

Proposal submitted for the first annual International Journal of Press/Politics conference, 16-18 September, Oxford

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Relations between political actors and journalists: Media instrumentalization in Serbia

Abstract

This paper examines the interplay between the state, political elites, media owners and journalists in the post-communist context. Building on Örnebring's findings about clientelistic political patterns impacting the media independence and the quality of journalism, as well as Štětka's argument about instrumentalization of the media in CEE countries (Örnebring, 2012; Štětka, 2012; Štětka and Örnebring, 2013), this paper aims to place the case of Serbia into this framework. The examination of the CEE region has been rather vivid in recent decades. However, Serbia has been underreported in these studies, although it shares many characteristics of the media systems of CEE, especially political parallelism. Outlined goals will be met through secondary analysis of the recent research findings including data from: 1) survey with 51 media owners and 260 journalists (2011); 2) in-depth interviews with 32 media owners or top managers of public media outlets (2012-2013) and 3) in-depth interviews with 25 journalists and editors (2014-2015). The survey mapped out main actors that interfere with media work: political parties, local governments and business elites. The mechanisms for practicing their influence were revealed through the analysis of the interviews. This paper identifies four types of media instrumentalization: 1) *political alliance* – editorial policy supporting ruling political parties' ideologies and high level of journalistic self-censorship; 2) *sophisticated political pressure* – concealed political influence exercised through corporative and commercial pressures; 3) *direct political pressure* – rare, but detected in several specific cases; 4) *sophisticated state's economic pressure* – allocation of financial support to media on rather non-transparent and biased principles.

Key words: *instrumentalization, clientelism, Serbia, media, journalists, political and economic influence, editorial independence*

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