Working Paper

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Building Media Systems in the Western Balkans: Lost between Models and Realities

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1.

Introduction

When dictators fall, the rhetoric of 'revolution', 'liberalisation' or 'new era' often disguises the enormous difficulties that lie ahead. Beginning with the fall of the Berlin Wall that marked the end of the Cold War, democracy has spread around the world in breath-taking speed. However, as the 'third wave'[1] comes of age, it becomes ever more evident that bringing down dictatorships is one thing, but building sustainable democratic institutions and media systems is quite another.

The working papers produced within the project "Development of Functional Media Institutions in Western Balkans – A Comparative Study"[2] provide vivid evidence of the many obstacles, errors and set-backs – but also of the achievements – that accompany the attempt of transforming media systems that hitherto have served the needs of an authoritarian regime into democratic institutions. Each of the working papers covering one of the five successor states of former Yugoslavia describes in much detail the policies that have been implemented to rebuild media institutions and journalistic practices in an environment that is marred not only by the legacy of socialism, but also by the trauma of war, deep societal divisions and economic decline. Given the importance of the Western Balkans for the stability and prosperity of Europe, considerable efforts have been made by the international community to build democracy in the region. Thus, besides describing the problems of transforming media systems in post-authoritarian countries, the working papers of this project also provide unique insights into the mechanisms and consequences of international media assistance in emerging democracies. In spite of the undeniable progress that has been made, the accounts given here are also rather sobering. The policies pursued by international donors often lack long-term sustainability and in some cases exacerbate rather than ameliorate existing problems.

Taken together, the significance of this working paper series goes far beyond the region of the Western Balkans. The outstanding scholarship and in-depth knowledge brought together in these working papers also help to better understand the dynamics of media transformation in other emerging democracies around the globe. While some of the problems the media in the countries of former Yugoslavia are struggling with are unique for the region – for example the extremely small

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[1]   Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (London; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

[2]   See Annex 1 for the full list of working papers reffered to in this paper.

media markets of countries whose populations range between less than two million (Kosovo) and some seven million (Serbia), many others show striking similarities with developments in other new democracies. For example, issues of persistent political interference into journalistic decision-making, low levels of journalistic professionalism, political parallelism and sharp polarisation of public communication are common features around the globe. Moreover, the emphasis on the work of media assistance organisation described in these working papers further highlights the difficulties that arise when transplanting the institutions and norms of democracy as practiced in established (mainly western) countries to contexts that either do not have any, or only little, experience with democratic governance or are part of cultural and historical traditions that have little in common with western traditions. These apparent discrepancies between the established democracies of the West and the fledgling semi-, partial or defective democracies of the 'third wave'[3] have provoked the question whether democracy and its essential ingredient of a free press can be exported to other contexts.

As elsewhere in the post-communist world of Eastern Europe, policy makers in the countries of former Yugoslavia have looked out for role models in established democracies as guidance for the reconstruction of their media systems. Hallin and Mancini's[4] models of media systems have become an influential framework not only for academic research, but also for policy choices to design media systems in emerging democracies. The three models proposed by Hallin and Mancini identify the key dimensions of media systems of the regulatory arrangements and behavioural patterns that organise state-media relationships, media markets, journalistic professionalism and the relationship between the media and the main cleavages in a society ('political parallelism'). The resulting 'ideal types'[5] are the 'liberal model' that is characterised by low levels of state regulation, commercialism and objectivity and neutrality as key journalistic norm; the 'democratic corporatist model' that includes a strong public service element and the attempt to accommodate different interest and groups; and the 'polarized pluralist model' that is dominated by partisan journalism and a close relationship between politics and the media. Hallin and Mancini's analysis, which focuses exclusively on Western media systems, reveals that the 'liberal model' is predominant in Anglo-Saxon countries, the 'democratic corporatist model' can be mainly found in the welfare

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[3]   Patrick Bernhagen, "Measuring democracy and democratization," in *Democratization,* ed. Christian W. Haerpfer et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 24-40; Aurel S. Croissant and Wolfgang Merkel, guest eds., *Democratization: Special Issue: Consolidation and Defective Democracy? Problems of Regime Change* 11, no. 5(2004).

[4]   Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[5]   The term 'ideal types' is used here according to Max Weber's definition as the aggregation of characteristics of a class of cases, rather than normative desirable features.

states of Northern Europe and the 'polarized pluralist model' covers mainly the Mediterranean countries.

Even though Hallin and Mancini emphasise that these models are empirical descriptions that do not imply any evaluation of the quality and adequacy of the kind of public communication each of the models provides, the 'polarized pluralist' model is widely seen as deficient and least desirable. Recent studies that have applied Hallin and Mancini's models to non-western countries and in particular the new democracies of the 'third wave' have come to the conclusion that it is the 'polarized pluralist' model that best characterises cases outside the Western world[6]. However, it appears implausible that eighteen Western media systems are diversified across three different models, whereas the rest of the world is lumped together into just one[7]. Besides the conceptual problems this lack of variance throws up, the classification as 'polarized pluralist' usually also implies a normative judgment that marks these non-western and emerging media systems as immature and flawed.

