

Addressing the young leaders of the Balkans

The Political Parties, Media and Negotiation in SEE



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Opening speech to the participants* of The Bulgarian School of Politics, Course 1, Political Democracy, Decision-making and Leadership,

Dear young Friends,

Let me start my address to this auditorium with my compliments and my best wishes with reference to your outlook as young political leaders of the Balkan.

That would not be an easy job for you - concerning recent past and history of our region.

Thanks to the organizers of this meeting I have almost complete freedom how to develop my address and the subject.

Regarding my own experience with the media, as a journalist, but also as a person involved, for some times, in skinny contacts and fat collaboration with some politicians in my country (Unfortunately always with a taste of disappointments) I decided to divide my address into two parts.

First part has the goal to back you with some items which are intrinsic to the nature of the media - the press and the broadcasting as well. Second (part) is devoted to how people, including politicians and leaders, think about social conflicts or problems. What they should have in mind facing with social and political items. Together they should carry your discussion on today's subject among yourselves, and less regarding my personal opinions - which can also be wrong.

I would like to begin my address with **two recent media stories from Belgrade**.

On Monday, this week, the morning after the already famous French NO to the European Constitution, all of the 5 most influential tabloids were without any information about this historical event on their front page. They located the news deep inside the papers.

A few days ago, every one of those tabloids, put on its front page a story about the soldiers from Norway who were singing, at one drunk soldier's party, a song in which they ironically mention unsuccessful missions of the UN in the world.

But, unfortunately, in that same context, they were also singing about the evil Serbs, including the Serb on whom the 14-th century Myth of Kosovo is based on.

Despite the fact it was a parody, and the fact that the trustworthy source of the information was a gay website - the whole Serbian press, and public opinion, got mad and angry.

They forgot everything what the Norwegian government has done to help Serbia after the NATO bombardment along with what they did for the Serbian refugees from Kosovo. The Serbian protest was so loud and tense that the Ambassador of Norway was forced to apologize in advance.

The investigation which promptly started in Norway was not finished.

The story has disappeared from the tabloid pages after two or three days. But, a bitter taste remains, for the Ambassador and Norway.

Should we inquire what is more important?

The potentially very important fact concerning Belgrade's perspectives to join the EU, or the facts about the drunken soldiers from a gay website.

To make things worse, neither political party mentioned this story in this fashion. Their spokesmen supported the media, they were afraid to confront with the opinion of the tabloids. Finally, adding insult to injury, the Party whose President owns a nation-wide TV network, (what is a miracle by it self), repeatedly criticized the Serbian government for remaining silent.

Luckily, the Serbian PM is not known as dynamic person. So, in this part of the story the Belgrade government remains clean.

On the other hand, all important Serbian politicians claimed on Monday, that the French NO has no influence on Serbians EU perspectives.

In this few lines we have almost everything what is important to our subject.

Let us start with **the tabloids as a relatively new phenomenon and experience in our region**. It is said of tabloid newspapers that they are written by people who are bad writers for people who are bad readers. Even if this could be taken as a funny definition it does not explain the essence. Maybe it just shows how such newspapers can deny their true nature. Besides, we need a better explanation of the tabloids nature - because after a long period of repression in the countries under the communist rule - tabloids have become unexpectedly influential. All papers demand a measure of literacy. Tabloids keep this demand as low as they can. Short words, short sentences, few paragraphs of more than a single sentence, few articles of more than a few paragraphs, and a great many pictures. It is possible to read them everywhere and anywhere. Optimists also say that their readers have background for deeper understanding of what they are writing about. But what if opposite is true? And also, what about the central truth that newspapers are what they are because human nature is what it is? The style, the speed at which most of their contents are written and judged, means that they reflect certain human reactions with an undissembled accuracy.

Their content cannot beat the capacity of their writers. But also, it can not go above the choice of their readers. So in the end the readers are the figures of power.

Once when a tabloid and its body of readers come together, the readers remain the freer of the two. The paper could not try to reach a fresh group of readers without the risk of losing those it had. However, any reader could choose a different paper.

So it is the readers who determine the character of newspaper. In the end it could be said that the media is conservative in tone because its readers are. The only hope in this story is that the tastes of readers may modify over the longer period. They shift as a result the existing environment of idea changes - as well, as a result of what they discover to be appearing in other opponent media.

Without any doubt there are people who read “posh” papers and those who read “popular” papers.

But my intention is only to remind you that the broad shape and nature of the press is at last determined by no one but its readers.

