MULTIPLE TARGET AUDIENCES, CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PRISTINA-BELGRADE DIALOGUE

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Abstract

Political actors often use media to convey messages of self-praise to the public. In such cases, they give the media only the information representing their positive side. When the developments in society pose increasing public interest as was the case with the last agreement between Pristina and Belgrade which is treated in this paper, the parties pay more attention to presenting themselves as winners against each other, rather than being concerned with informing the public about the real content of the international agreement. The findings of the paper show that a message giver, which could be either the Serbian party or the Albanian party of Kosovo, has at the same time four groups of message receivers: the country's opposition, its electorate, the opposing parties and the international mediation party. Considering that their message is addressed to those four different types of public, the findings show that the givers of the message do not hesitate to massage the message in order to impact the four different groups of public, and use media only as a transmission channel of their public relation strategies.

Keywords: media; communication actors; political communication; political message; information management.

1. The problem in review

Even after achieving independence, Pristina and Belgrade continue talks with the mediation of the European Union about issues regarding the international telephone code, the rights of Serbs in Kosovo, an association which would gather municipalities comprised of Serbs as a sort of internal autonomy, as well as other technical issues. In these talks, special attention is paid to the communication of government officials of both parties with their internal public. Both parties are cautious while they make public the course of these talks which are expected to be concluded with the normalization of relations. This caution comes as a result of the public opinion in Serbia that still considers the loss of Kosovo to be very

painful, whereas the public in Kosovo is not yet ready for other compromises toward Serbia after the suffering caused by the Milosevic regime. However, the information management could not result successful now at the time of media plurality and when the message could not be isolated only to an internal public.

Each party in these talks, along with the compromises they make towards one other, aims to adopt a specific information management. Each party, when back from Brussels, speaks about victory in these talks while referring to the compromises they have made. This happens because today it is difficult to address a political message only to a certain public and for the message to remain within the state borders of a country. Today, apart from the plurality of media, we also have the plurality of public. This requires that the message reach the preferences of several types of public. These are manifold, as former US Secretary of State Colin Powell expressed during Desert Storm (in Iraq, 1990), when he was the commander of US forces. He suggested his team staff be careful when speaking on television, since at the same time they spoke to the whole world, addressing five different groups of listeners (Leonard 2002:12). The first group of these listeners, according to him, were the reporters who asked the questions; the second group were the American people who watched television; the third group were at least 170 world capitals that were probably interested about what was being talked about; the fourth was that simultaneously you were talking to your enemy as well; whereas the fifth group were your military troops who were exposed to danger (Leonard 2002:12-13).

2. International political communication and cyber diplomacy

Media has become the greatest instrument of international communication, whereas new media increasingly finds use by state and non-state actors to convey messages even to the foreign public. This wide use has produced three conceptual models (Gilboa 2001:1): *public diplomacy*, when state and non-state actors use media and other communication channels to influence public opinions in foreign societies; *media diplomacy,* when officials use media to communicate with foreign actors and to promote conflict solutions; and *mediated media diplomacy,* when journalists temporarily take the role of diplomats and serve as mediators in international negotiations.

Jonsson and Hall (2005) emphasize that in today's communications, politicians and diplomats should be active and daily communicate even privately with the people outside the country, in order to create as positive an image as possible for the country, its policy, its ideas and its values. The challenge of today's diplomats is to move from finding the information – to capturing the imagination (Leonard 2002:90). These authors divide public diplomacy into three dimensions. The first is communication about everyday issues, or information management, approximating the diplomacy with a wide range of news. The second dimension is strategic communication, the management of general perceptions about the country. The third dimension is long-term cultivation of sustainable relations with important individuals. To be successful, a persuader does not move the receiver to a message, the persuader moves the message to the receiver (Gass & Seiter 2009:161). In other words, effective influence or the drafting of activities of public diplomacy require, first of all, considerable communication with foreign audiences in their country. Since the purpose for the participants in communication is to be understood and to dialogue, modern day communication with the foreign public is cleverly done through the media and internet.