In this concluding working paper I want to explore in some more detail the empirical and normative underpinnings of democratic media systems, in particular the 'polarized pluralist' model. The paper aims to address some of the theoretical and normative issues involved in transforming post-authoritarian media systems, which have been described and analysed in the country studies of this working paper series. The discussion starts by introducing the concept of 'social constructivism' as an effective theoretical tool to understand processes of institutional change in processes of democratic transition. Two key elements of media systems serve as examples to demonstrate the 'social construction' of norms and practices in different social and political contexts: partisanship and pluralism. While partisanship is seen as a deficiency of media systems, albeit widely practiced, pluralism is valued as an indispensible norm of democratic media, yet difficult to achieve.

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[6] See Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, eds., *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); see also Boguslawa Dobek-Ostrowska et al. eds., *Comparative Media Systems: European and Global Perspectives* (Budapest: Central University Press, 2010).

[7] See Katrin Voltmer, "How Far Can Media Systems Travel? Applying Hallin and Mancini's Comparative Framework Outside the Western World," in *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World,* ed. Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

2.

The Divergence of Democracy and the Social Construction of Media Institutions

More than a decade ago, Diamond and Plattner[8] observed that instead of 'third wave' democracies becoming more similar to their established counterparts, they were actually on a course of divergence leaving a growing gap between the liberal democracies of the West and post-authoritarian forms of democracy. While the emerging democracies successfully adopted some elements of democratic governance from Western role models, many other aspects appeared to be rather resistant to change, thus bringing about a hybrid blend of new and old institutional forms, orientations and practices. Similar observations can be made with regard to the media systems in new democracies. They incorporate structural elements and behavioural patterns of the regimes from which they emerged alongside forms of journalism that are associated with democratic public communication[9].

Especially in post-communist countries huge efforts have been made to privatise the media, assuming that the need to attract large audiences in a competitive market would force the media to distance themselves from their traditional bonds with the state and adopt a more professional approach to journalism. This rarely happened, as the papers in this working paper series demonstrate the many obstacles and unintended consequences of this policy in the countries of former Yugoslavia. The alternative model, public service broadcasting, was not much more successful either. Even though the institutional structures of established public service broadcasting organisation, such as supervisory bodies and licence fee funding schemes, were implemented the resulting organisational forms resemble more the old system of state broadcasting than, for example, the BBC.

In order to understand media transitions in emerging democracies, it is important to keep in mind that neither the key concepts of democratic media, such as independence, pluralism and public interest, nor the norms of journalism, such as objectivity, investigation and factuality, are as unanimous as textbook knowledge might imply. Instead, the way in which they are understood and practiced is highly

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[8]   Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *The Global Divergence of Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

[9]   See Katrin Voltmer, *The Media in Transitional Democracies* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), pp. 115-128.

contingent on the particular historical and cultural context in which journalists work. Existing meanings and practices are carried over to newly established institutions, thus altering the forms and performance of institutions. Milton[10] argues that the democratisation of existing institutions, which have their roots in the old regime, like the media, is more difficult and usually yields more fuzzy results than the creation of entirely new institutions, such as the electoral system or the central bank. According to Milton, it is almost impossible to eliminate the 'institutional traces'[11] inherited from the past when transforming institutions that have already served the old regime. These 'institutional traces' are not only imprinted in the procedures and rules that regulate institutional procedures; they also shape the expectations and behaviour of both the members of the institution and outside stakeholders.

The persistence of 'institutional traces' implies that democratic institutions like the media cannot be transplanted in a one-to-one fashion. Rather, the emerging forms and practices always constitute a complex juxtaposition of the old and the new, a compromise between an ideal vision and what is possible in a given situation, a unique conjunction between the trajectory of the past and the immediate constraints of the transition itself. Early democratisation research and democracy assistance was based on the assumption that democracy can be 'crafted'[12] or 'designed'[13], assuming that a functioning democracy – and with it a functioning media system – can be achieved if the right models are adopted and implemented.

The belief that democratic institutions and media systems can be 'exported'[14] has often led to a tick-box approach that attempts to transfer institutional packages to countries that are reconstructing their media systems after the collapse of the authoritarian regime. Inevitably, in most cases the results were disappointing. Differences between the outcomes and the model that served as blueprint for the transformation are usually seen as deviances, flaws and shortcomings. This is not to deny that many emerging democracies and their media systems are imperfect and in some cases fail to observe the most basic rules of democratic governance. However, rather than regarding the emerging hybrid forms of democracy and media

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[10]   Andrew Milton, *The Rational Politician: Exploiting the Media in New Democracies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

[11]   Ibid, p. 23.

[12]   Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[13]   Arendt Lijphart and Carl H. Waisman, eds., *Institutional Design in New Democracies: Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Boulder: Westview, 1996).

[14]   Craig L. LaMay, *Exporting Press Freedom: Economic and Editorial Dilemmas in International Media Assistance* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009).

as indicators for incomplete and even failed transitions, a more nuanced view is necessary for evaluating the new 'fuzzy' manifestations of democratic practice.

