

Прегледни рад

Примљено: 20. 5. 2015.

UDK 316. 774 (497.11)

Ревидирана верзија: 6. 9. 2015.

Одобрено за штампу: 23. 11. 2015.

CLIENTELISTIC RELATIONS AND THE MEDIA IN TRANSITIONAL SERBIA^a

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Abstract

Media studies have not amply dealt with the concept of clientelism, although it is the widespread opinion that political clientelism more or less exists in all modern societies. The first part of this paper examines political clientelism in the media through the presentation of the results of comparative research around the globe, in post-communist European countries that are members of the European Union, and in the countries of Southeast Europe. The foundation of the study involves the characteristics of political clientelism identified by Daniel C. Hallin and Stylianos Papathanassopoulos.

This paper raises the issue of the relationship between the slow democratization of Serbian society and the political instrumentalization of the media. The paper reviews the extent to which non-transparent media ownership, the state's media market, and state funding of the media affect the utilization of the media. Within this problem circle, the changes brought by new media laws adopted in August 2014 are also analysed and the necessity of implementing good solutions in practice is highlighted.

Key words: media, Serbia, political clientelism, political instrumentalization of media, media transition

КЛИЈЕНТЕЛИСТИЧКИ ОДНОСИ И МЕДИЈИ У ТРАНЗИЦИОНОЈ СРБИЈИ

Апстракт

Медијске студије се нису много бавиле концептом клијентелизма, иако је раширено мишљење да политички клијентелизам у већем или мањем обиму постоји у свим модерним друштвима. У првом делу овог рада испитује се политички клијентелизам у медијској сфери кроз представљање резултата компаративних истраживања у свету, посткомунистичким европским земљама које су чланице

^a This paper was written within the project 179008 financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

Европске уније и земљама Југоисточне Европе. При томе се полази од карактеристика политичког клијентелизма које су идентификовали аутори Данијел Халин (Daniel C. Hallin) и Стилианос Папатанасопулус (Stylianos Papathanassopoulos).

У раду се поставља питање односа између успорене демократизације српског друштва и политичке инструментализације медија. Преиспитује се у којој мери нетранспарентно медијско власништво, учешће државе на медијском тржишту као и државно финансирање медија, утичу на инструментализацију медија. У том проблемском кругу анализирају се и промене које су донели нови медијски закони усвојени у августу 2014. године и истиче нужност примене добрих решења у пракси.

Кључне речи: медији, Србија, политички клијентелизам, политичка инструментализација медија, медијска транзиција

INTRODUCTION

Although they are more or less present in all modern societies, clientelistic relations are particularly associated with societies that do not have sufficiently developed democratic institutions. Clientelism is a form of social organization in which “access to social resources is controlled by patrons and community resources are allocated to clients in exchange for various types of support” (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002, p. 11).

The development of clientelistic relations can be historically identified very early – at the time of the Roman Republic such relationships existed between the Roman patricians and their freed slaves and servants (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984, pp. 52-55). Modern societies are marked by clientelistic relations to a greater or lesser extent. The prevalence of clientelistic networks in modern societies was one of the criteria for the classification of these societies in a classic comparative study of clientelism by Eisenstadt and Roniger (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984). They analysed “the cases from several cultural regions and societies” (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984, p. 50). The first group of regions in which the clientelistic relations are “the central part of the institutional context” includes southern Europe, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. The second group consists of countries with clientelistic relations as a noticeable segment of society, such as Japan, classical India, Rwanda, and south-western Libya. In most modern democratic societies clientelism represents an ‘additional part’ while the institutions are the social core. The examples of this group are the United States, the Soviet Union (this book was written before the collapse of the Soviet Union), and contemporary India (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984, p. 50).

The authors who wrote about clientelism in the post-communist countries, among others, are Andras Sajo (1998) and Alina Mungiu-Pippidi

(2010).¹ Some authors (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984, pp. 157-159; Sajo, 1998, p. 40; Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2002, p. 33) see clientelism as a web of relationships that preserved the ruling class, which was called the nomenclature and which consisted of the privileged members of the Communist Party, common in the communist systems. After the fall of socialism in the transition period, this form of social organization, particularly in Eastern Europe, became a “stable form of social organization” (Sajo, 1998, p. 38). According to Sajo, even if there were no corruption and nepotism in communism, clientelistic relations would still be developed in the post-communist countries due to the form which offered many possibilities for what the author calls “clientelistic corruption” (Sajo, 1998, p. 42). What are these possibilities? The state, i.e. the political elite in power, represents the centre that allocates the resources of the country. For example, post-communist governments set the rules and the manner of privatization (Sajo, 1998, p. 42). Another large area that favours the development of clientelistic relations are the activities of political parties, or their aspiration to win the elections, which is why they are forced to enter into a patron-client type relationship with the owners of capital that financed the party’s election campaign (Sajo, 1998, p. 44; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2010, p. 6). After winning the elections, the political parties continue to operate in a network of clientelistic relations. Sajo cites the example of the election of board members for the allocation of broadcasting frequencies in Hungary set by the ruling party. Afterwards, these board members took care of party interests, e.g. when they decided on awarding licenses, because they expected the parties to put them in similar profitable circumstances after their mandates have expired (Sajo, 1998, p. 39).

Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith claim that the tendency of the ruling structures in one state to retain and preserve political clientelism is the cause of what these authors define as “the syndrome of partial reforms” in many countries that are trying to implement reforms (the authors cite the example of Bolivia) (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2002, p. 18). Commitment to reforms is mainly declarative, and all three sides of the clientelistic triangle – bureaucracy, politicians, and tycoons – jointly participate in their obstruction (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2002, p. 19). Keefer argues that politicians in young democracies, who keep failing to provide credible promises, tend to rely on clientelistic politics, where trust exists in the patron-client relationship (Keefer, 2005, p. 7).

¹Alina Mungiu-Pippidi states in her article *A Case Study in Political Clientelism: Romania’s Policy-Making Mayhem* (2010) that in Romania, following EU accession, the state failed to reach a sufficient level of autonomy from the political parties. Political parties decide how to spend budget funds by giving assets and state business to their clients (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2010, pp. 6-7).

With regard to the theoretical approach to clientelism, it was only in the late 1940s and early 1950s that some of these types of relations were recorded in the anthropological literature, and later in sociology (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984, pp. 2-3). Until the early 1960s this was a marginal issue in the social sciences, but it later became an important, interesting, and frequently-studied issue.² There are several reasons for this reversal of importance: first, clientelistic relations became increasingly complex and developed into a network of clientelistic relations, then studies on clientelism appeared in a number of countries around the world, and finally, it became clear that clientelism would not disappear with the spread of democracy and market mechanisms; yet, it survives in many differently developed societies by changing forms “and seemingly performing important functions within such more developed modern frameworks” (Eisenstadt & Roniger, 1984, p. 4).

Media studies have not amply dealt with the concept of clientelism. The advantage of this concept in the field of political economy of the news media is that it goes beyond the usual dichotomy between a liberal approach, which insists on the withdrawal of the state from the media as a condition for democratization of the media, and a critical approach, which primarily emphasizes the control over the media exerted by private capital (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002, p. 10).

This theoretical concept can be used with regard to the relationship between the media and politics in Serbia, mostly considering the period of the 1980s. In fact, it was then that the formation of political parties began after a long period of the one-party system, followed by the period of transition from 2000 onward. Given that clientelism tends to encompass the whole of society, one of its forms in the economic sphere in Serbia was “brotherly” privatization, as Nebojša Popov termed it (Popov, 2009).³ He defines “brotherly” privatization as mutual “set-ups of our people” (Popov,

² For an overview of social, political, and anthropological literature on clientelism, see Eisenstadt & Roniger (1984) *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 302-305; for a review of the literature on political clientelism, see Fox, J. (1994) *The Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship: Lessons from Mexico*, World Politics: vol. 46, No 2, 154-155. Wang refers to the authors classifying them according to which participants in the political clientelism they dealt with – political parties, farmers and landowners, bureaucrats, the mafia, local politicians, local and central authorities, the elites, or ethnic groups and immigration [Wang Chin Shou (2001) *The Dilemmas of Clientelism: Electoral Mobilization of Clientelism in Taiwan, 1993*, Democracy and Human Rights, No 1].

³ Nebojša Popov: *Drug as a poison*, Republic, No. 456-459 (without numeration, because the online edition of this magazine does not enumerate pages), <http://www.republika.co.rs/456-459/03.html>, retrieved on 20 March 2015.

2009, without numeration). Such a privatization often leads to the closure of factories.

“All of this is justified by the filling of the state budget, which is spent without proper public control. The affirmation of new entrepreneurs, experts, and analysts as a new ‘small company’ with more than a marginal care for the ‘welfare program’ for those who are excluded or removed” (Popov, 2009, without numeration).

After such privatization, manufacturing facilities are closed down, a new production does not begin – the economy collapses and the society is disintegrated, according to Popov. “Brotherly” privatization help develop clientelistic relations in the media. Some of these entrepreneurs, members of a “small privileged company”, founded their own media in order to offer media impact in exchange for big jobs.

This paper attempts to analyse some particularities of the Serbian media system that provided a fertile ground for the utilization of the media, such as slow transition of the society and the media sphere, non-transparent media ownership, and influence of the state through allocation of funds to the media (the state as a media owner, the state as an advertiser, and the state providing the stimulus for a variety of media-specific services).