The term *information management* was used for the first time by James Reston in front of a Congressional Committee in 1955 (Laurano 2006:34). This technique allows to overcome traditional censorship. The news is not kept secret or refined (as it usually happens for sensitive issues of foreign policy). Instead, the importance is focused not in the news but in creating *pseudo-events* (Boorstin 1987), where the news is to be granted a greater echo than it originally had, or said differently, it consists of transforming a not very important development into important news. Nevertheless, things have changed as not only state factors participate in this sort of communication. Indeed, non-state factors communicate more and more with the foreign public as well. Communication with the external public also takes place from house to house, through the internet, a communication channel that imparts the written message, acoustic, video-message, music etc. The first thing for every diplomat starting their work, or right after entering the office, is to open their e-mail address and see their messages or read the developments (Baldi 1998:10). Information and electronic communication influence external policy not only in establishing a new strategy of sustainable issues but also in changing the ways we deal with it. While ambassadors used to be exchanged between royal crowns and were prepared with knowledge from the

Renaissance, culture, art of communication, courage and eloquence in order to communicate well with the officials of the host state, today they need another culture since the actors of communication for a diplomat are also the people of the host country, not only its state officials. "Recently ambassador resources have dramatically expanded and they include access to the computer, satellite and other information technologies" (Dizard 2001:2).

As a result of new circumstances, the nature of diplomats' work has practically changed, from a traditional diplomacy that has often remained secret, into a massive diplomacy through new communication channels. The rapid development of technology and internet which has generated the expansion of social networks has also brought a new communication channel with the foreign public, through the internet, known as cyber-diplomacy. This massive communication at global level and the progress of new information and communication technologies have brought substantial challenges to the traditional course of international relations in the distribution of authorities on various terrains. "This has increased the activities of the global civil society and has led to a financial and global market expansion" (Potter 2002:3). According to Potter, such activities correlate the impact of innovation in communication and information technology with foreign policy and diplomacy. On the other hand, Melissen (2005) considers the development of this diplomacy mainly as a result of the progress of communication and information technology. "All these developments give opportunities to redefining the public diplomacy in conditions of an active role for the public instead of passive objects of foreign policy governmental strategies" (Melissen 2005:30).

The world is nowadays living sunk deeply into the electronic digital telecommunication technology which Deibert (2002:27) calls *hypermedia*. "However, the information explosion increases the need of increasing the reliability of information" (Potter 2002:23). It has also brought the democratization of foreign policy, because communication with the foreign public has also increased the transparency of foreign policy and at the same time has facilitated the possibility for manipulation attempts. Wolton (2009) says that the internet is an ocean of information, but there is a permanent question about how to establish relations with someone in a more easy, free and original way, because in this versatile communication channel, everyone communicates about everything, whereas reliability needs enhancement (Wolton 2009:53). "The internet is a great space of freedom, but also a huge

financial, criminal, mafia, propagandist perversity, the greatest warehouse of noise and manipulations when the essential information is not confirmed" (Wolton 2009:55). In public cyber space, the individual emerges into the space of public discussion, but the individual also emerges as a community, so community and collective speaking increases. It is a sort of democracy that goes downwards from state decision-making to community decision-making. "This virtual public space starts from the local one to the global one and it could be whether international or supranational" (Fuga 2013).

The daily communication is no longer the privilege of elites (political, military, economic etc.) of a country and its governance structures which were usually thought to have too much information, but a large public is being formed with the widespread of the word and the traditional media sight (Hyavard 2001:20)

This kind of message exchanging space aims for the creation of relations, which is the foundation of today's public diplomacy. As career diplomat George Kennan (1997) says, despite the fact that the foundation of American diplomacy are the relations cultivated by the ambassadors, these days this diplomacy may be called "diplomacy without diplomats" (Kennan 1997:207) in the sense of the physical presence of diplomats in the host country. The creation of this diplomacy without ambassadors at the time of internet has become a reality. After 30 years, the USA opened exactly this Embassy without ambassadors to communicate with the Iranian public. Diplomatic relations between Washington and Teheran were terminated in 1979 with the Islamic Revolution. The same year, on the 4th of November, a group of students entered the US Embassy in Tehran holding hostages dozens of American officials for one year. Precisely this dramatic episode marks the end of diplomatic relations between the two countries, to be reset virtually between the US Government and the Iranian people in October 2011. The reason of opening this virtual Embassy, as explained in the web page, is for the American voice to be heard by a wider Iranian audience, "in the absence of direct contact, we hope it can serve as a bridge between the American and Iranian people" (**Why Virtual Embassy Tehran? n.d.**). This Embassy-web page includes multiple messages addressed to the Iranian people, audio video messages, social networks etc.

Although they belong to two countries without diplomatic relations, Pristina and Belgrade continuously communicate through the messages transmitted by the media.