It is worth noting that in the literature on globalisation hybridity is regarded as cultural forms in their own right that often represent creative and innovative ways of coping with the challenges of change[15]. In contrast, in the literature on democratisation, hybridity usually denotes the many forms of 'democracy with adjectives' that political scientists are reluctant to classify straightforwardly as 'democracy'[16]. What is often overlooked is the fact that for new institutions and norms to become legitimate, they have to be 'domesticated' through a process of adaptation and integration into local value systems and customs. Far from undermining democratic ideals, the domestic anchoring of norms is a precondition, rather than an obstacle, for the consolidation of a sustainable media system that is able to play its part in the democratic life of its country. Thus, the resulting hybridity of journalistic practices extends beyond the dichotomy of democratic versus authoritarian, free versus unfree, professional versus unprofessional[17].

Democratisation research has only recently begun to acknowledge the large variety of pathways democratic transitions take, and the role that indigenous cultures play for the outcome of the process. The social constructivist approach provides a conceptual framework that helps to understand why 'exported' democracies and their media systems differ significantly from their role models. According to this perspective, institutions emerge from, and are continuously re-created through collective discourses and social interactions[18]. Thus, the performance of institutions not only depends on their formal rules and hierarchical structures, but equally on the way in which they are interpreted by those who are applying these rules in their everyday actions. Consequently, even though institutions such as elections or a free press are signified by the same word, they mean different things in different cultural contexts. The dramatic consequences of different interpretations of what democracy means became evident when on 3rd July 2013 the military in Egypt removed President Morsi from power following massive street protests against his leadership. Even though Egypt adopted elections as part of its transition to democracy, the country is deeply divided over

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[15]   See Andrew Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Daya Thussu, *International Communication: Continuity and Change* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).

[16]   David Collier and Steven Levitsky, "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovations in Comparative Research," *World Politics* 49, no. 3(1997).

[17]   Katrin Voltmer and Herman Wasserman, "Journalistic Norms between Universality and Domestication: Journalists' Interpretation of Press Freedom in Six New Democracies," *Global Media and Communication* (2014, forthcoming).

[18]   Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966); John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).

the interpretation of these elections. One camp insists on the primacy of elections as binding mechanism for selecting a country's government; others believe that democracy expresses itself through the voice of the people on the street. The future face of Egypt's democracy depends on which interpretation of democracy prevails.

Adopting a constructivist approach, democratisation scholar Laurence Whitehead[19] proposes an 'interpretavist' understanding of democratic transitions. His argument can be equally applied to the institutionalisation of independent media in emerging democracies:

> If 'democracy' [and 'independent media'; *author's addition*] is viewed as a contested and to some extent unstable concept, anchored through the invocation of practical knowledge and a deliberative filter of collective deliberation, then democratization [and the creation of independent media; *author's addition*] can only come about through a lengthy process of social construction that is bound to be relatively open ended.[20]

This view emphasizes the ambiguous nature of democracy, which has its roots much less in philosophical arguments rather than in 'practical knowledge'. Even though democratic institutions and media systems have to be implemented at some point, they come into existence through practice. Building democratic media is therefore a long-term, often frustrating process of trial-and-error. Moreover, the practice of 'constructing' democratic media is embedded in 'collective deliberations'. Without this rooting in public discourse institutions remain isolated, without legitimacy and ultimately unprotected. This seems to have happened in several of the countries described in this working paper series. As soon as foreign donors withdrew their (financial and practical) support the newly implemented institutions dwindle or are being hijacked by particularistic interests. Apparently, the new institutions have not grown strong enough roots in their own soil to be able to survive without external support. From Whitehead's 'interpretavist' point of view an important element of sustainable transition is missing: 'collective deliberation'. In many emerging democracies institution building is primarily regarded as an elite project in which the citizens are reduced to consumers of services and products, but not as 'constructors' and active participants in their own right. Several democracy promotion agencies, including the EU, have become increasingly aware of this deficiency and have begun to reach out to civil society organisations as partners in the transition process. However, civil society organisations often do not exist

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[19] Laurence Whitehead, *Democratization: Theory and Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[20] Ibid, p. 30.

in these countries or do not have the structures and expertise that are necessary to participate in an elite-driven transition process. What should be a 'collective deliberation' process is therefore often reduced to a behind-the-doors bargaining between different interests that can hardly claim to speak in the public interest.

Understanding the democratisation of media institutions and journalism as social construction, i.e. as a process of collective (re-)interpretation and continuous practice, might sound like an esoteric academic discussion, but it has far-reaching consequences for the policy choices that are made and the evaluation of outcomes. One conclusion that can be drawn from the social constructivist approach is that the emerging media systems in new democracies are bound to deviate from western models. For even if the new institutional structures are an exact adaptation of the western model, they will ultimately function differently because of the way in which they are interpreted and used by individuals in the new environment.

The other conclusion is that the 'models' of media institutions – usually the 'liberal' one with some elements of 'democratic corporatism' – which media assistance organisations try to export to new democracies do not exist, neither does the journalism that is taught in textbooks and many journalism training programmes. The 'real existing'[21] media systems in established Western democracies deviate from these models and their underlying ideals in many ways – maybe as much as the new media systems in emerging democracies. In fact, the institutions and practices of Western media systems are themselves social constructions that have evolved in a historical process and are shaped by the specific cultural, political and economic conditions in which this process took place. Yet they are often seen as 'natural', 'objective' facts to which, apparently, there is no plausible alternative. Berger and Luckmann describe this tendency of taking for granted what is in fact contingent as 'reification', i.e. a false assumption that confuses specific social forms with universal norms that could claim validity across cultural boundaries. As Berger and Luckmann maintain, 'man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness'[22].

