

Authoritarian legacy and the media framing of democratisation conflicts in Serbia after Milošević

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Transitions from authoritarian rule and the introduction of democratic procedures – such as free and fair elections and the basic freedoms, including the freedom of speech, press and association – reflect a sharp break with the past and the opening of a new stage in political development, which involves the rise and expansion of free media. Still, politics and media coverage in new democracies often reflect political struggles that unfolded under prior non-democratic regimes.

The paper explores the impact of the legacy of authoritarianism on political conflicts in newly established democracies by focusing on (1) how authoritarian past features in the media framing of democratisation conflicts, and (2) which factors explain such media framing in light of the literature on democratisation. While democratisation studies focus on structural and cultural factors, and more recently on the international dimension, three perspectives/arguments discuss the influence of authoritarian past on politics after regime change: a transitional justice perspective (a default option in media, legal, cultural and area studies) and two comparative politics perspectives, namely the focus on prior regime type, and on the mode of transition from authoritarianism. Evidence about the extent, forms, evaluation and instrumentalisation of authoritarian past in the media coverage of democratisation conflicts in Serbia after Milošević reveals that transitional justice perspective remains essential, principally with respect to demands for accountability of the old regime rulers. The other two arguments are also highly relevant since the legacy of highly personalist regime strongly shaped media messages even long after the fall of Milošević from power, as did the legacy of revolutionary change that swept away the old regime.

Evidence is drawn from the content analysis of conflict messages of the most influential media in the coverage of the following democratisation conflicts: the conflict over the imprisonment and extradition of Milošević to The Hague Tribunal (ICTY) (April-July 2001); the parliamentary elections campaign, with the focus on the EU integration and Kosovo's secession (March-May 2008); and the Pride parade (September-October 2010). Media sample includes newspapers *Politika* and *Večernje novosti* and the public and private broadcasters RTS and B92, respectively. This paper draws on empirical research conducted for the collaborative EU-funded (FP7) project 'Media, Conflict and Democratisation', which explores the role of traditional media and ICTs in democratisation conflicts in four states in different stages of transition from authoritarian rule: Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa.