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# MIRROR WITHIN POLITICAL RELATIONS



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## INTRODUCTION

International politics and world affairs are not a dominant topic in Bosnian and Herzegovinian media. Surveys analyzing the various topics covered by the overall content are rare. In 2011, Media Plan Institute carried out a comprehensive survey of daily newspapers and prime time news programs on public services, where one of the variables was the topic of news content<sup>1</sup>. Dnevniavaz and Glas Srpskein the two top spots had the topics world and sport (Avaz 16% and 14%; Glas 24% and 18%). However, the statistical results show that the topics of internal politics and social affairs had pronounced dominance on the **first six pages**, including cover pages.

When one looks at a table that shows content on all three public TV services in B&H on a 14-day sample, it is clear that internal politics is the dominant topic, while world content takes up a total of 10 percent of news program content. Sport scored higher, as we also monitored the sports segments of the news program, as they form an integral part<sup>2</sup>. A virtually identical result on the representation of topics was revealed by a 2013 monitoring, also carried out by Media Plan Institute<sup>3</sup>.

	Topic – TV news programs	Percentage by number of units
1	Internal politics	19%
2	Sport	18%
3	Social affairs	12%
4	<b>World</b>	<b>10%</b>
5	Other	10%
6	Crime	7%
7	Economy	7%
8	War crimes	6%
9	<b>International activities of the country</b>	<b>3%</b>
10	Culture	3%
11	Accidents and extraordinary events	3%
12	Human stories	2%
13	Entertainment	0%

The small number of articles on international activities of the country shows how much Bosnia and Herzegovina is preoccupied with the internal problems and how incapable it is of carrying out international activities. Shuttle diplomacy, so characteristic of Serbia and Croatia, does not exist in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For example, for years in a row, the topic of international activities of the country has had the biggest presence on the Serbian public service, in line with the country's efforts to preserve at least

1 Udovicic, R (2012), VJERODOSTOJNOST MEDIJA, teorijske i praktičnedileme (MEDIA CREDIBILITY, Theoretical and Practical Dilemmas), Media Plan Institute, Sarajevo

2 Ibid

3 Analysis of the program on three public TV services in prime time – PRESENTATION OF PUBLIC ROLE – FORM, CONTENT, STANDS <http://www.mediaonline.ba/ba/?ID=540>

the status quo regarding Kosovo and approach the European Union. In Croatia too, according to surveys by agencies, international diplomacy takes third place in reports. On the other hand, in B&H the state bodies are totally submissive to the demands of the international community.

## AMERICAN ELECTIONS ALWAYS TOP ISSUE

Right after the recent elections in the United States, Fena news agency analysed the domestic print media coverage of various presidential elections. A review of the press published in B&H in the 1960's shows that news related to US elections captured front pages and top positions, that correspondents from the United States reported about them, that reports from foreign press were carried and special items and analyses were published.

It stands out in particular that the 1960 presidential election was covered in detail, given the narrow race between Democrat John F. Kennedy and Republican Richard Nixon. "Moment of truth has arrived" and "Average serious American vs. young man" were among headlines in B&H press on the eve of these elections.

Due to the time difference, the actual results were not known the day after the elections and headlines saying that Nixon had an advantage were featured in B&H media, but on 10 November 1960 the headline "John Kennedy new US president" appeared in *Oslobodjenje*, with the message: "With Kennedy, young generation of American politicians takes helm".

It was followed by the inevitable publication of President of the Republic Josip Broz Tito's message congratulating the election winner, as well as President Kennedy's first message: "The achievement of fair and lasting peace must be the primary task of the United States". The public in B&H was also informed about the new charming First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, whose photographs were published in B&H press.

We can find some similarities with the 2016 elections. It had been believed that Hillary Clinton would win and public and online media from Sarajevo had been predicting her victory until midnight. However, as soon as the preliminary results were known, all online and print media reported on their front pages that Trump was the new president. The state leadership instantly sent their congratulations, with the hope that good cooperation and stability in the region would continue. Media focused a lot of attention on future First Lady Melania Trump, especially as she comes from the former Yugoslavia. It is interesting to look at the daily *Oslobodjenje's* front pages from 10 November, but with a 56-year difference.