In the following, the historical roots and contextuality of media institutions will be discussed by taking a closer look at two features of emerging media systems, including those in the Western Balkans, that are often regarded as evidence for the failure of exporting the Western model in post-authoritarian countries: partisanship and (external) pluralism.

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[21]   The term alludes to the expression 'real existing socialism' which was widely used to describe the socialist countries in Eastern Europe; see Richard Sakwa, *Postcommunism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999). The term was somewhat ambiguous: political leaders used it to proudly refer to the attempts of establishing socialism in their countries; but the term often opened up ironical, even critical connotations, as it pointed at the gap between the promises of ideal communism and what existed in reality.

[22]   Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality,* p. 89.

3.

Partisanship, Collective Identities and Social Divisions

One of the key characteristics of the 'polarized pluralist' model of Hallin and Mancini's[23] typology is 'political parallelism'. The notion draws on the concept of 'press-party parallelism' introduced by Colin Seymour-Ure[24] to describe the pattern and degree to which the press system mirrors the party system in European history since the 19th century.[25] Seymour-Ure[26] emphasised the interdependency of political parties and the rise of the mass-circulation press:

> The growth of competing political parties in 19th century Europe was widely paralleled by the rise of newspapers supporting them.

Conversely, newspapers depended on sponsors like political parties because other forms of revenues, such as advertising and the related economy of mass consumption, were still in their infancy. Seymour-Ure's argument resembles Benedict Anderson's[27] assumption of the role the printed press played in the rise of national identities. By creating narratives of current events, historical experiences and images of 'us' and 'them', the media contribute to the emergence of 'imagined communities'[28] by enabling individuals to form emotional bonds with other individuals without sharing the same physical space. These bonds could be based on ideological beliefs, class, ethnicity or nationality.

Scholars of media history argue that neutrality and objectivity as a journalistic norm only emerged in response to changing economic conditions, especially in the

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[23]   Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics.*

[24]   Colin Seymour-Ure, *The Political Impact of Mass Media* (London: Constable, 1974).

[25]   Hallin and Mancini prefer the more general term 'political parallelism' to indicate that the media might associate with political organisations or groupings other than just political parties.

[26]   Seymour-Ure, *The Political Impact of Mass Media,* p. 157.

[27]   Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

[28]   Ibid.

U.S.[29]. The rise of the so-called yellow press – i.e. cheap, easy-to-read newspapers with mass appeal – made it imperative for media owners to produce content that would be attractive to mass audiences regardless of their particular political worldviews. The newly established news agencies also contributed to a less partisan style of journalism, as news became a commodity that was sold to a large number of different customers[30]. Even though the norm of objectivity and neutrality has become a widely accepted part of journalistic professionalism, in reality partisan-based political parallelism remains the dominant pattern of media pluralism – not only in new democracies, but also in established democracies. It is important to note that partisanship and quality journalism are not mutually exclusive, as the leading national newspapers in Europe demonstrate: from The Guardian to Le Monde, and from La Repubblica to the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung; these national newspapers have clear and outspoken political preferences, but are at the same time widely praised for journalistic excellence. The most partisan media, and thus the strongest political parallelism, can be found in Britain, the country that Hallin and Mancini classified as representing the 'liberal model'.

With the spread of balance and objectivity as journalistic norms alongside a journalism of advocacy and partisanship, the foundations of the relationship between media outlets and their audiences also changed. Waisbord[31] distinguishes between a 'journalism of information' and a 'journalism of opinion', each of which makes different credibility claims. 'While one says "trust me, I'm an expert", the other says "trust me, I'm one of us"'[32]. Waisbord argues that for trusting the media people consume, partisanship is much more important than objectivity and balance. When trying to make sense of the political conflicts of the day, most people regard a source of information that supports their own political views as more trustworthy than a media outlet that challenges their beliefs. In an environment of information abundance 'journalism of opinion' provides an important guide through an otherwise over-complex and confusing political environment.

Biased information not only helps to make sense of political issues without investing an unreasonable amount of time into comparing and evaluating different sources of information; it also encourages political involvement and participation[33].

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[29] See Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

[30] Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Terhi Rantanen, eds., *The Globalization of News* (London: Sage, 1998).

[31] Silvio Waisbord, "In Journalism We Trust? Credibility and Fragmented Journalism in Latin America," in *Mass Media and Political Communication in New Democracies,* ed. Katrin Voltmer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

[32] Ibid, p. 84.

[33] Diana C. Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative Versus Participatory Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Martin Wattenberg[34] is another scholar who emphasises the benefits of partisan media. Writing from the perspective of U.S. politics, he argues that the neutral reporting style of modern media is, at least in parts, responsible for the decline of American political parties. As voters no longer find clear partisan cues in the media, party identification is eroding giving way to candidate-centred politics and an increasingly vacuous political discourse.

