobodan Milošević, which ended in October 2000, in what Serbian nationalists call the October coup.”

In the fall of Slobodan Milosevic's regime, the international media played an important role, as they continuously covered the crimes of this regime during the Kosovo Conflict. The role and importance of the international media during and after the conflict in Kosovo was immense. They helped create the first media after conflict. “Most of the investments in the Kosovo media came from international donors. Despite this, the media has managed to create an efficient system to this day. A key aspect of the international effort to develop Kosovo’s media was the emphasis on multi-ethnicity.” Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK) is a multiethnic medium that has been established and financially supported by international donors with all the necessary equipment and since the end of the conflict broadcasts programs in all official languages of Kosovo. Among other things, the importance of the international media was that these media were perceived by both parties as a neutral and objective source of information. The role of the international community in reducing tensions and more balanced political communication was very important. Political communication is a key factor in building democracy, conflict resolution, peace and transitional justice. The biggest sources of political communication are public speeches, televised political advertising, print advertising, political posters, televised debates, and websites, especially during election periods.

In addition to these sources, hate speech in political communication is an element that hinders interethnic reconciliation. Broadcasters such as Radio Free Europe and Voice of America manifested an impartial voice and professional coverage of events. These foreign media that broadcast programs in the Albanian language could also serve as a model for local media. The local media in their beginnings were heavily influenced by politicians and certain interest groups and mainly served the influencers. This was reflected in the very inconsistencies.

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of the population in the work of the media. These contradictions were constantly sought to be reduced by the United Nations Mission in Kosovo known as UNMIK and the NATO Military Forces in Kosovo known as KFOR. These actors through local and national communication channels, video campaigns that promoted freedom, coexistence and tolerance gave their messages for a multiethnic Kosovo and a place where dialogue should be the solution and not the creation of the problem. But the situation was dire, and the culprit was always on the other side. Whenever the situation in the country presented itself as difficult, both in political, security and economic terms, the culprit was abroad. The impossibility of solving various local problems was always linked to national politics, which greatly damaged the path towards the establishment of stable democratic institutions. Despite the steps taken now for two decades, the road to building a healthy and productive communication between the parties is long and challenging.

This article based on the analysis of the literature will provide a theoretical perspective on the goals, motives, and strategies of political communication in post-conflict societies with a focus on the Case of Kosovo. Politicians in post-conflict societies like Kosovo have pursued an aggressive, emotional, and often dogmatic and propagandistic means of political communication. Perhaps this is part of the legacy of the functioning of politics from the past, which we will address throughout this paper. This raises the need for post-conflict analysis from the point of view of political communication between the parties, in this case of an ethnic nature and having incompatible goals for a long time. The background, theories, research and practices of political communication in Kosovo during the two decades of post-conflict and social and political transition will be analyzed. This will be done starting from the analysis of the ethnic conflict in the 90s between Albanians and Serbs and the role of political communication in this context of this period. We will then focus on the consequences of political speeches that incite parties to conflict and ethnic division, and then proceed with the consequences of hate speech in public communication. The final section will focus on the importance of political communication in affirming democratic values and building peace between ethnicities and the society.

1.1. Hypotheses

H1: Effective political communication plays a crucial role in fostering reconciliation and stability in post-conflict societies, such as Kosovo. By employing inclusive and empathetic language, politicians can bridge ethnic divides and promote national unity, leading to increased trust and cooperation among the different communities.

H2: Responsible and impartial media coverage can facilitate informed discussions, mutual understanding, and reconciliation among diverse communities.

Both research hypotheses have been rejected. Political communication in Kosovo has not been effective, which has influenced the increase of hostilities between communities. Politicians have used an aggressive language towards political opponents and have not shown any empathy for the needs of the population. Political divisions were deep and this has influenced the increase of violence and conflict in society. Political communication in Kosovo has mainly had a negative impact on the overall development of the country.

1.2 Research questions

RQ1: How does political communication influence the process of peacebuilding and conflict resolution in post-conflict societies, with a focus on the case of Kosovo?

RQ2: What role does the media play in shaping political communication in (post) conflict societies, focusing on the context of Kosovo?
Both research questions give us solid information that the role of political communication in peacebuilding is quite important, but in the case of Kosovo this role has been mostly negative and has not helped the process of conflict resolution. However, the role of the media and the focus of the independent ones that have been financed by international donors have had a great importance in the formation of political opinion, the increase of inter-ethnic tolerance and cooperation and in free and independent elections.