I will leave it to your imagination - to figure out what all this could mean among less educated groups of readers - who are also voters in elections and referendums.

Or, what can happen if this conservatism of the tabloids and their readers gets “supported” by the secret services, or various ex-intelligence groups that were supposedly removed in the social upheavals in your countries.

The third, and our question is about the politician’s answer to the previous: Is their approach to this subject different if they are in power or if they are in the opposition?

The experience with this phenomenon in Serbia could be very illustrative.

In March 2003. The Serbian PM Zoran Djindjich was assassinated. I will remind you that he was the first Serbian PM elected after 50 years of communist rulers and their successor, represented by Slobodan Milosheвич.

In the second part of 2003. tabloids lunched a serial of scandals, intrigues, plots etc. The targets were Djindjic’s friends and collaborators, the Carriers of his sarcophagus, connected with the Serbian government.

The epilog of the tabloids three month offensive: the downfall of the government and breakdown of the famous, infamous to some, coalition under the name of DOS, founded by Zoran Djindjic.

Performer No1 in this offensive was the current Serbian minister of finance. Mladjan Dinkich. Day by day, he was on the front pages of the tabloids. They loudly followed his finger pointing at corruption and financial scandals among the rulers.

And, his party, previously an NGO, entered the parliament in the elections held by the end of December 2003.

The main tabloid in this offensive, the paper with the biggest circulation, and the best partner of the finance minister is, now, Mr. Dinkich 's Public Enemy No. 1.

The paper printed a series of articles of the same style as two years before.

But this time connected with names from the Minister's party. And with figures in millions instead of thousand's. Euros, of course. However, after this, the paper's building was full of financial inspectors, who were looking for the grounds to ban the tabloid, for weeks.

This story is still unfolding.

And, at the same time, this is a story in which I prefer to stay out of the way which leads to moral dilemmas.

A matter of much greater political importance is the question of who were the supporters that transferred the figures and other scandalous materials to the minister then and the tabloid this time?

So far, neither side was ever willing to discuss the issue.

My remarks will now lead in different direction.

I would like to share my **concern and discomfort regarding the impression that most Serbian parties use the tabloid's style in their activities.**

Their way of communication with the public is of the same nature as that of the tabloids.

Sometimes you can have impression that the only literature read by Serbian politicians are the tabloids.

The politicians in Serbia do not just share the topics and subjects with the tabloids.

Worse still, they share the same way of thinking.

They are hostages of the tabloids.

And I prefer - the fight for the biggest paper circulation and for the prosperity of the party, must be different.

Quo licet lovi no licet bovi.

Simplification, cheap effects, and speed are more dangerous for politics and politicians - then they are for the press and the journalists.

With this in mind, one could ask, and answer, why the Serbian democratic parties hesitate to confront, for instance, radical or old-fashioned Serbian nationalism?

Political hesitation, under such circumstances, could also be taken as another name for fear to be different.

This also may partially explain why most Serbian parties have such programs which are like the eggs – impolitely similar, and are confusing, not to mention irritating, to the party's members.

Sometimes the gestures of rightwing and leftwing party leaders are so the same that it's insulting.

Usually, we must oppose the claims that the press and the politicians are opponents and nothing else.

But it seems that in this case, and not only in Serbia, we have to clarify their roles.

The first duty of the media is to gain the earliest and most correct information at the time, and to instantly make them the common property of the nation...

Their duty is to enlarge the field of democratic civil control and force of public opinion. To anticipate, if possible, the facts. And to stand between present and future.

By definition **the statesman's duty is just invert.**

He carefully guards from the public eye the information by which his actions and and opinions are regulated.

The politician prefers to keep his judgment on passing events till the latest moment. Then he reports, if he is wise, bearing in mind the practical interests of his own party or country.

The first duty of the media is to speak.

The first duty of the other is to think.

The politician is not allowed to gamble with the effects of his words.

Because sometimes it could be very dangerous not only to himself but is also dangerous for his nation.

One Serbian poet wrote: I was killed with sharp, big words.

And Nobel price writer Ivo Andrich once said:

“Who leaves in the building made of glass should be particularly careful when tossing stones”.

It seems that in Serbia these two famous men of our culture have been forgotten.

It could be useful to keep in mind these sentences! Even if you are meant to be young leaders and politicians.

Dragging facts into the open, journalist may also bring forward unwelcome arguments.