These positive views of media partisanship seem to be surprising given the wide-spread concern about political parallelism. And indeed, political parallelism is a double-edged sword. If media partisanship involves stirring hostility and disrespect for anybody who disagrees with one's own favoured view, then it poses a serious threat to the viability of a democratic public sphere. Political parallelism can polarise a country up to a point where it becomes difficult to agree on any policy or definition of a situation or even the outcome of an election. In their comparative study on political attitudes in post-communist countries Anderson et al.[35] found that the political culture in these countries lack what they call 'losers' consent', i.e. the ability to accept the validity of opposing views. However, the legitimacy of elections not only requires that they have been conducted according to the rules, but also that whoever loses the election acknowledges that fellow citizens who voted for the winning side have made their decision on reasonable grounds. However, the reality in many new democracies looks very different. Elections are widely seen as a zero-sum game where the winner takes all and the loser loses everything. Hungary under Orban is only one – admittedly extreme – example for the deep polarisation of a society where the opposite political camp is regarded as enemies. In all countries where it has become impossible to reconcile the divisions between different camps, partisan media have played a central role. Many have made hostility against the other side and smear campaigns a kind of business model which secures them revenues from the political groups or individuals in whose services they have put themselves. However, in an atmosphere of hostile antagonism, moderation and compromise are becoming virtually impossible, thus keeping in motion a vicious circle of hatred. Given the ambiguity of media partisanship as a source of political identities on the one hand and social divisions on the other, it can be argued that the crucial characteristic of Hallin and Mancini's 'polarized pluralist' model is not the existence of political parallelism, but a degree of polarisation that leads to a dominance of centrifugal forces over the ability to maintain common grounds for a shared sense of citizenship.

Ironically, at a time when Western democracy promotion agencies invest considerable resources into exporting the 'liberal' model of media systems and

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[34] Martin P. Wattenberg, *The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952-1996* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[35] Christopher J. Anderson et al., *Losers' Consent: Elections and Democratic Legitimacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

journalism to the emerging democracies of the 'third wave', this model seems to be in decline in the very countries that serve as role models for objectivity, balance and factual news reporting. Britain has always had a strong – and at times aggressive – partisan press, which, however, is counterbalanced by a strong public service sector and the dominant role of the BBC. Recent empirical findings show that partisanship and polarisation have even intensified over the past decades[36]. Arguably even more surprising is the recent rise of partisan media in the U.S. The proliferation of transmission capacities has allowed cable channels like Fox News to establish themselves alongside the big three national television networks. Fox News pursues a distinctly partisan editorial policy that caters for the right-wing sectors of the population and has supported the disputed foreign policy of the Bush administration[37]. In their comparative analysis of US, British, German, Swiss, French and Italian newspapers, Esser and Umbricht conclude that 'the ideal of Anglo-American journalism as a coherent benchmark … turned out to be a category of limited and at most historical value'[38].

Evidently, 'real existing' media systems are shaped along partisan lines. Rather than converging towards the liberal model, as Hallin and Mancini[39] imply, they seem to converge to the model of 'polarized pluralism' that is often regarded as less fit for the purpose of democratic public communication. The examples from the U.S. and Britain demonstrate that the spread of the 'polarized pluralist' model is not just due to the large number of new democracies which, one might argue, are still going through a process of developing mature democratic media systems. Instead, many established democracies reveal similar developments. It would be too easy to put the trends towards partisan media down to ruthless political instrumentalisation by the ruling power elites or the market strategies of media owners who are looking for profitable niches in an overcrowded market. While these factors are undoubtedly playing an important role, it cannot be denied that there is a genuine need among audiences for a kind of information that helps citizens to find their place in the world.

[36]   Andrea Umbricht and Frank Esser, "Changing Political News? Long-term Trends in American, British, French, Italian, German and Swiss Press Reporting," in *Political Journalism in Transition: Western Europe in a Comparative Perspective,* ed. Raymond Kuhn and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013).

[37]   Sean Aday, "Chasing the Bad News: An Analysis of 2005 Iraq and Afghanistan War Coverage on NBC and Fox News," *Journal of Communication* 61, no. 1(2010).

[38]   Frank Esser and Andrea Umbricht, "Competing Models of Journalism? Political Affairs Coverage in US, British, German, Swiss, French and Italian Newspapers," *Journalism,* first published online on April 15, 2013, p. 15.

[39]   Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, "Americanization, Globalization, and Secularization: Understanding the Convergence of Media Systems and Political Communication," in *Comparing Political Communication: Theories, Cases, and Challenges,* ed. Frank Esser and Barbara Pfetsch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

The paradox is that democratic life – in particular in emerging democracies – needs both: vivid partisanship and detached and factual reporting. On the one hand, partisanship provides orientation in the complex and often chaotic circumstances of transition. It also helps to establish political loyalties that are important for the growth of civil society and a stable party system. On the other hand, objective journalism and unbiased information are crucial for developing a public sphere where different voices can be heard and listened to, and where compromises and shared visions can be forged.

4.

Pluralism, Polarisation and the Search for Unity

The normative principle of pluralism is often seen as the opposite of partisanship because it implies inclusion of different views rather than exclusion. However, pluralism is in fact the flipside of partisanship and it can be argued that the two develop in tandem.