2. Methodology

The researchers have used an in-depth interview for the qualitative analysis of the study. In-depth interviews enable the collection of comprehensive and detailed information from participants, providing deeper knowledge and a more nuanced understanding of the research topic. The paper aims to capture the perspectives and experiences of the people involved in the study, in-depth interviews give them the opportunity to share their views in their own words, contributing to the authenticity and reliability of the research findings. The specifics of the approach are used to understand if there was any trauma after each political hate speech in throughout 1990’s in Kosovo.

The chapter contains information on the interviewees’ demographics and their qualitative responses. Since this research is focused on qualitative study, a hypothesis is used in the form of a clear statement concerning the problem to be investigated.

Our research team conducted an empirical survey, collecting qualitative primary data between April 20, 2022, and May 5, 2022, from 100 individuals. The age of the individuals was mostly middle-aged and over 40 years old, which compared to the period of the war, it is considered that the participants were adults at that time and could remember and perhaps experience the events personally. The distribution of the non-probability sampling of Kosovars was based on the inclusiveness of adults who have experienced the conflict and who came from different ethnic and religious groups. The topic is not very complex and does not include many dimensions, on the contrary, the inclusion of more than 100 respondents would allow us to have a broader overview of experiences and individuals. Participation in the interview was voluntary and free of charge, the data has been kept confidential. The interview was based on 10 subject questions and five demographic questions. Our main goal was to examine the impacts of hate speech in Kosovo in the early 1990s. The researchers are determined to study the impact of hate speech on violence, discrimination, trauma, and hindrance of democracy in the political environment.

3. The background of ethnic conflict and political communication in Kosovo in the 1990s

Conflict represents a disordered state of functioning of society. The impact of conflict on society is evident in all social activities. Kosovo has experienced a wave of sporadic conflicts since the 1990s, but which were largely isolated and not of the magnitude of this one during 1998/1999 where NATO intervention was needed to stop the bloodshed. “Kosovo has been one of the longest-running ethnic conflicts in contemporary Europe. It can be characterized by the diverse nature of the participating entities and the heterogeneous complexity of their interactions”. Kosovo’s security institutions have taken major steps towards justice and security since 2004. However, the result has not been as expected as the justice system is lacking behind but has made some progress. At the same time, the security system in Kosovo

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has received large amounts of financial and political attention, and is considered as a considerably successful example of the provision of post-conflict internal security.\(^8\)

Ethnic and ideo-political divergences between Albanians and Serbs have a long and complex history. They have their source in the historical claims of the parties for territory since the time of the Ottoman Empire. The narrative of who was the first indigenous people has historically enticed the Serbian-Albanian political relationship. This story, in addition to the collective memory of the peoples, has also found support in nationalist books and treatises that Serbian politicians have used in their political communication. Slobodan Milosevic's nationalist speech in Gazimestan, Kosovo, on June 28, 1989, on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, where he said, among other things, that new armed battles were not ruled out, was interpreted as a warning of war. This speech later was presented as proof of his intentions of war during the trial by The Hague Prosecution. This political speech was one of the most nationalist speeches heard in the Western Balkans since World War II and which contained dozens of threats to anyone who dared to oppose his regime. About two years later, war broke out in the former Yugoslavia, first in Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, then in Bosnia in 1992, and in Kosovo in 1998.