*Oslobodjenje*, 10 November 1960





# POSITION ON INTERNATIONAL POLITICS IN LINE WITH DOMESTIC DIVISIONS

The year 2016 was one of major international events. The several-year war in Syria resulted in a massive influx of refugees in Europe via the Balkan route and in ruthless terrorist attacks in Europe and Turkey; Great Britain voted to leave the European Union; and in the United States Donald Trump won the elections, as a candidate announcing big changes in American foreign policy. Although no one has made a precise analysis of media content on these topics, it is evident from careful insight into media from different parts of B&H that the number of items related to international politics has not increased in terms of quantity; in terms of journalistic forms and qualitative coverage of these events, what has grown is the so-called analytical opus, i.e. correlation with B&H's international position.

The position on these events taken by the different ethnic and political options in B&H was in line with earlier political stands. We will look at the main patterns of divergences on the example of US elections and Brexit, which were particularly visible between the Serb side, on one hand, and the Bosniak and so-called Bosnian side<sup>4</sup>, on the other:

- Serb politicians, like most Serbs in the Republika Srpska, wished for a Donald Trump victory. The main reasons are that candidate Hillary Clinton personified the policy that was behind NATO strikes and recognition of independent Kosovo. It is true that these events are from a neighboring country, but B&H Serbs heavily identify with Serbia. Further, Trump kept announcing the improvement of relations with Russia that, as an Orthodox and Slav country, enjoys a lot of sympathy among Serbs. What concerns B&H directly is the expectation that Trump's announced foreign policy change would mean a more positive stand with regard to the Republika Srpska and its aspirations for greater decentralization of B&H. Most ruling politicians, as well as a portion of citizens, maintain that the United States have been conducting an anti-Serb policy since 1991, with the presidential candidate's husband being the main personification of that behavior. Serbs also had a positive view of the Brexit vote because it was interpreted as a "blow" to Europe, which has cherished "Clinton and Obama values", including the position on B&H.
- Bosniak policy, as well as the informal policy of the NGO sector which is mostly funded from American and European sources, was on the side of the defeated candidate Hillary Clinton. The main reason is the fear that Donald Trump might abandon support for an integral B&H and perhaps even leave it in Russia's interest zone, which has evidently been the

4 „Bosnian side” includes the so-called civic option that sets state interests before the ethnic.

goal of RS President Milorad Dodik and his ruling party for the past two years. The second important reason is Trump's announcement that he would ban Muslim immigration to the United States. Although this may not effectively concern B&H and therefore Bosniaks, such stands are interpreted among Bosnian Muslims, like in the whole Islamic world, as discriminatory and anti-Islamic.

- The main constant of Croat policy in B&H is unreserved commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration, but without specific positions or statements favoring any options. The position of the "new world order" on Croats' desire to create a Croat territorial unit is also awaited.

Media behaved in line with these patterns. True, there were some exceptions, which we will describe further in the article. This was mostly noticeable in selecting the information and giving space to people who agree with the majority group, rather than in journalists' by-lined commentaries.

## SUPPORT RALLIES FOR CLINTON AND TRUMP

Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of few countries that had rallies in support of the American presidential candidates, which only confirmed the deep political and ethnic divide on this issue. Although the rallies did not have many attendees, especially the one in Istocno Sarajevo, most media covered these events.

On October 22, 2016, the organizers of the campaign "Sarajevo votes for Hillary Clinton" said that "all of us together, with our symbolic signatures, send a message of love and a message of friendship into the world." As media reported, the booth where signatures of support were being collected especially amused tourists. After giving their signatures of support for the Democratic Party candidate for US president, citizens were given a T-shirt depicting the former First Lady and US Secretary of State. "Let us remember when not so long ago, in 1996, Hillary together with her daughter Chelsea and several other public figures organized a good will visit to B&H. Hillary came to B&H as a senator, as US Secretary of State, as a citizen and as the First Lady of the United States and B&H was the first stop in her official visits to the Balkans," said one of the rally's organizers.