Delegations of the two states, Kosovo and Serbia, on 25th of August 2015, with the mediation of the EU in Brussels, signed an agreement for the creation of the so-called *Association of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo*, which provides exclusive rights for the Municipalities inhabited by Serbs in Kosovo. The signatory parties have interpreted this agreement in very different ways, each of them speaking of a great victory in the negotiations. Different interpretations of the signed document continue to be made not only by the signatory parties, but also by the opposition, in both Kosovo and Serbia. Transmitting the statements of Kosovar and Serbian officials, the media have informed the public in Kosovo and Serbia about the content of this agreement, but always in different ways, with respect to the competences that the Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo will have. The Serbian party proclaimed itself triumphant in the negotiations mediated by Brussels, just in the same way as the governors of Kosovo. "Using sports terminology, Serbia has won with the result 5:0. Serbian Municipalities Association in Kosovo shall have their Mayor, assembly directly linked to Serbia, and many executive powers" (Đurić 2015). The Serbian Prime Minister also made a similar statement (Vučić 2015).

On the other side, the Kosovar party has as well expressed to have reached great achievements with the conclusion of this agreement, denying that Serbian Municipalities shall have executive powers (Deutsche Welle, 2015), because with this agreement, the sovereignty of Kosovo is finally established even in the Municipalities inhabited by Serbs in the North of Kosovo. Foreign Affairs Minister Hashim Thaci states that the signing of this agreement marks "*de jure* the recognition of Kosovo by Serbia and that the Serbian delegation signed this agreement after great international pressure" (Tači, 2015). A similar statement is made by the Prime Minister of Kosovo.

The interpretation and the argumentation by government and nongovernment actors, including the media, are completely different for the same issue.

2.1. The message receiver

In political communication, a message addressed to the public, aside from informing, intends to influence, convince, sometimes manipulate, orientate and encourage to act. Even the messages in the case of this political agreement, apart from informing, aim to influence the receiver of the message. In this case, the message is drafted in such a way that the effect

would lie over some heterogeneous public, because the same message is addressed: to the internal public from whom the vote is required; the country's opposition so as to neutralize and minimize its critics; to the foreign chancelleries, especially to Brussels as the mediator; the opposing party, which in this case is either Pristina or Belgrade. While formulating such a message, the political actor wants to be all-inclusive, first of all interlocking a message liked by the electorate, but saying the reality or at least a piece of it, so it will not provoke the opponent or the mediator who may disprove if the statement has a great diversion from reality; to save the tranquillity of the opposition; to prove oneself as a good political manager. In such cases, finding a common denominator about the content of a drafted message is difficult and the information is more of a public relations message than a message close to reality. In other words, in this case, *a massage* is done to the message in order to make it more preferable to the message receiver's preferences.

2.2 Political communication and message transformation

The problem that arises here extends into pragmatic moulds of political communication, a communication which is as old as politics. But today's political message, in a time of new technologies and internet, when the message could be delivered in real time, has transformed not only the message, for it is challenging for the political actor who constantly loses the luxury of counselling before they pronounce acute and important issues in political developments. This is why policy and relations between individuals in today's societies are in continuous transformation. A huge role in the transformation of these relations has been played by new technologies. The political individual hopes that by using these technologies they shall continuously convey massive personalized messages to the public, for the purpose of raising their image and convincing the public about the ideas they express. The individual in this constant and permanent bombing is not always clear whether they are receiving information, having fun, consuming an advertisement or a message which combines a little bit of everything. Thus, this is a political communication that could be comprehended as an exchange of discussions between the politicians in power and those of the opposition, mostly during the electoral campaign. However, political communication also includes learning the role of communication in political life, in a wider sense, encompassing the media and polls of public opinion as well as marketing and political advertising (Todorov

2003). This common designation is focused on the constantly rising number of political actors. Said differently, if we understand political communication just like any other communication having politics as an object, then we could simply define it as intentional communication about politics, undertaken by politicians and other actors for the purpose of reaching specific objectives (McNair 2011). This short designation has advantages because it includes two of the most basic characteristics of contemporary politics: the expansion of the political sphere with the rising number of problems and actors, interlocked in the field of politics, as well as the enhancing role of communication. In other words, political communication is a fighting field of discussions, having politics as an object and having the purpose of getting the power for a political interpretation of reality. The basic idea is that today politics get their public character through the media, meaning that politics become real not through the people's personal experience, but through their presence in the media. The problem of political communication dates back thousands of years.

3. Communication classics

In the European cultural tradition, the studies concerning the relations between politics, political communication, convincing language or rhetoric can be encountered in Ancient Greece, in the 5th-4th centuries BC. This communication is often international because of the geopolitical specifics in the city-sates of the time. Plato (427-347), since that time required education in order to govern, said *let's invent with our discussions the method to educate the warriors (soldiers)* (Plato 1999). Moreover, he supported the idea of taking the power even through manipulation. "A man must want to seem fair and this probably makes one seize the governance of the state; you shall do good to your friends and bad to your enemies and this way you shall glorify Gods and shall be zealous to them; this is how you could do good more than a fair man could and it looks as if Gods love you more than the fair man" (Plato 1999:59).

It looks as though even at that time the methods of political communication were well known, while the advanced level of convincing methods, oratory as well as propaganda, is obvious. "And, in order to hide our rogueries, we shall hatch plots and there are masters who are ready to teach the art of eloquence and jurisprudence science and with their help we will partially convince the others and we will partially use the force with them and being the

strongest we shall not be punished" (Plato 1999:63). In other words, if we had given to our fiction the best possible view of the truth, we would have made a useful action through the lie.

Even Aristotle (348-322) requires more convictions for governance and this is to be reached through the obedience influenced by oratory. It looks as if he requires conviction with more presented facts. For as much as the direct democracy of the time had no need for communication mediated tools as we have the media today, Aristotle consulted political orators who should have:

"The goods for which a broad consensus was reached; welfare; some virtues: bravery, justice, restrain, patience, generosity, miracle; …body attributes: beauty, health; further: wealth, company, honesty, glory, art, ability, fear, admiration, jealousy, what they love and hate; …the good: good is the thing that is bad for the enemy – opponent, good is the things that deserves praise, the thing that is appreciated more by the others, good is the thing that is resolved easy, the thing that is desired, the thing that gladden friends, the thing that is chosen to be done by those we greed" (Aristotle 2002:58).

Rhetoric, according to Aristotle, is the ability to make use of what could be convincing at any given time and for these special convincing abilities are required not only speaking and sentence formulation, but also good personal attitude, intonation, looks etc. The present time of media development reminds us that media effects are not only words, but also appearance, the finding, the moment etc. It is not enough knowing only what should be said, but also knowing the way it should be said (Aristotle 2002:265). Aristotle's advice of that time applies today to those that treat public relations.

Opposing Plato, Aristotle sees rhetoric as a dialectic with the tools of general knowledge not of any special science. From the Aristotelian point of view, rhetoric differs from political propaganda because it does not require to impose ideas in the absence of critical access, but rational justifications. In contrast to science, which relies on truth, rhetoric refers to the actions in which sentiments, uncertainty and hopes play an important role in the formulation of judgments. The fact that human evaluations interact with entities and constituent materials helps explain why political rhetoric should always remain unscientific (Diodato 2003:22). This is the reason why in the third book he writes that if fraud applies as a truth, then the truth could not be trusted (Aristotle 2002:233).

4. The political message as an information and as an advertisement

Ancient debates about the existing relation between what is objective (or the truth) and political communication can be retaken now to analyse the problems concerning the debates that take place in Kosovo about a signed document which deals with the level of competences that Municipalities inhabited with Serbs inside Kosovo shall have. The messages conveyed by both parties include contradicting information. In earlier studies, especially during the 18th and 19th century, the authors emphasized the great importance of the press constituting an imperative element of the democratic system. Moreover, Thomas Jefferson considered the press as "the best instrument to brighten the human mind" (Bivins 2004:4). This shows that since the ancient Greece's direct communication, and after Gutenberg, we have yet another revolution in the spreading of the political message, and the press also enters as a political factor. However, later on, this assessment changed starting with Lippmann (1922), Dewey (1955) and the increasing voices and beliefs that the media do not play an influencing and mainly positive role in the democratic processes anymore.

Afterwards, we also have the assessment that the media turned from a reality description tool into a reality creation tool (Berger & Luckmann 1966), and with television it is absolutely notable how this media, from a reality recording tool, creates a new social reality (Bourdieu, 1998). On the other hand, the individual, as explained by Goffman (1959), constantly tries to play their role aiming to present themselves as well as possible in everyday life. Even in the 21st century, political communication where countries successfully enter into relations with other countries, or as it is preferred to be called today, global governance, includes complex technical tools for the management of people. In other words, global governance represents a power system, recognition, depending on the strategic orchestration of human freedom, within which dynamic and complex networks of governance are formed. These networks operate through strategic manipulations of diverse principles of society; this orchestration requires detailed knowledge of the population and the area where they live (Dillon 2003:135).

Thus, in our case, the state recognizes its citizens' preferences and that is why it intends to deliver such a message which on the one hand would fulfil their preferences regarding the internal regulation of the state of Kosovo, and on the other hand, would not incite the discontent of the international community.

However, not only state actors play the role regarding information and the truth. Media creates a reality in society and according to Luhman (2000), whatever we know about society, or think about the world, we know it through the media and this truth is not only about the knowledge of society and history, but nature as well. But, we may talk about the knowledge of mass media in the double sense. This ambiguity about the same issue also occurred with the rights of Serbs in Kosovo after the agreements with Belgrade were signed with EU mediation. The debate held in the media by the political actors made the public have different interpretations, which resulted in major ambiguity over the same agreement. Several media inform about a useful agreement for Kosovo, and some others do the opposite, so it is evident that this depends on the contiguity of certain media with actors and political organizations. Mediated political communication often contributes to reducing the value of democratic ideals and civic engagement. The researchers who find corruption in the process of democratic information, in the field of strategic marketing that excludes segments of the public from the field of politics, would do good to recognize the fields in which individuals demonstrate in an impressive way the autonomy of their critical thinking beyond information management (Bennett & Entman 2005).

5. Media contiguity with politics and media plurality

Regarding media contiguity and their attitude in supporting one or the other side, in these days of market and commercialization when the media, just like businesses, intend to profit or they face a survival crisis, their corruption can occur. Communication during previous eras of pluralistic democracy was relatively uncorrupted by the latest technologies (Bennett & Manheim 2005:281). Nowadays, with the multiplication of possibilities to possess a medium which the internet has facilitated, this problem is even more present. The level of media corruption is much higher now than it used to be in the past. The interaction between the media system and society often happens to be a confrontation of different realities, fragmented either within the society or the media system in a country. The importance of political communication for the citizens depends, first of all, on the decision-making power toward the local community and on the structure of the state (Lang 2003). And this importance in our analysed reality is quite huge because we are talking about the internal functioning of the state where within the state another entity is being formed, a Serbian

entity, directly connected to Belgrade. The state actors need information that describes actions as sustainable solutions, as can be noticed from the statements of the state actors that there are no political but only technical negotiations with Serbia, to the current repetitions that the Association of Serbian municipalities would sooner lead Kosovo to the EU. This is how Luhman (2000) explained this; according to him, the code of media system and the difference between information and no information is that the social system works with the information. Therefore, the system is forced to have new information and the repetition of the information becomes an event. After these events, the information is needed again and this gives rise to the need for new information (Luhman 2000:18).

Political actors, in this case, seek to follow the preferences of various types of public to whom the message is addressed, and to create a close connection with the social reality. The message receiver, according to Wolton (2009), refuses the information that concerns them whereas the individual, the people, would like to get their vision of the world.

6. Conclusion

In the era of continuous bombing by multiple information, the individual consumes too much information. Most of this information goes through a massaging process of the political message. For some of it, considering that the distribution time of the information is 24 hours, the receiving is continuous and selective at the same time. Nowadays, the individual receives the message when they want to, not through *prime time* when the others serve it, but when they have time for it, *my time*. Following consumer preferences, the information conventionally known as *objective* and *managed information*, loses even more the thin distinctive line. Media and the political actor already follow more the preferential reality of political and mediated consumer, than the social reality.

On the other hand, even communication actors are transformed into new communication channels. Today, even the citizen as a communication actor, through social media and other online media, becomes a political actor participating in political communication through comments, assessments or political views. This has led to the democratization of communication and political thinking and, at the same time, to increasing non-professional opinion about social issues. In this communication channel, the ongoing battle is no more about the relation between reasoned and objective justification on the one

hand, and non–objective or non-professional on the other hand, but what is required there is the dominance of quantitative support for a certain issue. Communication actors are more superficial than in traditional media and harsher in public discussions. Thereby, in this virtual political communication, the truth could be best proven by the one who has more powerful tools for the dissemination of a political message and greater mobilization for participation in communication. This means that the social reality and massive perception about it have been transformed.

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