“In 1991, the world watched in amazement as the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) began what was seemingly a fratricidal civil war. Formerly peaceful republics, joined for almost five decades under the banner of ‘Brotherhood and Unity’, would soon end their coexistence when the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) rolled into Slovenia to prevent Slovenian independence by force”.\(^9\) This continued with the same intensity in almost all the countries that had once constituted the Yugoslav Federation. In addition to launching military intervention, the Milosevic regime had centralized media and public communication throughout most of Yugoslavia. This has resulted in the Serbian nationalist government to control almost all the media in the country. Belgrade’s regime increased its influence and control of the media by installing Serbian journalists and editors in the Kosovo media.\(^10\) News censorship was common among editors of television, newspapers, and radio stations who were direct collaborators with the ruling regime. In order for the news to be more convincing, Albanian journalists were also hired to cover the news in Albanian, but whom were under the orders of the political agencies of the government. The only Albanian television station of that time in Kosovo, Radio Television of Pristina (RTP), had such a fate of closure. This situation led to the beginning of demonstrations and the uprising of Kosovo Albanians for freedom, justice, equality and democracy. Ibrahim Rugova as the leader of the Kosovo Albanians at that time had chosen to send his political messages through media such as the newspaper ‘Rilindja’ and Radio Television of Pristina (RTP). Rugova's political communication was more restrained and constantly sought a peaceful solution to Kosovo's status. However, it did not take long that the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to appear in Kosovo, which saw armed war as a solution to stop the repression. The KLA had formed in parallel its communication channels that broadcast through two media, a radio station "Kosova e Lirë" and a news agency "Kosova Press". The broadcast in these media was in Albanian and their base was in mountainous regions that were not yet under the control of Serbian forces. In these broadcasting stations, the journalist's work was carried out by members of the KLA. Most of the broadcasts and news in these media were devoted to KLA events and actions from the

\(^8\) Jones, Seth, G; Wilson, Jeremy, M; Rathmell, Andrew and Riley, K, Jack (2005): Establishing Law and Order after Conflict, Santa Monica, RAND.


battlefields. These media during 1998/1999 demanded mobilization and armed resistance and were the political voice of the KLA communication.

4. Theories of conflict, political rhetoric and hate speech in post-conflict Kosovo

The importance of communication and media throughout the conflict is very greatly felt. This has already been seen in the case of the bloody conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. Political communication in conflict situations tends to mobilize people for insurgency and armed resistance through various information and propaganda strategies. We have seen cases where prudent public communication has reduced tensions while when the message has been negative, it has fueled the escalation of violence. Misleading information on ongoing violence and repression has zigzagging effects.

“Theories of conflict diffusion have long argued that domestic conflict spreads from one country to others”.11 The conflicts in the former Yugoslavia generally had chain effects in the other provinces and republics that were then part of the Yugoslav Federation. Within a decade, the disintegration of Yugoslavia, considered one of the most powerful federations of the time, took place. This paved the way for the democratization of the Western Balkan countries as a whole.

Kosovo is an example of a country that has moved from a socialist to a democratic system and where political communication has followed an unusual route. Political communication was based on centralized media, and public information was controlled by the ruling government. After the conflict, the country had the opportunity of creating the first inclusive media. This of course had its positive sides as it influenced the creation of the first democratic institutions. However, in an area where legislation was not the best possible enforced, many commercial media outlets were formed by political and special interest groups. In this context of the development of post-conflict media, antagonisms emerged between different parties. Hate speech and fighting political opponents through the media began to become a trend. “Hate speech is usually thought to include communications of animosity or disparagement of an individual or a group on account of a group characteristic such as race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, or sexual orientation”.12

In Kosovar society, hate speech has mainly had political motives. In the first years after the conflict, political opponents used newspapers, radio and television as means of communication for their political propaganda, while later they did so through online media, mainly social networks and electronic newspapers and portals. Social networks continue to this day to be used not only to communicate with the public, but also to crack down on opponents, especially in recent years when Kosovo has marked a major increase in internet access. Based on the "Results of the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Survey on the Use of Information and Communication Technology for 2020, 96.4% of households in Kosovo had access to the Internet".13 Such high internet access has influenced all newspapers in Kosovo to switch to the online platform, interrupting their paper printing in physical form. As a result, there is currently no print newspaper in Kosovo.

With the development of online media everyone has the opportunity to participate in public and political life and communicate directly with their favorite politicians through social

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media networks. At the same time this has also resulted in the growth of hate speech. Its online dimension, especially with this extension and potential damage to democratic processes is one reason for society and institutions to act. The Internet, with all its importance, in the transition societies such as Kosovo, has become a mean of spreading hatred, which leads to conflicts and social problems. The anonymity and mobility provided by this form of communication makes it easy to express hatred in a very wide space which goes beyond the scope of traditional application of law. The message of hatred can reach millions of people in a short time through the network, which enables various ethnically fragmented groups to connect by generating a sense of community and shared identity that Benedict Anderson defines as Imagined Communities.14