Politicians, dependent on the voters hope that the public comments on their plans and deeds will be favorable. Journalists are not much concerned with that. They have blind spots of their own. Even if they know that the Governments budget is right, they can not avoid the considerations on the other side.

But it would be wrong to present journalist and politicians only as opponents, as I already said a few moments earlier. It seems that the best description of their relationships is that they are opponents who depend on one another - like in boxing or wrestling.

Politicians and governments need the media in order to have its deeds and expectations publicly set out.

The media, concerned to be as interesting as possible, constantly ask the government machine for help.

The mutual dependence is there. It exists. The clearest expression of the interdependence of the two are those in the parliaments or in individual dealings with the press officers.

Remember **the interest of a politician and a journalist are not identical**. However both serve to the system and the society. One can ask are there any points where these two interests meet ? Yes, and for journalists those are the most difficult areas of all. On the Balkans in particular.

Journalists are also citizens. In that key they are no more opponents to the government than the great body of citizenry is. They want the country to be well run, to overcome its problems

at home and abroad. In so far as those are task for the politicians. In most areas of life, that sets up no conflict.

Ordinary reporting of what the Government is doing ought to help it: Its aims will then be understood and shared. Even criticism could be helpful: it may set the Government on a wiser course. Things get complicated when those critical comments and observations become facts in the case. In other words: to declare that a certain Government project is failing may speed up its failure. Remember the articles on privatization, or currency devaluation, or other issues in the national economy. In such instances the journalist may be acting directly contrary to his fellow citizens' best interests, and his own interest as a citizen.

But what with war, and the war efforts?

Answering that question, a great number of journalists put their duty to their country first. They see what they were allowed to see. And they write what the army censors allow them to. But what if that duty is misinterpreted or misunderstood? Sometimes a journalist's job could be a nightmare, when his choice is clashing between, let's say, patriotism and humanity. For a journalist there is a tension between the such claims of his country and the claims of his work.

Imagine the journalist who is to report about civil conflicts or ethnic clashes. Regardless of the claims that a journalist is a member of the country he lives in, or a nation, like it or not, and that is why he has to accept the obligation as well as the benefits of his membership, this tension can never be entirely resolved.

I'm certain that you can number many of the examples to his dilemma in the region of Western Balkan.

Our region became famous thanks to bad news.

And even today most of the population is surrounded with bad news. How can we continue, can we keep up with the **BBN, Bad Balkan News**?

Ask your colleges at this meeting about their impressions on this subject.

You are here to get support, as young future leaders of the Balkan, how to think about the problems and how resolve them.

You are expected to help your own political parties how to face the Balkan problems.

What should be your logical starting point?

Where is the logical place to begin your analysis of how to start to think about the problems?

So, you have to consider the opinions, information and impressions, which can form the foundation of your thought.

Remember, if there are serious distortions or inaccuracies in your information about the problems - the most powerful analysis, your best effort to solve the problem, will be unable to generate correct and productive conclusions.

The first thing that you have to know is that your **personal experience**, as well as common folk wisdom, including the media production, **could be false**.

You have to ask yourselves about the limits of your experience and your knowledge. Personal experience is a very poor guide to know what is happening in our society.

Even the so called experts on dealing with the problems must constantly have in mind the bias in their personal experience. So, you have to **stop bias in your acting**.

This is not an easy job.

Beside, most people have very inefficient abilities in processing even simple information. **Very little that could be remembered is actually remembered**. Because most of the things are forgotten, those parts of information we do remember carry a great deal of weight in influencing our final decisions.

So, if there is a bias regarding which information we can recall on a personal level, we are, also, in a position to make serious errors in our decision making process.

If you are familiar with computers remember G.I.G.O. – what means garbage in, garbage out. So, if you use biased information, you will get biased conclusions.

The most powerful calculations cannot make the correct decision if the information is unclear.

The next step you have to resolve is the folk wisdom.

Look around you. Is there, and what are the ethnics, or national stereotypes you are surrounded? Compare it with bias concerning Americans and Russians, Greeks and Turk's, Black and Whites etc.

Balkan is very reach part of the world in folklore. The results of your experiment , the characteristic you know or you can get, will be false, misleading and completely wrong.

People who seriously think about social problems usually realize that both the conventional freedom and their personal experience are poor guides to understanding society.

So they expect help from the media. In the political slang, they are willing to be "informed citizens". That can, as we know, end tragically.