The next day, a rally of support for Donald Trump was organized in Istocno Sarajevo, from which a smaller group of citizens sent the message that they expect changes in the position on the Balkans, with hopes of peace and stability in the region.

Although all mainstream media reported on that, there were no specific comments of either support or condemnation. Only in November, journalism lecturer from the University of Istocno Sarajevo, Vuk Vucetic, made an interesting statement on *TVBiH* news, saying that these two rallies reminded him of the Top listanadrealista (The Surrealists' Top Chart). This was a mega popular comedy show in the former Yugoslavia, featuring sketches ridiculing the political situation in the country at the time. There were also many posts on social networks criticizing these rallies, considering this form of support inappropriate for elections in a foreign country.

## DIFFERENT COMMENTATORS, DIFFERENT IDEAS

One of the best known foreign affairs commentators and long-time journalist **Mufid Memija** said in an interview on Klix.ba, the most popular web portal from Sarajevo, on the eve of US elections that if Clinton won it would carry a lot of weight that a woman became the president of the United States<sup>5</sup>: "After America with Barack Obama crossed the 'Rubicon' of racial prejudice, let's hope now that a precedent will be set with a woman leading the United States. In a country which, among other things, remembers horrific episodes of violence against human rights, especially misogyny (Witches of Salem, Ku-Klux-Clan...), the election of Hillary Clinton would mean a new American epochal achievement. May the world finally experience a 'woman's hand-writing' in the political sphere. Her convincing victories in all three presidential debates are an encouraging indication of a new, feminine sensibility in American politics," said Mufid Memija.

When asked how he sees America and the world in case of Donald Trump's victory, Memija shortly answered: "I honestly hope that on Wednesday morning neither you nor I will see that." On the other hand, he believes that the Balkans and Bosnia and Herzegovina in American foreign policy "have the importance of a decimal in a calculation."

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5 Retrieved at <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/mufid-memija-balkan-i-bih-su-decimala-u-racunu-vanjske-politike-sad-a/161107037>

“Therefore, even after 8 November we will be where we are now. Whoever wins the American presidential elections will conduct policy in line with the interests of the military and industrial complex, oil and pharmaceutical transnational companies, GMO lobby... In that regard, the new tenant of the White House will follow to the detail the same paradigm as her/his predecessors: Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama... mutatis mutandis, like all previous presidents of the United States of America,” said Mufid Memija.

**Ensar Zgodic**, former foreign affairs journalist of *Dnevni avaz* and now freelancer known for his critical posts on social networks about American foreign policy, commented for this report on B&H media conduct in relation to international affairs. He believes that media follow political patterns of their respective communities and that their content is also conditioned by foreign donations.

“In most of B&H, except for the Republika Srpska, on the public service RTRS, the overall public – analysts, politicians, journalists, hence everyone who presents themselves in the media as relevant and expert, current and competent for giving some information and views to the public – every single one of them openly and without reservation favored the candidate Clinton, including media in the Republika Srpska which are financially supported by American money in order to topple RS President Dodik,” said Zgodic.

Zgodic also believes that foreign media broadcasting in B&H in the local languages basically represents the West’s political propaganda: Balkan version of CNN – Television *N1*, *Al Jazeera* and *Free Europe*.

“There are some Turkish media in B&H too, but due to well-known events after the attempted coup d’état in Turkey, we can expect and we already feel a decline in Turkey’s media presence in B&H, reduced activity and change in reporting on certain issues. There are no Russian media in B&H and Serbian and English editions of these media are certainly followed in the Republika Srpska more than in the BiH Federation, that lives in a parallel reality created over decades by globalist NGOs and media which have been drilled into believing that spreading the ideology of Euro-Atlantic integration is the foremost duty and obligation,” said Zgodic.