The media can influence the reinforcement of existing images or stereotypes in society. In this context, the society may see the media as a source of promoting stereotypes of different subgroups. In this regard, media monitoring is needed in order to avoid shortcomings and improve misunderstandings in the context of developing a media model that aims to prevent the use of hate speech. Such a model will enable us to encourage social dialogue, conflict prevention, and the emergence of security crises not only in Kosovo but also in the region.15

Hate speech opens up unpleasant and complex problems for societies in transition, causing great harm to both the individual and the group to which it is addressed. Political pluralism, inclusiveness, and ethnic tolerance are elements that can only be advanced through political communication that essentially relies on tolerance, freedom of expression without discrimination, and mutual respect between political actors. Political speeches that contain hate speech potentially as we have seen above can also lead to armed conflict and with serious consequences for those affected by the conflict. When a certain group is despised, it is considered unequal and can easily become the subject of physical attacks and violence. Rival groups constantly incite discrimination among themselves. In this way, the members of such groups consider the actions of the group to which they belong as right and the actions of the rival group as wrong.16

5. Research and practices of political communication in Kosovo: transition and democracy

Research has shown that inter-group rivalry and competition can result in brutal or serious forms of violence as such, groups tend to attract audiences through their actions.17 It primarily violates the dignity of the individual as a member of a particular group. This damages the social status and reputation of those affected. Incitement to hatred is also sanctioned by law in Kosovo, but there are only a few cases when the justice system has properly addressed this issue. This is also related to the poor functioning of the justice system in Kosovo. In 1978 UNESCO adopted the Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racialism, apartheid, and incitement to war. Although, the media cannot be condemned for the spread of hate speech however; the media can be an instrument, channel, and a tool for spread of hate speech, if not used properly and under certain guidelines. The media system is increasingly becoming one of the criteria of a society's democracy, and

protection of human rights. How the media system is set up in a country depends on the professional standards and conditions of media operation, but it is also very important the media culture which depends directly on the political climate. Political rhetoric in post-conflict societies is characterized by extreme political fragmentation that uses nationalism to attract as many supporters as possible.

Political rhetoric with nationalist tones in Kosovo was divided mainly on the side of peace and that of war. These two poles shared completely different beliefs about the politics, economy and social development that the country should pursue in the coming year. However, the first post-conflict elections under the supervision of the International Community were convincingly won by the peace side. The various incidents throughout the election process were numerous. Political communication was aggravated by accusations and counter-accusations between politicians. Interethnic incidents were another feature in the first years after the end of the conflict. Nationalist rhetoric had begun in a society that had just begun the process of democratization. “Political rhetoric is underpinned by its relationship to context”.19

The context was problematic because the media was politicized. Political parties aimed for power at all costs. The media was used as a tool to come to the top of the country as a ruler. Political speeches focused mainly on national issues while the needs of society were practical and local. People sought shelter, food, medical and psychological help, water, roads, and generally better living conditions. Politicians found it difficult to understand the needs of the population and their real problems, so political discourse was focused on national issues. The political struggle was fierce, as the media were divided and it was clear which media belonged to which political party or interest group. This is also known as the period of lack of freedom and editorial independence of the media, which over time is somewhat overcome but even today there are still media that continue to operate and be politically positioned.

Communication is in itself a very important element of the development of a country's democracy. Communication in democratic societies is characterized by objectivity, transparency and generally has an anime-free approach towards different ethnic, political, cultural and religious groups. When political communication is exclusive to certain political groups then we are talking about an undemocratic society. “Political communication is the glue that binds the electorate and politicians together. Therefore, an analysis of the role of political communication in light of the criticism from realistic democratic theory is therefore an important element in attempting to revive democracy”.20 Democracy is a system that guarantees every citizen equality, participation and freedom of expression.