One of the main policy objectives of post-authoritarian media reconstruction is the creation of pluralism in the public sphere. The normative vision underlying this policy is the notion of a 'marketplace of ideas', which goes back to John Stuart Mill's treatise 'On Liberty'[40] in which he uses the metaphor of 'marketplace of ideas' as an argument to defend press freedom against the common practice of censorship of his time. In Mill's view it is through competition of different ideas and the confrontation of arguments and counterarguments that 'the truth' will eventually emerge. Being one of the leading proponents of the 19th century philosophical school of utilitarianism, Mill's justification of press freedom derives from the assumed beneficial consequences of competition between different ideas. In his view 'the truth' is most likely to emerge from the free play of market forces rather than through state regulation. While Mill's notion of a 'marketplace of ideas' is a metaphorical description of a space of human exchange and interaction, liberal media theorists and policy makers have adopted a literal understanding of the term to denote media as commodities that are offered and bought on a market of goods. The economic interpretation of the 'marketplace of ideas' metaphor has led to the assumption that the plurality of channels equals the plurality of ideas that are expressed in the public realm[41]. It is therefore not surprising that privatisation and increasing the number of media outlets figured high on the agenda of media assistance agencies that were engaged in re-building the media systems of the countries of former Yugoslavia.

However, the experience not only in the countries of the Western Balkans, but also in emerging democracies elsewhere in the world, shows that the results of this policy are often counterproductive to the sustainability of the emerging media system and even detrimental to the consolidation of the young democratic order.

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[40] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (London: Penguin, 1859/1972).

[41] See Philip M. Napoli, "The Marketplace of Ideas Metaphor in Communications Regulation," *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 4(1999).

Apparently, the scope of pluralism matters. Here, Downs's 'economic theory of democracy'[42] can help to understand the dynamics of pluralism in a competitive environment. Downs developed his theory to explain the behaviour of political parties in different constellations, but his argument can be equally applied to pluralist media systems. Downs argues that in a system with two competing players – parties, media – whose survival depends on the mobilisation of mass support, these players will move towards the centre of the space of competition in order to capture the 'median voter' – or 'median reader/viewer'. As a result, the profile of the two players will become neutralised and almost indistinguishable, bringing about 'catch-all parties'[43] which dominated post-war Western European politics, and – as described in the previous sections – neutral news media that adopt objectivity as a guiding journalistic norm.[44] Even though both arrangements seem to incorporate and balance different viewpoints, the spectrum of opinions that are represented is rather centralised and mainstreamed. As the number of players increases, the need to occupy the middle ground relaxes and actors – parties, media – seek to adopt a clearer profile that attracts particular voters or audiences, thus giving alternative and non-majority positions a higher chance to be represented in the system.[45] A further increase of players usually leads to growing fragmentations with a strong pull towards polarisation whereby individual actors adopt extreme positions in order to secure loyal followers, even though they might count for only small portions of the market[46]. Symbolic politics and political parallelism that draws on particular identities – ethnic, religious, regional or tribal – is a way of forging strong ties with particular groups of the population.

Thus, there is a point where pluralism turns into a destructive force. Where exactly this point is depends on the kind of divisions and how they are played out in the competitive game. To decrease the risks of fragmentation and polarisation, many constitutions include mechanisms to limit pluralism in the party systems, for example through electoral hurdles that require a minimum of votes in order to claim seats in parliament. However, similar considerations are rarely applied when re-building post-authoritarian media systems. Here, the principle of 'the more, the

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[42]   Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).

[43]   Otto Kirchheimer, "The Transformation of West European Party Systems," in *Political Parties and Political Development,* ed. Joseph La Palombara and Myron Weiner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 177-200.

[44]   It has to be noted that neutrality is a rather superficial understanding of objectivity. Tuchman describes it as a mere 'ritual' whose main objective is to avoid risks, such as accusations of bias or libel suits, but which fails to bring about 'truth'; Gaye Tuchman, "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity," *American Journal of Sociology* 77, no. 4(1972).

[45]   In party systems the key mechanism that affects the number of players is the electoral system. In media systems anti-concentration regulation of ownership exerts a similar function.

[46]   See Arendt Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

better' seems to dominate – with detrimental consequences, as the case studies in this working paper series, but also other experiences from new democracies demonstrate. In the countries of former Yugoslavia the policy of encouraging the launch of new media outlets has led to an oversupply in very small markets. Newspapers with circulation rates of hardly more than 30,000 copies are not only unsustainable in the long run; they also lack the resources that are necessary to produce high-quality information. Unable to afford professional journalists, these newspapers often have to resort to 'cheap' partisanship, which is hardly rooted in a coherent editorial or ideological programme, but uses opinion journalism and ethnic or nationalist rhetoric to fill the daily news hole.

In post-conflict societies the perils of unbridled pluralism are particularly evident. New democracies that emerge from war not only have to cope with the challenges of building functioning institutions; they also have to overcome the trauma of the past and the divisions that have triggered the conflict. Thus, achieving 'democratic peace'[47] in post-conflict societies requires more than a formal settlement on the future distribution of power and resources; it also involves creating conditions that make it possible for the antagonistic groups to live together in one nation. However, democratic politics and the liberalisation of the media have not always brought about 'democratic peace'. The unsettling truth is that in many instances elections and uncensored public speech have exacerbated the already fragile situation in post-conflict societies[48]. The reason is that the space opened up by liberalisation and privatisation is often immediately occupied by those who aim to manipulate public opinion. Especially where political parties campaign on a sectarian agenda, the media usually follow suit resulting in deeply polarised pluralism. The competition between claims for domination by different ethnic, religious etc. groups fought out in media that put themselves into the service of these particularistic interests is worlds apart from Mill's 'marketplace of ideas' where different truth claims compete for recognition through the force of the best argument. In their analysis of the policies of Western media development organisations in post-conflict and crisis states, Putzel and Van der Zwan[49] criticise what they call the 'unsophisticated liberalization of the media' that is not sufficiently aware of the complexities of deeply divided societies.