Remember the Serbian or Croatian TV before the fighting in Croatia. **The sad fact is that people turn to the news in a sincere effort to overcome their personal bias.** But, often, they end up getting a worse bias from the news.

The point is that regarding stereotypes and inadequacies of personal experience they also apply to most of the information presented on the news.

In many cases, our personal experience is a much better guide than the impressions created by the media and politicians.

At first glance, it might appear that the news goes in one ear and out the other without making any permanent impression. This is not completely correct. Much of the material on the news might be totally forgotten, but an deposit remains. This occurs because the news uses various devices to help the material presented overcome our usual tendency to ignore and forget information.

First, TV news and newspapers use pictures of dead bodies, crying children, mob scenes, funerals, and other attention grabbers. Second, they surround themselves with an air of authority that gives the impression that what they are presenting is really important.

Perhaps most important of all, **the news has an effect due to constant repetition.**

If constant bias does exist in the news media, our "informed citizen" will be presented with that bias day after day, year after year.

The effect of any one presentation might be minimal, but cumulative effect is substantial, extensive.

A fundamental problem with the news is that it is the news.

The news is dramatic, exciting, strange, unexpected, thrilling, and shocking...

In a sense, the news presents precisely those things that rarely happen.

So, as a result, getting your understanding of society from the news is risky and uncertain.

The news does seem to be mostly bad. Political scandals, bombings, tragic homicides, bankruptcies, and other horrors are surprising, dramatic, shocking, and are standard topics for political oratory. To put it simply, t h e y are news.

And they are bad news.

Those who develop their understanding of society from the news, therefore, frequently develop an extremely pessimistic attitude towards life in their environment.

I have already pointed out that the experts, due to their one-sided experience in dealing with problems, frequently have a very poor understanding of the backgrounds of the problem they try to resolve.

In addition, many experts have a personal motivation to overstate the extent of the problem they are supposed to solve.

In order to justify their position, power and annual requests for budget increases, those empowered to fight social problems tend to overestimate the need for their services. As a result, the sources of the most depressing stories regarding social problems are precisely those authorities whose job is to solve the problem they now tell us it is out of hand. The point is simple. Those who has to put into effect its position regarding the solution of social conflicts or troubles face a double problem.

On the one hand, he must demonstrate to others that the problem exists. On the other hand, he must show that his doing his job .Therefore and particularly when they are seeking funds we can hear two claims.

First, they say that by reason of their efforts the problem they deal with is approaching solution. But, second, and in the same breath, they say the problem could perhaps be worse then ever and requires renewed and increased effort to keep under control... In making these claims officials provide good reason for continuing the existence of the position they occupy.

So, keep that in mind dealing with missions and helpers.

Social-problem solvers not only present overly pessimistic view, they also can create confusion about the nature of the problem they are supposed to be dealing with..

It is not my intention to talk about UNMIK as you maybe can think.

We have to imagine what would be the effect on the average citizen if the media presented more of the good, "normal" news.

There are many experiments attempted to answer this question.

The outcome shows always that people answer more positive view of human nature when questioned after hearing good news.

People may think that the news don't have any effect on them.

But constant exposure to bad news is likely to create feelings that our problems are getting worse and worse, and there is nothing we can do about it.

If most people become convinced that our social problems will inevitably get worse, they will stop trying to solve them.

As a result, social problems will indeed get worse.

Let me try now to keep your attention concerning **some confusions about social bargaining and negotiation.**

Their meanings are often overlooked in the media. But also by the politicians, despite fact that this notions are in fashion - particularly in our region.

If you repeat the same word over and over, the word begins to lose its meaning.

Constant focusing off attention or the repetition of words are also common techniques for inducing hypnosis. The fish is the last one to discover water.

Bargaining related to social or political problems is a common place on the news.

And frequently appear completely irrational.

Bargaining involves two or more parties, each of whom has some power to reward or punish the other.

If only one of two parties has power, there is no bargaining: there are only demands.

The cat does not bargain with the mouse. Nor the king with the slave.

It is the essence of bargaining that each side can hurt the other.

There also must be some conflicts, or disagreement between two parties, or else there would be no need for bargaining in the first place.

In the ideal bargaining situation the parties attempt to find a solution which achieves goals of each side.

This is known as *win - win approach*.

This should not be confused with compromise.

Let's compromise is a fine-sounding phrase, but compromise is actually the opposite of a win-win strategy.