The democratization of most of the colonized countries has followed a difficult path, sometimes accompanied by armed war and sometimes by conflicts of various natures. Thus, the role of political communication in a democracy is not only historically necessary but also socio-politically necessary. The role of political communication throughout the democratic transition in post-conflict societies has proven to be irreplaceable. Viewed from a historical perspective, conflict and social movements have had a major impact on the social sphere with particular emphasis on the political transition that these countries have gone through and where the role of informing the public is paramount.21

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Kosovo’s overall transition has been slow and society’s expectations have not even been met. The promises of politicians in Kosovo addressed to the citizens, especially in the election campaigns, time has shown that they have been unrealistic, repetitive and the trust of the citizens in them has decreased. Corruption, organized crime, truncated media freedom, weak economy, poverty, lack of rule of law, unemployment are part of the daily reality of Kosovo even today. These were the words that have been heard most by politicians for two decades. Such concerns of the citizens were promised to be eliminated in the first years after the conflict. But this has not yet happened and remains only an unfulfilled electoral promise. Whenever new elections are offered, the Kosovar voter is faced with many dilemmas. It’s time for political parties to stop making promises that they themselves doubt they will deliver on.

Undoubtedly, the media have a very important role in shaping the opinion of voters. When covering an election campaign, it is important to have adequate information and a large part of all this depends on their access to important political events. It is up to the media to be professional and informative of their readers and to be constantly vigilant when evaluating the conduct of any election campaign. The personal position of a journalist is very important during an election campaign, in which she/he is considered by the public as an image maker of a politician, as an impartial provider of information, and as a professional whose mission is to serve the public. “Journalists have a role to play in helping transform a violent conflict into the normal processes of peaceful politics”.

Mistrust between communities continues, as does a rift and mistrust between the population and government institutions. There is a growing distrust of politics and international intervention, and an increasingly visible divide between the generation of conflict preoccupied with issues such as identity, sovereignty and state building.

The post-conflict generation in Kosovo, fueled by conflict narratives that are usually presented as absolute truths, and with a limited interaction with the other side of the initial conflict that can provide empirical observation to challenge the prevailing narratives, is at the same time vulnerable to inherited prejudices.

Political communication in both Kosovo and Serbia has kept the victim’s discourse alive in the political vocabulary. This discourse has caused constant distrust and interethnic hostility. Politicians of both countries have not served as interlocutors of the conflict but as its instigators. This has damaged democracy and interethnic reconciliation of both ethnicities. This has also blocked the steps of both countries towards the European Union. Both countries are considered to have a fortune tied on their path to the EU.

Confidence has in a way been replaced by frustration with political elites and this has led to a growing sense of inertia among all communities in Kosovo. Political participation is estimated to be low and people feel politically excluded. This perception is particularly pronounced among young people, women in rural areas and minorities. The perpetuation of nationalist politics has proven to have an impeding impact on the transition of peace. In this way the situation often returns to zero. It is evident that there is a lack of proper communication between ethnic communities in Kosovo which leads to the emergence of false narratives. There has been no national and comprehensive process for dealing with the past. Facts and historical events have not necessarily been communicated to all parties and there have been very limited

efforts by the ruling party to promote reconciliation. Therefore, even today, constructive dialogue between the parties is lacking. In recent decades, dozens of countries emerging from long periods of oppression and civil conflicts have experienced the difficulties of transition to democracy. Although the precise indicators of a successful transition to democracy are a matter of ongoing controversy, scholars and policy experts agree that societies need to explicitly address their legacy of violence which usually involves systematic and brutal human rights abuses. The term transitional justice usually refers to formal efforts by post-repressive or post-conflict societies to address past wrongdoing and their attempt at democratization. 25 Dealing with the past is one of the most important elements of transitional justice. The difficult past of the countries of the Western Balkans has left great consequences, which first of all require the clarification of the crimes committed and the bringing to justice of the war criminals. Only a few of them have been convicted, while most of them live free. Despite all this, there are politicians who still in political communication do not manage to break away from the past and face the challenges of the future.

The need for justice and peace in the Western Balkans, especially in Kosovo and Serbia, is extremely great, due to the consequences of the conflicts that are still fresh in this region from the past. Therefore, a constructive approach, a restrained language and rational dialogue are urgently needed. 26 Democracy in some form means the opportunity to have elections and people should be left free to choose and speak their mind without fear. The process of shaping democracy in a country goes in a parallel with the process of democratization of society. And the democratization of society goes in parallel with the democratization of politicians. Moderate politicians have their strongest weapon in cold communication and without emotional charges. This gives citizens security and trust in their institutions and this way democracy develops. It is not only the time distance that defines the consciousness of democracy, but it is also the political and media culture. In Kosovo, the country still does not have completely free and independent media, where the influence of politics does not exist.