However, Media Plan Institute’s research shows that *Free Europe*, *N1* and *Al Jazeera* have very high professional standards and often give space to views that are not always available in B&H media. Nevertheless, it is evident that all three media outlets are politically constant, that is they support an integral B&H whose protagonists are pro-Bosnian and Bosniak forces, as well as current pro-Western democratic values generally personified in the incumbent political regimes.

On the other hand, President of BH Journalists Association **Borka Rudic** gave support to Hillary Clinton multiple times in her posts on Facebook. The main arguments were that she is a woman who has high awareness of human rights, particularly the rights of various minority groups, and that she is politically moderate. Similar views were posted by Aida Sljamo Daguda, director of one of the largest NGOs, and Ivana Maric, currently the most exposed analyst from Sarajevo.

On the most popular TV station in B&H, one of the three public services – Federal Television-, there is a show called “**Paralele**” (Parallels) edited by foreign affairs journalist **Mladen Maric**. Unlike mainstream media from the capital and even the general tone of this media outlet itself, the show has a so-called anti-globalist character. It is expressly against the official American foreign policy and official policy of the European Union, i.e. policies of most of its members. Through selection of information in TV items and editor’s comments, western policy is accused of provoking the war in Ukraine and the so-called Arab Spring, which is claimed to be an “American project”. On several occasions over the last few years, Barack Obama has been for the deaths of tens of thousands of people in Libya, Tunisia and Syria with the goal of appointing pro-American regimes and for oil and interests of big corporations. Throughout the election campaign, the show looked at Donald Trump with sympathy. After the elections, that was even more open. The show of 13 November 2016<sup>6</sup> opened with an extensive item on demonstrations in the United States against Donald Trump’s election victory. The item shows demonstrators who claim they will never recognize his victory, that Trump is not their president... Footage shows destruction of property in cities and reports on torched American flags. Then, in his first appearance, the show’s editor says: “We suggest repeating the elections until Hillary Clinton wins. I don’t know what the problem is and why her supporters are complaining in the streets. Trump was legally elected; it’s a different matter that the unhealthy ambitious Hillary Clinton cannot accept defeat. She is an ex in every regard and her time is irrevocably gone. Good evening.”

6 <http://www.federalna.ba/bhs/vijest/183929/13112016>

After Trump's victory, in media which had not been in his favor, articles started coming out showing that the future American president was far from being an eccentric and that he had strategically outwitted his opponents. Especially striking is an article of 11 November from Dnevniavaz, "Establishment, media and Clinton stood no chance: New York Times will never decide elections again".<sup>7</sup>

In an article published as a newsroom commentary<sup>8</sup>, although it is clear that it is also based on foreign media analyses, it is stated, among other things: "Trump simply started a savage tweetatis using brutal and direct language which old distributors would never have allowed and then he applied this model to traditional forms of communication: rallies, debates, forums and various official dinners. He insulted minorities, praised his own penis, terrorized former beauty pageant winners and military veterans, announced walls and deportations, called for dictatorial powers and political persecutions, implied Hillary's assassination, ridiculed disabled people, proudly displayed utter ignorance on all important issues, and bragged about imposing himself on women. We relied on filters which no longer exist. While we all saw scandalous, infantile and creepy behavior in that, Trump saw an authentic product that resonates. And while we were sure that such a product had a very limited audience, Trump realized its evident massiveness from the number of tweets, shares and comments."

Brexit attracted a lot of attention from B&H media, although for just a few days. Newsroom commentaries were rare, but the selection of interviewees and outside commentators, especially in Sarajevo-based media, showed B&H's support to Great Britain remaining in the EU, as well as the disappointment after the decision was made to start the exit process.