POLITICAL CLIENTELISM IN THE MEDIA: COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

Daniel C. Hallin and Stylianos Papathanassopoulos researched political clientelism in the media sphere in four countries of Southern Europe – Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal – pointing out that these countries share many characteristics that clearly separate them from the rest of the European Union; they also included three Latin American countries – Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico. They found that these countries are related by their political development, particularly by the fact that the conflict between liberal democratic and authoritarian traditions continued through most of the 20th century. These authors found some common characteristics of the media systems of the surveyed countries of Southern Europe and Latin America. These are as follows: low level of newspaper circulation, tradition of advocacy journalism, instrumentalization of the privately-owned media, politicization of the public service, regulation of broadcasting, and limited development of journalism as an autonomous profession (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002, p. 3).

Slow development of democracy characterizes the countries in which there are widespread clientelistic relations. When traditional social structure begins to crumble, and when individuals are isolated, having low social capital and unable to reach the centres of political and economic power on the basis of equal access for all through the market or political institutions, then clientelism develops (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002,

p. 11). In its classical form, clientelism is the relationship of dyads based on individual relationship of dependence. With the development of political parties and administration, clientelism becomes a more complex relationship.

Clientelistic relations in these countries co-exist along with other forms of political organization. In some countries, clientelism is the leading form (this is the case with Mexico), and in some it is not. For instance, in Italy it exists together with mass political parties and an active civil society (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002, p. 2). In addition, after the Second World War, the political and social scene in Italy became pluralistic, and power was divided among many actors who stepped into the public arena by using the media and agitating for their political interests (Mancini, 2000, p. 242). On the other hand, Italy is the country with a 21st- century phenomenon that is unique in the European Union – one man (the then Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi) owned private media and had control over the public broadcasting service, thus accumulating great power (Radojković, 2004, p. 1). It is important to note that clientelistic relationships more or less exist in all modern societies (Legg, 1975, quoted from Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002, p. 2).

Political Clientelism in Post-communist Countries of the European Union

Political instrumentalization of the media is present in post-communist young democracies that are members of the European Union. These are Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Hungary. This is the result of research of the German author Jens Tenscher (Jens Tenscher, 2011, pp. 201-237) who studied the media systems of post-communist countries of the European Union. Media systems of these countries went through the change from strictly controlled one-party political systems to multi-party young democracies. In the first stage, new media laws were adopted in order to democratize the media and to reduce political influence on the media. However, in most countries this was not realized immediately, especially not in the area of broadcasting. The influence of political parties and powerful individuals was strong and often enabled by the structure itself and the way of choice of regulatory bodies, or the way of managing public television. This is especially valid for those countries that used the Mediterranean model as their model of public service, where the influence of the State is significant, or the German model of public service, in which the influence is exercised by political parties (Tenscher, 2011, p. 216). Therefore, in the second phase, from 1998 to 2003, the laws were changed and new ones adopted, and media policies of these countries were more attuned to the liberalization of the market of electronic media.

As regards the press in these countries, the state quickly withdrew from print media ownership, and foreign capital entered the majority of these new media markets. However, this allowed political pressure to be

replaced by the pressure exercised by media owners. The low level of journalistic professionalism in these countries is influenced by several factors: hidden political pressures and fines, economic pressures, shifts of journalistic generation with less than good results, and lack of trade union organizations of journalists and bodies of self-regulation (Tenscher, 2011, pp. 217-218).

Political Clientelism in the Countries of Southeast Europe

Clientelism in the media systems of Southeast European countries is a phenomenon that prevents democratization of the whole society, as revealed by the research conducted from July 2013 to February 2014 as part of the project *South East European Media Observatory – Building Capacities and Coalitions for Monitoring Media Integrity and Advancing Media Reforms*. The project analyzed media integrity in five countries of Southeast Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, and Serbia) and one of the conclusions was that “the media remained trapped in a network of non-transparent client relationship” (Hrvatín and Petković, 2014, p. 30).

All these countries adopted media laws that follow European standards, but their implementation is mainly sporadic. Any new government maintained the old mechanisms of influence on the media regardless of the declarative acceptance of European standards. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the situation in the media is worse than two decades ago (Hodžić, 2014, p. 79). Political affiliation and ethnicity have divided even the economic sphere.

“Without adequate answers at the level of media policies on the greatest weaknesses of the media sector, the situation in the media system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, even after intensive international involvement, is now a ‘colossal tragedy’, as Mark Thompson recently said” (Hodžić, 2014, p. 79).

Even positive measures, such as the decriminalization of libel, are twisted in these circumstances and have detrimental consequences – this measure is used by politicians seeking high compensation by suing primarily the media that criticize the government (Hodžić, 2014, p. 82). According to Sanela Hodžić, the number of libel suits is huge, so that the Municipal Court in Sarajevo alone processed 670 complaints against the media in the five years before (Hodžić, 2014, p. 82). Vuk Vučetić (2013) believes that the media sphere in Bosnia and Herzegovina is at a low level of democratization and that political clientelism is active. The political instrumentalization of commercial media here appears completely bare. This can be seen from the example of *Dnevni Avaz*, the highest circulation daily in Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose owner Fahrudin Radončić became the Minister of Security when the party he founded became part of the

parliamentary majority. *Dnevni Avaz* was used to fight his political opponents, especially in the period before the 2010 elections (Vučetić, 2013, pp. 359-361).