As long as Kosovar society does not prioritize the creation of a state governed by the rule of law, there will be neither a stable democracy nor European integration. With this situation, democracy in Kosovo will continue to be fragile while the citizens will be in the service and dependence of the government and not the opposite, which for example happens in real democracies. Democracy is no longer just a way of administering power by the elected government or parliament and is not just an internal matter for the state. Governance can no longer be limited and concluded by invoking the will of the majority, whether it is local or national government. Governance and democracy are something that happens everywhere, in the family, school, institutions and has the same meaning, the rule of the will of the majority through representation and not the rule of politicians who use the narratives of the past, hate speech and nationalism to come to power. 27 In this situation, the need for general reforms, open political communication with citizens, and co-governance of shared governance should be an obligation of the new generation of politicians aiming at Kosovo's integration into the European Union otherwise political conflicts and crises will be present for a long time. 28

Independent media and constructive journalism have a special importance in political communications. The Western Balkans is characterized by politically influenced media and journalism, however there are also cases when certain media do their job properly. The media content is distinguished by numerous political programs and debates, especially in the evening hours, where there is no lack of fierce confrontations and offensive language between politicians and opinion leaders. There are cases when various political parties accuse certain media outlets of political anime and refuse to cooperate with them. Political parties accuse the public medium Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK) of serving the ruling party. A major concern regarding media freedom in the region is political interference in the media and their editorial policies. This concern is based on the financial dependence of the media in Kosovo on politics. In this way politics has created servile media and unconstructive journalism. The media system in Kosovo should be oriented towards independent editorial policies and constructive journalism respecting each political wing but avoiding corruption and clientelism. Political programs should convey a balanced political message, avoid biased reporting, and educate the public in the spirit of a democratic politics. Media content should aim to provide fair information to citizens. This would help create a multi-ethnic and multi-political media environment according to European standards.

6. Results and discussion

The data collection method was based on interviewing 100 interviewees; whose age was over 20 at the time of collapse of Yugoslavia. Interviewees include 57 females and 43 males. Out of 57 females; almost 89% (50 of them) are currently between the ages of 40 to 50, almost 6% (4 of them) between 51 to 60 years of age, almost 2% (1 individual) between 61 to 70 years of age, and almost 3% between the ages of 71 and 80 (2 individuals). Out of 43 male respondents; 70% (30 individuals) are currently between the ages of 40 to 50, 28% (12 individuals) between 51 to 60 years of age, and almost 2% between (1 individual) 61 to 70 years of age. Out of 100 interviewees, 98% (98 individuals) identified themselves as Albanian/Kosovar, 1% (1 individual) as Serb/Kosovar, and one blank answer.

Out of 100 interviewees, 94% (94 individuals) identified themselves as Muslims, 4% (4 individuals) as Catholic. All individuals who identified themselves as Catholic stated that they have faced discrimination as a result of hate speech in Kosovo and experience some trauma. At the same time, they unanimously felt positive considering speeches of “Kosovar” politicians in the 90s. However, they collectively felt negative in regard to the speeches of “Serbian” politicians in the 90s.

Out of 94 Muslim interviewees, the majority (55%) indicated that they have experienced trauma as a result of a negative Political speech in the 1992 through 1998. All interviewees unanimously (100%) felt fearful and powerless, and believed that the war is going to start as a result of Slobodan Milosevic’s nationalist hate speech in Kosovo in the 1990s. 87% of the interviewees felt negative as a result of Serbian political speeches in 1990’s, whereas only 7% responded feeling negatively as a result of Kosovar political speeches in the 1990s.

75% of interviewees expressed they have faced discrimination as a result of a hate speech in Kosovo, 24% did not face any discrimination as a result of hate speech in Kosovo and one individual declined to answer this question. 47% stated that they have been the subject of an assault or attack as a result of hate speech in Kosovo, while 53% claimed they have not been a subject of an assault or attack as a result of hate speech in Kosovo. 85% of interviewees responded their family or friends have faced discrimination as a result of hate speech in Kosovo, while 14% responded they have not seen a family member or friends facing any discrimination.

as a result of hate speech in Kosovo, one individual declined to answer this question. 88% of participants claimed someone that they knew was a subject of an assault or attack as a result of hate speech in Kosovo, while 12% claimed there was no assault or attack on someone they knew as a result of hate speech in Kosovo.