Right before the referendum, the web portal Klixbrought an interview with political analyst **Adnan Huskic**, who publicly expressed his fear: "What happens when the organization that is in this case the only real guiding force for B&H – European Union – is left without a country such as Great Britain and sustains a tremor of this kind?" His opinion is that it would be a precedent, since it had never happened that a country walked out of the EU, especially one like Great Britain. "It would be an absolute catastrophe because the EU would have a hard time summoning the strength and capacity to continue to be seriously involved in our country. When Americans do not have an important role in B&H and Europeans have an insufficient one, then there might be more interference from Russia, Turkey and countries that do not contribute to the general security and to the creation of an environment conducive to the development of democracy in B&H," added Huskic<sup>9</sup>.

However, the "catastrophe" did happen. After the British referendum, Dnevniavaz brought an interview with French philosopher **Bernard-Henri Levi**, who had given a lot of support to B&H and besieged Sarajevo during the war. He characterized the British vote without mincing his words. He said that those who won through Brexit are "people with clouded minds, drunken skinheads, hooligans, illiterate rebels, neo-Nazis with bull heads." - a tragicomic comparison, but also insulting to more than half of Britain's citizens who voted in favor of the decision.

"It is a victory of fiery sovereigns, stupidest nationalism and, I would even say, of a decaying England over an England that is open to the world. It is a defeat of complexity by dictatorial simplicity. I consider this above all a victory of Donald Trump, one of the first to enthusiastically welcome the historic vote, but also, of course, of Vladimir Putin, whose dream, which cannot be emphasized enough, is the disintegration of the EU," said the French philosopher<sup>10</sup>.

## ISIS AS A CATALYST OF POLITICAL CLASHES

As elsewhere in the world, B&H media focused a lot of attention on the war in Syria, the Balkan route used by refugees from Turkey to get to Germany, ISIS terrorist attacks, and battle of the American-Russian coalition against this extremist group. Common to virtually all mainstream media is abhorrence at the brutality of the war in Syria and condemnation of terrorist attacks both in the Middle East and Iraq as well as in Turkey and Europe. Media unmistakably condemned terrorism, but to a lesser extent they accused American and European governments of generating the creation of extremist groups by their policies on Arab countries and military interventions. In quite a lot of media outlets in the B&H Federation as well as in Republika Srpska, it

7 <http://m.avaz.ba/clanak/261630/establishment-mediji-i-clinton-nisu-imali-nikakve-sanse-evo-ko-je-doveo-trumpa-u-bijelu-kucu#sthash.SP6rm4us.dpuf>

8 Idem 7.

9 <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/analitici-brexit-bi-kocio-put-bih-u-eu/160623061>

10 <http://www.avaz.ba/clanak/243528/bernard-henry-levy-o-brexitu-pobjeda-najglupljeg-nacionalizma?url=clanak/243528/bernard-henry-levy-o-brexitu-pobjeda-najglupljeg-nacionalizma#sthash.6btgd2qY.dpuf>

was implied that the war on terrorism must be based on the change of western policy concerning Islamic countries. However, an obvious difference between Serb and Bosniak media was the difference in their stands on Russia's role in the world, including in the war in Syria. Serb media had a positive view of Russia's engagement and interpreted it as a reaction to the "hegemonic policy" and military intervention of the United States. On the other hand, Bosniak media condemned Russia's interference, which they claimed, additionally, deepened the plight of the people in Syria.

Like the government in B&H, most media were in a way pleased that the so-called Balkan route used by refugees did not cross B&H and that the country did not have that problem for the moment. There were occasional items and articles reporting on possible changes in refugee movements in terms of the government having a plan for that situation, but always emphasizing that it was rather unlikely due to B&H's geographic position.

ISIS was often a catalyst of internal political skirmishing in B&H. Serb media in B&H particularly persisted in that; referring to foreign intelligence sources as well as some domestic information, they reported that the ruling Bosniak party was tolerating extreme Islamists, both domestic and foreign ones, who were residing in B&H and allegedly planning terrorist acts. However, this issue especially exploded with regard to media when Croatian President Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic said that thousands of volunteers fighting on the side of ISIS had returned to B&H from Islamic battlefields.