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[47]   The term 'democratic peace' usually denotes inter-state relations between democracies, but can equally applied to the social order within states; see Paul K. Huth and Todd L. Allee, *The Democratic Peace and Territorial Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[48]   See Voltmer, *The Media in Transitional Democracies,* pp.188-196.

[49]   James Putzel and Joost van der Zwan, *Why Templates for Media Development do not Work in Crisis States: Defining and Understanding Media Development Strategies in Post-War and Crisis States* (London: LSE Research Online, 2006).

What could be alternative ways of building media institutions that are conducive for the consolidation of new democracies? Allen and Stremlau 2005[50] suggest that in some circumstances a certain degree of censorship might be necessary in order to stabilise the fragile situation of transitional and post-conflict reconstruction. This might be an extreme measure that bears its own risks, most notably that of political instrumentalisation when power-hungry elites try to exploit the call for security and peace as a pretext for self-interested censorship. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that a pluralism of hate speech has little value for the emergence of a democratic political communication culture.

A different way of addressing the perils and virtues of media pluralism is to re-think what pluralism in public communication is about and what it is for. Most policy makers and scholars of normative media theory alike[51] understand pluralism primarily as a means for the representation of different views in the public sphere. However, a solely expressive form of pluralism would hardly yield the kind of public exchange that Mill had in mind when stressing the virtues of a 'marketplace of ideas'. Equally important as the opportunity to express views is therefore the opportunity to encounter and listen to divergent voices. As the philosopher Onara O'Neil[52] maintains, public communication and the freedom that underpins it involves both communicators and audiences, speaking and listening. It is only when citizens have the opportunity to encounter the viewpoints, experiences and worldviews of fellow citizens that divisions can be bridged. Voltmer and Lalljee[53] point out that in democratic life it will never be possible to reach agreement on divergent positions, as theorists of deliberative democracy imply. Rather, what is crucial for a viable democracy is respect for the other side and toleration for diversity which, as empirical evidence suggests, is fostered by exposure to different viewpoints in the media[54]. Voltmer and Lalljee's study also shows that exposure to opposing views and respect for political opponents ultimately increases the legitimacy of democracy because citizens are able to acknowledge that others might have good reasons for their views, even though they themselves do not agree with them.

Obviously, partisan media do not provide opportunities for listening that are much needed particularly in unconsolidated and divided democracies, like most of the

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[50] Tim Allen and Nicole Stremlau, *Media Policy, Peace and State Reconstruction: Discussion Paper no. 8* (London: LSE Crisis States Development Research Centre, 2005).

[51] See Denis McQuail, *Media Performance: Mass Communication and the Public Interest* (London: Sage, 1992).

[52] Onara O'Neil, "Practices of toleration," in *Democracy and the Mass Media,* ed. Judith Lichtenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[53] Katrin Voltmer and Mansur Lalljee, "Agree to Disagree: Respect for Political Opponents," in *British Social Attitudes: The 23rd Report,* ed. Alison Park, John Curtice, Katarina Thomson, Miranda Phillips, and Mark Johnson (London: Sage, 2007).

[54] See also Diana C. Mutz and Paul S. Martin, "Facilitating Communication across Lines of Political Difference: The Role of Mass Media," *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 1(2001).

countries of the Western Balkans are. However, partisan media, besides fulfilling an important function in their own right, will be with us for the foreseeable future, as shown in the previous section. Building democratic media systems therefore requires provisions for 'forum media' where people and groups with different beliefs and identities can meet. Curran 1991[55] emphasises the importance of media systems being composed of different forms, formats and principles rather than being dominated by one particular 'model'. The institutional form that is most likely to serve the purpose of enabling listening across lines of division is public service broadcasting, provided it is committed to open pluralism and the public interest. In all successor states of former Yugoslavia building democratic media systems included creating public service broadcasters, usually by transforming the former state broadcaster into a public institution. Given the importance of communicating across lines of divisions, the decision to implement three different broadcasters in Bosnia and Herzegovina each serving one of the ethnic groups of the country would probably be grossly mistaken. In countries such as Switzerland segmented public service broadcasters that serve the different language communities of the country might be a workable federal solution because there is a widely shared sense of national unity that binds different communities together. But in countries that emerge from ethnic conflict the separation of communication channels will only further divide and polarise the society.

Creating a forum media that is capable of bringing together different discourses requires political and civic will. It does not emerge naturally. It might also require new forms of journalism that does not indulge in playing out and exaggerating differences, but one that enables dialogue and listening. One of the main problems with establishing public service broadcasting is its vulnerability to political interference. In many new democracies of post-communist Eastern Europe, public service has been hijacked by political elites to serve their needs of controlling the public agenda. In many cases, a majoritarian approach to appointing the editorial and supervisory bodies of public service broadcasters have been an invitation to the government in power to manipulate the operation and performance of the institution[56].

Besides flaws in institutional design and political dependency, there is yet another danger for public service broadcasting that might even be more perilous to the survival of public service broadcasting and its underlying philosophy. This risk comes from a more universal paradigm shift in public policy that regards market forces and deregulation as the ubiquitous solution to whatever problem is at hand; from education, housing, healthcare to public communication. The technological

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[55] James Curran, "Mass Media and Democracy: A Reappraisal," in *Mass Media and Society,* ed. James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (London; New York: E. Arnold, 1991).

[56] See Karol Jakubowicz and Miklós Sükösd, eds., *Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Change in Global Perspective* (Bristol: Intellect, 2008).

innovations during the 1980s that made it possible to overcome the transmission scarcity that had dominated broadcasting policy since its beginning, coincided with the rise of neo-liberalism to global dominance. Both developments have pushed public service broadcasting to the margins of media policy across Europe where it originated and subsequently dominated national media systems for decades. Even though policy makers continue to pay lip service to public service broadcasting, most public broadcasters see themselves in a precarious situation between market forces and increased political pressure. In 1987, France sold its main channel (TV1) to the private sector, while the remaining public channel has been reduced to an, albeit high-quality, niche enterprise[57]. Meanwhile, the BBC, arguably the 'mother of all public service broadcasting' worldwide, finds itself constantly under threat by voices that challenge the legitimacy of the licence fee as 'ineffective and unethical'[58].

These are only two prominent examples to demonstrate the decline of the institution of public service broadcasting. Thus, like with the 'liberal' model, the reality and philosophical pillars of the 'democratic corporatist' model are disappearing in the very moment when emerging democracies like the countries in the Western Balkans are setting out to implement them.

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[57] See Mary Kelly, Gianpietro Mazzoleni and Denis McQuail, eds., *The Media in Europe: The Euromedia Handbook* (London: Sage, 2004).

[58] David Elstein, "The Licence Fee Is a Fetter on the BBC," *Open Democracy*, January 11, 2013; see also Alan T. Peacock, *Public Service Broadcasting Without the BBC?* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 2004).

5.

Conclusion

The underlying concern that guided this concluding working paper is the question whether 'models' of media systems that have developed in the West can be exported to other countries where democracy is less consolidated. Essentially, this is a question that – explicitly or implicitly – runs through all chapters of this working paper series. While the case studies are addressing this question through a thorough account of the attempts of building democratic media systems in the five countries of former Yugoslavia, this paper approached the issues mainly from a theoretical perspective by exploring some of the key concepts that guide media policy decisions in processes of democratic transition.

Since the publication of Hallin and Mancini's seminal book on 'Comparing media systems',[59] the notion of 'models' of media systems has been widely used to understand the distinct features of both established and emerging media systems. However, as this paper argued, the term 'model' is in itself ambiguous, as it refers to both empirical manifestations of media institutions and practices and normative role models, i.e. how media systems are and how they (ideally) should be. Even though Hallin and Mancini present their models as empirical descriptions, the models they suggest are rooted in normative assumptions that have guided the development of Western media systems, such as political independence, competitive pluralism and journalistic professionalism related to standards of balance and objectivity. On a very abstract level these principles seem to be indisputable for a democratic media system. However, unpacking these norms in more detail reveals a more complex picture. In this paper the ambiguity of general media norms was demonstrated with regard to media partisanship, a media practice that ostensibly violates the objectivity norm, and pluralism, a norm that is valued as a central principle of democratic media systems.

Even though media partisanship is tolerated as a form of public communication that is protected by freedom of speech, most media assistance practitioners who are involved in reconstructing media systems and journalism in new democracies will aim to limit the level of partisanship in the media. However, politics is not a neutral enterprise and partisanship is an essential ingredient that makes political involvement and participation meaningful. This paper argued that partisan communication helps to develop party support, which in turn is important for a stable electoral process. Yet, at the same time, the potentially destructive forces of

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[59] Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics.*

media partisanship are irrefutable in situations when the promotion of particular beliefs and identities turns against outsider groups and political opponents. Since media partisanship is an inevitable, even indispensible, yet problematic part of a democratic public sphere, media development programmes should initiate public debates about quality standards of partisan and advocacy journalism to ensure its benefits for a viable democracy. These standards should include, for example, fairness of critique, respect for the integrity of the opponent and moderation in the promotion of particular worldviews.

In contrast to partisanship, pluralism is an unequivocally positive norm – at least so it seems. Pluralism, or the diversity of voices that have access to the public sphere, constitutes the 'marketplace of ideas' which fosters the expansion of knowledge and innovation; or, as Mill would put it: the truth. However, there is a dark side to pluralism. An expansion of plurality inevitably leads to fragmentation and, in the worst case, polarisation. The idealised vision of a 'marketplace of ideas' where people come together to exchange views is offset by the centrifugal forces of difference. Especially in divided societies, like those in the Western Balkans, the plurality of voices has to be counterbalanced by shared narratives and opportunities to communicate across the lines of difference. Forum media, as embodied in the ideals underpinning public service broadcasting, can provide common spaces where public debates on the big issues that concern the nation as a whole can take place. However, with the rise of the Internet to soon become the dominant means of communication and the decline of traditional media, future media development has to think beyond existing models of 'media systems' in search for new opportunities and forms for public communication.

6.

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