Ironically, 55% believed hate speech is used in political agenda only in Kosovo, while 44% believed hate speech for political agenda is not used only in Kosovo, one individual declined to answer this question. Almost all participants (95%), believed hate speech hinders the development of democracy even in today’s Kosovo, while 5% responded negatively to this question.

According to the results collected from 100 individuals here are the outcome to answer the research question; hate speech evidently has an impact on violence, discrimination, and trauma in Kosovo. Additionally, based on the responses, there is a hindrance in the development of democracy as a result of hate speech in Kosovar society.

7. Conclusion

Communication is one of the essential elements of organizing political agenda. This interactive process between political leaders and citizens aims to send and receive the message. It is not always easy for the political message to be neutral, to be sent in the right form, to be persuasive, and to influence people in which political direction to line up according to their will. This becomes even more difficult in conflict societies with deep ethnic divisions and where prejudices and stereotypes are the starting point of political reference. Populist and nationalist speeches have characterized the politics of the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia.

The media was influenced by politics and the news was censored by editors serving the ruling regime. Freedom of expression was almost non-existent. Politicians were the masters of the media and they achieved this through military force. Nationalisms were great and hate speech had reached its peak. The war was seen as an opportunity to suppress those who thought otherwise. The socialist system tried at all costs to fight the democracy that had already spread to most European countries. In the Western Balkans this process was claimed to be stopped even by war. And so it happened.

The constitutional changes paved the way for the Milosevic regime to start an armed conflict with the countries that until yesterday were an integral part of the Yugoslav Federation. This was already announced in his speech at Gazimestan in Kosovo in 1989. Thus began the break-up of Yugoslavia and ended with the armed conflict in Kosovo in 1998/1999.

The role of the media during the conflict in Kosovo was very large, especially the international media covering the events. The local media were forcibly shut down and the broadcasting was almost completely interrupted in Kosovo. Foreign news agencies were a credible source of information from the battlefields for Kosovo Albanians, as they were seen as neutral media. With the end of the conflict, what is known as the period of creating new media began. International donors helped set up these media financially and professionally. However, despite the investments made, it was not possible to create a media landscape independent of the influences of politics. The lack of media legislation led to the creation of a large number of commercial media backed by powerful people in politics and business. These media through political agendas conveyed the message of propaganda and fragmentation to the voters and thus created the political opinion. Gradually with the spread of the internet the print media began to lose ground and some of them were shut down.

Hate speech was extremely widespread on the Internet, especially through these newspapers/portals. The anonymity offered by the internet through fake accounts on social
networks in such a situation had found the necessary space. Thus, political communication in pluralism was characterized by divisions and antagonisms between different political parties and groups. Post-conflict Kosovar society was deeply divided politically. The road to lasting peace and democracy had become quite difficult.

The transition had lasted and was characterized by challenges and problems that were not addressed by politicians. The needs were real and practical while the approach to solving them was non-pragmatic. Freedom of expression and freedom of the media had a low index, among the lowest in Europe, as did the development of democracy and accountability. This has made Kosovo the only country within the European continent that does not enjoy visa liberalization and that its path to European integration is questionable.

The expectations of the citizens of Kosovo have not been met even closely. Politicians have failed to close the gap to get closer to the citizens. Political culture has only in recent years begun to take some steps forward. This has gradually increased the transparency of institutions, especially at the local level, although trust in them is still very low in public opinion polls. Corruption, lack of rule of law, poverty and unemployment are just some of the problems that have recently begun to be part of the political vocabulary of politicians. Until recently, they were not part of the political class agenda at all. Patriotism, debates with accusations and counter-accusations, threats and blackmail against each other have characterized the political communication between the parties.

Political rhetoric to this day continues to be dominated by empty promises that politicians use for election campaigns. Ethnic divisions still persist, and narratives of conflict are there whenever election time comes. Disappointment with the political elites of the past has brought a new generation of politicians who face many challenges that must be overcome in order for democracy and justice in Kosovo to function. Without free and independent media, political communication will not be able to free itself from the past that has plagued it for decades.

**Bibliography**


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