Although the state withdrew from the ownership of the media, it stipulated rules of their privatization and created an atmosphere in which new media owners had other interests when purchasing media (they were mainly encouraged by properties owned by media, or were trying to protect their other jobs as media owners).

The problem of a small media market, which characterizes all these countries, increased the already existing dependence on political centres of power, which allocated substantial government funds. In this research of media integrity, the state funding of the media is marked as particularly risky (Hrvatinić and Petković, 2014, p. 30). A key role in some of these countries was played by advertising agencies, whose owners were either close to the government or were even members of the government. Such was the case in Macedonia and Serbia. Money was allocated via these agencies to the media who supported the current government. In Macedonia, most of the money from the state budget went into financing of two TV stations that supported the government – *Sitel TV* and *Kanal 5* (Trpevska & Micevski, 2014, p. 286). In Croatia, during the investigation of the biggest corruption affair involving former Prime Minister Ivo Sanader, known as *Fimi media affair*, it was disclosed that the agency *Fimi media* allocated the money from state enterprises to the media, which in turn provided support to the governing structure (Popović, 2014, p. 72). On the other hand, the state has exerted great influence on where the advertisers should place their money, which led to the closure of certain media companies. That was the fate of the influential Croatian weekly *Feral Tribune*, known for its unsparing criticism of the government. It survived the political pressures, but was extinguished in 2008 due to financial difficulties arising as a result of “lawsuits and boycotts from advertisers” (Popović, 2014, p. 89).

Public media services in these countries have experienced a transformation from state televisions into public televisions, which are mainly financed through subscription, and which are expected to protect the public interest, control the government, and protect the high standards of professional journalism. However, the impact of current ruling political parties on public services is great and it is provided by a method of selection and composition of the management and supervisory boards in which there are representatives of certain parties’ interests. In Croatia, the changed law provided that the director of *Croatian Radio Television* is to be elected by the Parliament (Popović, 2014, p. 90). Until recently, the level of payment in Macedonia and Albania⁴ had been extremely low, so

⁴ In Albania, the revenue from subscriptions increased almost ten times – approximately €440,000 in 2008 amounted to about €4 million in 2013 (Londo, 2014, p. 93).

the public service broadcasting in these countries is almost entirely dependent on revenues from the state budget. Management of public services is not transparent – the employees in the media know very little about the decisions made by managers and management bodies while the general public knows almost nothing. For example, even though the public radio-television service in Macedonia is obliged to publish its financial plans and annual reports online, they do not do it. In addition, the very media organizations that are public service media wish to be financed from the state budget, even though it is known that this would threaten their independence (Hrvatín and Petković, 2014, pp. 35-38). These countries are faced with “deliberate and long-term obstruction of a transparent, independent, and stable work of public broadcasters”, which is carried out by the government (Hrvatín and Petković, 2014, p. 38).

The journalistic profession of the countries of South East Europe is characterized by low economic status – wages are often below the national average, ranging from €250 to €350. Although journalists are often forced to work in an atmosphere of distorted professional and ethical standards, the journalistic professional organizations are generally weak and the protection offered to the endangered reporters is insufficient. The role of some editors is characterized in this study as a link in the chain of clientelism that allows direct implementation of the owner’s demands through appropriate media content, while the editors use various undemocratic methods. Research journalism has become a venture that depends on dedicated and incorruptible journalists ready to bear the widest variety of risks (Brankica Stanković, a journalist from Serbia, author of the series of investigative programs “Insider”, which has been broadcast on *Television B92* since 2009, is under twenty-four-hour police protection). Other mainstream media do not cherish investigative journalism, which can still be found only in the alternative media, founded by journalists (Hrvatín and Petković, 2014, pp. 38-41).

POLITICAL CLIENTELISM IN THE SERBIAN MEDIA SYSTEM

Slow Transition of Society and the Media

Although media laws were adopted after the changes in October 2000 and although the country has moved towards democratic reforms, the transition of the media was carried out very slowly and with great difficulties. The biggest problems in the initial period were: the establishment of an independent regulatory body (Republic Broadcasting Agency – RRA, today Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media), which did not exist until the adoption of the Broadcasting Law in 2002; the issuing of permits to electronic media and bringing of order to the broadcasting chaos in which there were 1,200 broadcasters; implementation of media privatization; and transformation of state TV and radio into a public service medium. Five

years after the October changes, the accounts were settled and it is recognised that media freedom is undoubtedly bigger than before, but that there was still “a bond between politics and capital and the media” (Veljanovski, 2006, p. 268).

Some authors estimate that the latest phase of media policy, however, is determined by the inability of the government to formulate a public policy and thus a media policy. This was clearly evident in the adoption of the Media Strategy in 2011, when the government did not openly show what goals it advocated, but which could be revealed through alternate routes (Savović, 2013, pp. 6-7).

Media Ownership

Most media analysts agree that, in addition to the type of media ownership, for the emergence of instrumentalization of the media, way of their financing is a key factor. In Serbia, there is a dual system of ownership, which means that the media are either in the public domain (there are two public service media – *Radio Television of Serbia, RTS*, and *Radio Television of Vojvodina, RTV*) or privately owned. Still, there are media owned by the state, but the amendments to the Law on Public Information and Media, which the Serbian Parliament adopted in June 2015, provided that the privatization of the media should be completed by 31 October 2015. Regarding private media ownership, there are several types of owners and their role in the instrumentalization of media is different. Jovanka Matić and Dubravka Valić Nedeljković wrote about foreign ownership, hidden tycoon ownership, (hidden) politicians’ ownership, small businessmen’s ownership, journalists’ ownership, mogul ownership, and civil society ownership (Matić and Valić Nedeljković, 2014, pp. 76-88). Services are often offered to politicians by tycoons and big media owners who expect easier access to benefits and privileges in return, and they are a part of the clientelistic network in Serbia. It is assumed that this is one of the main reasons why Milan Beko did not want to disclose for some time that he was a shareholder in the daily newspaper *Večernje novosti*. Likewise, Miroslav Mišković hid the fact that he was the owner of the daily newspaper *Press*, only announcing it to the public three days before the newspaper was extinguished.

Change of the owner of *Television B92* meant a big change of the editorial policy of this TV station, which, from once a trademark of courage and responsible journalism, turned into a just one of the many stations that broadcast news programming, while advertising programming is constantly increasing. Indicative of this change was the introduction of the show *Bulevar* in 2013, which advertises itself as infotainment (program content in which the facts are combined with entertainment). Somewhat later, in July 2015, new changes were made, even on *Radio B92*, when the decision of the owner virtually abolished the news programming of this radio as well as

all original programming, followed by the dismissal of all of the original authors who created these shows (more than ten journalists and technicians and one music editor). The Anti-Corruption Council of Serbia (2011, pp. 8-9) reported that the hidden owner of *TV B92* since 2010 was the Greek ship-owner Minos Kyriakou, who had previously purchased *TV Prva*, also a station with a national broadcasting license. This concentration of ownership had not previously been permitted by law. In the meantime, the Law on Public Information and the Media was adopted in 2014, which stipulates that media ownership is illicit when the share of these media in the auditorium is over 35 per cent. This is difficult to verify under current conditions, so it is believed that this change in the law weakened the obstacles to media concentration (Anti-Corruption Council, 2015, p. 16).

The history of relations between media owners and the political elite in Serbia testifies to the political instrumentalization of private media. Željko Mitrović, the owner of *TV Pink* and *Pink Media Group* and the only media mogul in Serbia, owns capital in:

“radio, television, satellite, and cable broadcasting, production of entertainment programs, film production, music recording, developing and reproducing of CDs and DVDs, and business aviation. The company includes the leading national commercial television station *TV Pink*, regional *Radio Pink* in Belgrade, television stations in Montenegro (*Pink M*) and in Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Pink BH*) and 35 cable channels” (Matić and Valić Nedeljković, 2014, p. 87).

This media empire emerged in the nineties thanks to the close ties that Željko Mitrović had with the ruling elite. This enabled him to acquire a national frequency and buy the necessary equipment for a very low price from *RTS* (Anti-Corruption Council, 2011, p. 10). In 2006 he was awarded the national licence for television broadcasting, although he had a serious competitor, the company *RTL*. He repeatedly used *TV Pink*, of which he is the owner, in order to protect his business and personal interests.

The Economic Status of the Media

Unfavourable economic situation of the media puts them in a position where they have to depend on political financing, which threatens the freedom of the press. Although the global crisis and technological changes affected the deepening of economic crisis in Serbian media industry, the media were in an unfavourable economic situation during the whole transitional process. Matić and Valić Nedeljković claim that this is “the result of the nature of the financing structure of the media”, which has the following characteristics:

- unregulated and dysfunctional market;
- the state acts as a market actor;
- advertising agencies are associated with politics (Matić and Valić Nedeljković, 2014, pp. 95-96)

The media market in Serbia is poor, oversaturated, unregulated, non-transparent, and irregular. The value of the media market has been about €170 million for the last three years, making it one of the poorest markets in the region. In Croatia, the media market is worth €630 million, while in Slovenia it is worth €522 million. Compared to such a small market, the number of the media, which is around 1,000, is large. The fact that most of them survive is the result of a deal between the owner and the political elite, and not of the market mechanism.⁵ The media market is not sufficiently regulated (data on media ownership are hidden; the adoption of laws on illegal concentration of media was once prevented; there are pirate media; etc.). All of this gave the media owners who were in league with politicians the opportunity to make deals that allowed their media not to pay dues and debts. Thus, for example, the former owner of the daily newspaper *Kurir*, Radislav Rodić, repeatedly liquidated his publishing company to erase all debts and immediately opened a new one, which proceeded smoothly to do the same job (Matić and Valić Nedeljković, 2014, pp. 96-98).

The situation in this irregular market is further complicated due to state funding of the media through direct and indirect, often secret, subsidies. Although it is difficult to establish the exact figures on how much money comes from the state budget for financing the media, most authors agree that in times when most media barely survive in the market this has to be a considerable sum. In the document “Report on Pressure and Control of Media in Serbia”, published in 2011, the Anti-Corruption Council of Serbia revealed that 50 government bodies and large public enterprises annually allocated around €15 million for advertising in the media (Anti-Corruption Council, 2011, p. 17). The media financed in this way in turn published affirmative articles about state officials and state endeavours in their news without disclosing that those were paid articles. The politicians who were the heads of government bodies or institutions that allocated the most money for advertising in the media appeared most frequently in those media (Anti-Corruption Council, 2011, p. 18).

This money at the same time allowed the politicians to suppress or completely relativize any issues raised in the media regarding their responsibility (Anti-Corruption Council of Serbia, 2011, p. 18). Three years later, a new report by the Anti-Corruption Council of Serbia analyzed the pressure on the media in the period from the first report in 2011 to 2014. The situation in the media sphere remained the same – non-transparent ownership and influence of politics on the media through the national budget allocated for advertising as well as through tax exemptions. In the first observed period from 2008 to 2010, in the first report, in as many as 18 out of 30

⁵ This is in accordance with the widespread opinion in Serbia that ‘politics is a highly corruptive practice’ (Greenberg, 2010, p. 63).

largest media the actual owners were not known, whereas in the new report the ownership of 50 media companies was analyzed and it was found that the ownership was non-transparent or controversial in 27 of them (Anti-Corruption Council of Serbia, 2015, p. 11).

Matić and Valić Nedeljković believe that one can safely assume that the state has 23 to 40 per cent share in the media market. This includes grants, government advertising, and assets allocated to local media through public information contracts.⁶ State funding is in most cases based on “non-transparent and arbitrary decisions” (Matić and Valić Nedeljković, 2014, p. 102).

Advertising agencies through which money is being channelled from advertisers to the media are associated with the politicians in power, and in the previous period, the owners of agencies that have earned the most were senior officials of the ruling party. Dragan Đilas, the Mayor of Belgrade from 2008 to 2013, a senior official of the Democratic Party and for a while even its president, is the owner of the agency *Direct Media*. This agency, together with the agency *Universal McCann*, which is owned by Srđan Šaper, an official of the Democratic Party, was the most successful in the advertisers market. The market share these two agencies achieved amounted to 70-80 per cent (Matić and Valić Nedeljković, 2014, pp. 104-105).

Another instance of political influence in the media is the payment of tax debts or the possibility that the accumulated tax debts are tolerated. According to the data provided by the Anti-Corruption Council of Serbia in August 2014, some of the largest tax debtors are *TV Pink*, *Novosti*, *Politika*, and *RTS* (Anti-Corruption Council of Serbia, 2015, p. 144).

Although the transformation of the state’s national broadcasters into public service broadcasters was completed in 2006, there are still difficulties both broadcasters are facing (*Radio Television of Serbia* and *Radio Television of Vojvodina*). The financial sustainability of the two the largest media companies in Serbia⁷ is one of the most serious problems, especially after 2008, when the percentage of collection of payment decreased. In 2010 and 2011 the collection of payment was 44 per cent, and in 2012 about 36 per cent. With the adoption of the new Law on Public Media Services in 2014, the subscription has been temporarily suspended, and the public service broadcaster is financed from the state budget.

In addition to the threatened financial sustainability, some authors (Veljanovski, 2014, pp. 1302-1303; Matić and Valić Nedeljković, 2014,

⁶ Local authorities most often gave money to the media through subsidies or direct contracting, and rarely through a public bidding, which would make this process much more transparent (Mihajlov Prokopović, 2014, pp. 10-11).

⁷ *RTS* has 3,250 employees, and *RTV* has 1,200 employees (Matić and Valić Nedeljković, 2014, p. 115).

p. 108) mention other elements that testify that the public service is in crisis: insufficiently defined legal concept and centralized management that cares more about the interests of the political elite rather than about public interest. Rade Veljanovski highlights the influence that the political elite had over the editorial policy of *RTS* in 2007 when the decision of the Republic Broadcasting Agency (RRA) forced *RTS* to broadcast live every session of the Parliament. Likewise, the author recalls that in 2004 the national government dismissed the then general director of *RTS* Aleksandar Crkvenjakov and appointed Aleksandar Tijanić to that position although the law stipulated that the director should be appointed by the *RTS Managing Board* through a vacancy announcement (Veljanovski, 2014, pp. 1302-1303). The Anti-Corruption Council of Serbia found that clientelistic relations existed between the management of *RTS* and the political and business ruling elite in its “Report on Pressure and Control of Media in Serbia” (Anti-Corruption Council of Serbia, 2011, pp. 35-39). At the time, clientelistic relations were especially noticeable in arbitrary decisions on purchases of independent production programming, and this practice continued in the following three years (Anti-Corruption Council of Serbia, 2015, pp. 82-84).

Journalistic professionalism is threatened from several directions. According to the study on the economic and professional status of journalists conducted by UNS in 2014:

“earnings survey showed that most journalists earn between 31,000 and 45,000 dinars (33.87%), as well as between 16,000 and 30,000 dinars (26.02%). 14.26% of the respondents earn less than 15,000 dinars, 18% from 46,000 to 60,000 and 7.84% of the respondents earn more than 61,000”.⁸

Low wages are the first among the many problems of journalistic profession identified in this research (UNS, 2014, p. 33), and there are also the lack of professionalism and inadequate education of journalists, because even though 72.5 per cent of those surveyed have completed some form of higher education, only one in five journalists graduated from the Faculty of Journalism (UNS, 2014, p. 2). In addition, there is fear of losing one’s job, journalist unions are weak and without influence, and the safety of journalists has been threatened (Matić and Valić Nedeljković, 2014, pp. 118-119). All this creates an atmosphere which favours self-censorship. The aforementioned survey on the economic and professional status of journalists, conducted by UNS, found that 6% of the interviewed journalists

⁸ The Association of Journalists of Serbia: Research Report on the Economic and Professional Status of Journalists – March/September, 2014 (UNS, 2014, p. 7), available at http://www.uns.org.rs/sw4i/download/files/article/IzvestajUNSintegracijapodataka_FI_NAL.doc?id=372, retrieved on 5 April 2015.

have constantly been exposed to censorship, and even 41% of them have periodically been exposed to censorship (UNS, 2014, p. 9).

Journalist associations exist, but their function to protect the professional integrity of journalists is rather underwhelming. One of them is the Press Council, founded in 2009, as the first and so far the only self-regulatory body. The media approach this body voluntarily, and the task of the Council is to protect the professional journalistic code of ethics. Penalties for the violation of this code, which the Council pronounces, are of moral nature. The Press Council received 71 complaints in 2013 and 92 complaints from 1 January 2014 to February 2015.⁹

Not all journalists understand the goals of the profession in the same way. The media whose most important goal is the ratings often violated professional ethics. Thus, the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media imposed a temporary ban on the broadcasting of reality show *Pairs* on the station *Happy TV* on 2 April 2015 for a period of 24 hours, because it broadcast content “which can seriously harm the physical, mental, or moral development of minors”.¹⁰

The process of tabloidization, which is characterized by sensationalism, publishing of unreliable information, and the dominance of private over public, is spreading in the media in Serbia (Milivojević, 2007, pp. 2-3). Trivialization of the topics as a process is expanding to the whole society, whose citizens receive less and less relevant and reliable information by which to make their own judgments, so there is a tabloidization of the whole society. This evaluation was made by the ombudsman of the Republic of Serbia Saša Janković in his two successive annual reports (Ombudsman, 2013, p. 4; Ombudsman, 2014, p. 11),¹¹ and it was also discussed by the professional community.¹²

CONCLUSION

The transition in Serbia is accompanied by many problems, as it is in many other post-communist European countries and the countries of Southeast Europe. Nevertheless, the situation in Serbia is somewhat different, because Serbia entered transition ten years after the rest of the neighbouring

⁹ <http://www.savetzastampu.rs/izvestaji.html>, retrieved on 5 April 2015.

¹⁰ <http://www.rra.org.rs/cirilica/news/article/24-sata-zabrane-za-parove>, retrieved on 5 April 2015.

¹¹ http://www.ombudsman.rs/attachments/3237_Godisnji%20izvestaj%20Zastitnika%20Ogradjana%20za%202013%20%20godinu.pdf, http://www.ombudsman.rs/attachments/3733_Godisnji%20izvestaj%20Zastitnika%20Ogradjana%20za%202014.pdf, retrieved on 5 April 2015.