"Radicalization of Islam is happening in B&H. We must look the truth in the eye and face the trends that are coming, including returnees from the so-called Islamic State, from battles in Iraq and Syria. There are already several thousand of them. I want B&H to become a member of the NATO alliance and European Union as soon as possible," Grabar Kitarovic told Croatian media on 3 November.

All media from Sarajevo condemned the statement, calling it an exaggeration. They quoted data from the B&H security agency SIPA, according to which 226 people from B&H had been on the Syrian front, not thousands. Some other data claimed that only 115 people were there, 65 were killed and 45 had returned. They also carried statements by numerous other security officials from B&H who said that a maximum of a couple of hundred people from B&H might have been on foreign battlefields in different stages.

B&H Presidency member Bakir Izetbegovic said in his reaction to the media: "President Grabar-Kitarovic demonstrated disrespect toward Bosnia and Herzegovina and its leadership. It is not good to call B&H an unemancipated country, to comment on how Bosniak men and women dress, to exaggerate the problem of so-called Islamic extremism in B&H, for example to add two zeroes to the number of returnees from foreign battlefields... Our security agencies are addressing this problem actively and successfully, exchanging data and experience with relevant agencies, including the ones in Croatia. In Croatia too, Ustasha extremism is flourishing, Croats are also going to foreign battlefields such as Ukraine, a memorial plaque with a Nazi salute was unveiled in Jasenovac, the public was puzzled by some photographs with extremist flags, but we from B&H avoided commenting on such occurrences... I hope, in future, President Grabar-Kitarovic will worry about her own yard and leave worry for ours to us," said Izetbegovic.

However, the owner of FACE TV from Sarajevo, Senad Hadzifejzovic, had the fiercest reaction, which was also sexist and insulting<sup>11</sup>. The once popular journalist uttered this comment in the news program: "With regard to us Bosnians, you are a fatal lady, moreover an ideal lady. Don't hurt our feelings, although (they are) manly oriented toward you. Comrade President, for me an interview with you would be an incredible satisfaction... You are under stress. You need physical therapy and a very radical one," he said. The public in both B&H and Croatia interpreted this as the Croatian president needing some hard sex to calm down.

## CONCLUSIONS

International affairs in B&H are not a dominant topic in B&H media, although they are covered every day. Sources of such information are news agencies (mainly from western countries) and international television exchange. So-called added value is given to news by various domestic and foreign commentators who explain situations and events. Few media have their own correspondents; only the most powerful media outlets have them selectively. They are primarily in Washington, Istanbul and Brussels.

11 Video retrieved at <https://youtu.be/ZiRkzEqKOMs>

With just a few exceptions, the main media outlets generally did not provide newsroom commentaries on world affairs. However, selection of commentators or analysts reflected bias, primarily with regard to US presidential elections. Although some of the commentators had never been to America or their continuous pursuit of foreign affairs was dubious, especially on public TV services in Sarajevo they were given airtime to list the advantages of Hillary Clinton and to assess the consequences of Brexit and the Syrian crisis. On the other hand, the selection of interviewees on the Serb side of B&H leaned toward Donald Trump and was relatively indifferent to Brexit.

International affairs in B&H media are obviously a mirror of domestic political developments. The majority positions of the political public in each ethnic community on Russia, Europe, United States, Turkey, terrorism and ISIS were reactions to the positions of these countries or international events with regard to domestic political actors.

Conduct of public figures on social networks (journalists, NGO activists, politicians and artists) was based on their personal political preferences. As Facebook and Twitter are selective means of information and depend on interest circles (established friendships), it is hard to draw valid conclusions on their activities. However, what is clear is that individuals shared and commented on what they liked. Thus, numerous NGO activists from Sarajevo and Banja Luka who are supported by European and American donations favored Hillary Clinton and opposition to Brexit in their posts and emphasized the importance of human rights of minorities.

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