¹² <http://www.novimagazin.rs/vesti/tabloidizacija-medija-prerasta-u-tabloidizaciju-celokupnog-drustva>, retrieved on 5 April 2015.

countries and the former communist bloc. The similarity between these countries is undeniable: the first phase of media transition is characterized by the adoption of laws whose implementation should realize the democratization of the media. But the resistance demonstrated by the government and powerful groups or even individuals prevents the implementation and relativizes the provisions of the law. In the second phase the laws are changed in order to eliminate the detected problems.

Political clientelism is present in Serbia thanks to all of the abovementioned characteristics of the media. The opportunity to change things was created when new media laws were adopted on 2 August 2014. The media Registry was legalized in order to increase the transparency of ownership. Although the media are not obligated to register at the media Registry, those media that fail to do so will not be able to bid for project funding, and there are also restrictions on the advertising of state institutions and authorities in these media.¹³ Furthermore, the Law on Public Information and Media prescribed that all state-owned media were to be privatized by 1 July 2015, but this deadline was postponed to 31 October 2015 by the amendments to the Act passed by the Serbian Parliament in June 2015. According to the Privatization Agency, there are 84 state-owned media in Serbia. The process of privatization of the media is particularly important in terms of instrumentalization of the media by future owners, so the information about who the potential buyers of the media are should be emphasized. The Privatization Agency announced public invitations for bids on two occasions. Although the letters of interest do not greatly affect the outcome of privatization, they can help with risk prediction. One of the risks of privatization of the media is a desire of future owners to acquire the real estate owned by the media in an easy and inexpensive way,¹⁴ all the more so because some of the media that will be privatized are *Politika*, *Dnevnik*, *Studio B*, and *Tanjug*. The Law also introduces transparent state participation in the project co-financing of the media through public bids with regard to achieving public interest with clear rules (the right to participate in the bid, the composition of the selection committee, precise criteria for the allocation of funds, etc.). For the time being, it cannot be predicted whether these legal opportunities will be realized in practice and whether they will consequently reduce the instrumentalization of the media.

¹³ <http://www.anem.rs/sr/aktivnostiAnema/AktivnostiAnema/story/17348/IZVE%C5%A0TAJ+IZ+KRAGUJEVCA+%E2%80%93+TRE%C4%86I+SEMINAR+ANEMA+O+IMPLEMENTACIJI+NOVIH+MEDIJSKIH+ZAKONA+.html>, retrieved on 6 April 2015.

¹⁴ Thus, for example, “*Dnevnik AD* owns an office building of about 4,000 square meters and printing office of about 5,500 square meters spread over a plot of land of about 6,000 square meters. *Dnevnik* owns three apartments in Novi Sad, as well as 14 premises in cities across Vojvodina” (Anti-Corruption Council, 2015, p. 97).

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КЛИЈЕНТЕЛИСТИЧКИ ОДНОСИ И МЕДИЈИ У ТРАНЗИЦИОНОЈ СРБИЈИ

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Резиме

Политички клијентелизам уско је повезан са недовољно развијеним демократским институцијама. Медијски системи које карактеришу ниски тиражи штампе, традиција заговарачког новинарства, инструментализација приватних медија, политизација јавног сервиса и регулације у области радиодифузије и спор развој новинарства као независне професије, подложнији су за развој клијентелистичких односа, закључак је до ког су дошли у својим компаративним истраживањима аутори Данијел Халин (Daniel C. Hallin) и Стилианос Папатанасопулус (Stylianos Papathanassopoulos).

Иако се обрасци клијентелистичких односа могу наћи у свакој земљи, они су јасно видљиви у посткомунистичким земљама које су данас чланице Европске уније, као и у земљама Југоисточне Европе које још увек нису у Европској унији. У овој другој групи земаља свака нова власт задржавала је старе механизме утицаја на медије, без обзира на декларативно прихватање европских стандарда.

Скривено власништво над неким медијима у Србији део је атмосфере која погодује развоју клијентелистичких односа. На пример, у Србији дуго није било могуће установити ко су стварни власници Вечерњих новости, Преса или Телевизије Б92 од њене продаје 2012. године. Таква ситуација омогућава власницима да нуде свој медијски утицај и размењују га за привилегије. Део ове атмосфере свакако је и скромно и нерегулисано тржиште на коме има много медија, па већина њих заправо једва преживљава. Због тога расте утицај политике на медије јер у очекивању новца из буџета било кроз оглашавање државе или кроз државне субвенције, ови медији жртвују своју независност. Држава се, дакле, кроз оглашавање, појављује и као учесник на медијском тржишту и тиме увећава обим укупних средстава које издваја за медије. Неки аутори сматрају да држава учествује у финансирању медија од 23 до 40 одсто, и то чини пристрасно и не-транспарентно. Сег медијских закона који је донет у августу 2014. године пружа могућност да држава настави да финансира јавни интерес у медијима, али на много транспарентнији начин, кроз суфинансирање пројеката на конкурсу.