It is a *lose – lose strategy* because in compromising neither side gets what it really wants. No does compromise solve the problem of the fairness or legitimacy of the various demands. Needless to say, bargaining about political or social problems as exposed in the news, does not usually suggest a *win – win strategy*.

The negotiators are often too unconfident of their own position to give the appearance of trying to help the other party achieve its goals.

Instead, they promote a public image of a "tough" negotiator who adopts a *win-lose strategy* and is strong-minded to be the one who wins.

In order to demonstrate that, they are hard-working and resolute negotiators - they publicly introduce themselves surrounded with an air of energy and commitment.

This is often only for use at home, for the benefit of those who are curious about what is happening because the actual bargaining is secret.

Despite no one is sure what they are doing, the public is clear that they are doing it energetically.

Ask your parents about bargaining in former non-ramp Yugoslavia. Unfortunately the end was in blood, pain and crime.

With this as background we can face a few of **common tactics in bargaining and negotiating.**

(The logic of many bargaining situations has been analyzed by means of the theory of games).

But our short examination has nothing to do with logic. Let us concentrate on the psychological ploys that come into play when the parties adopt lose-lose or win-lose strategy. *Claiming a lack of responsibility* is one of the examples that runs.

What does it mean for one bargaining position.

If negotiator can convince the other side that he is only messenger with no real power - there will be little pressure on him to change his position. Because, he has no authority to change it.

An illustration: Imagine the representative who might say "Personally, I like your proposal, I think your offer is a good one, but if I were to bring it back, home, they would skin me alive."

In international diplomacy the US representative might say "We like your proposal, but the President could never get it through the Senate

Much of this *denial of power* by some of the most powerful people on earth would be funny if the results were not so grave, particularly for small nations.

If a negotiator cannot convince the opponent of his lack of power, he can carry the *strategy* one step further and actually make himself *not responsible*. This approach can be illustrated with the use of police in the riot. You might trust the police not to run you over in cold blood, but when a policeman is on the horse galloping toward you, can you trust the horse?

I am sure one can find better examples in the Balkan diplomacy and bargaining.

Going crazy is the next step, a variation of the strategy of loss of responsibility.

One side can expect that as long as the other side is rational, it will not want to carry out its threat and hurt itself, just to hurt the opposition.

It is therefore helpful to convince the opposition that it is dealing with a completely irrational group that doesn't mind hurting itself.

Even the youngest Serbian pupil met the slogan Better in the grave than to be a slave.

However many stirring slogans did not pass the test of praxes.

After more than a half century Serbian pupils they were told what was the price of the slogan, in terms of lost human lives.

Former Serbian President Milosevic also was inspired with this claim of irrationality in bargaining.

The next step in negotiation is contradiction by itself. It is known as *destruction of communication*.

That means to make demands more convincing in a way to make the demands and then cut off all communication.

By destroying the capacity to communicate, the opposition is, in effect, incapable of negotiating and will feel more pressure to agree with the demands.

That was the last attempt of Mme Albright's in her communication with Mr. Milosevic before she sent her angel over the Serbs.

Unfortunately her tactics were not compatible with Milosevic's.

Anyway, because of failure to communicate can signal the seriousness of one's demands, it is frequently employed as a symbol of determination.

During international crises the governments will call home their ambassadors, not just for "consultations" but also to underline their perceptions of the serious situation.

The breaking of communication can signal that a party is not really very interested in the negotiations, and does not care if there is an agreement or not.

The more desperate one party is for an agreement, the more likely he is to give in to the others demands.

This implies that the party that has the smaller need for making an agreements gets the better deal.

This is sometimes called *the principle of small interest*.

With this principle in mind, one can decide to get a haircut in the middle of the negotiations. In the international disputes` one side might suggest that a war could be helpful. In America because it would help the economy. In the Balkan to increase support for the ruling section. Like most bargaining ploys these claims have an element of humor about them, but can also backfire and contribute to serious problems.

We can also remember that many announcements by the bargainers are made for the official records. Or to protect their public image and are not believed by either party.

On the other hand, there is always the possibility that the bargainers might begin to take their public image seriously and trick themselves as well as the public.

Maybe this part of my address is not completely in the path of our subject, but I have the feeling that **particularly young leaders of the Balkan will face the situations in which they will need any knowledge or information connected with bargaining and negotiation.**

Also, **ability to bargain is of the grate importance for young politician from the Balkan.**

Coming from the Balkans you should be, at least, suspicious of the well-known fraise that history is the best teacher of life.

On the Balkan, either this sentence is false, or your parents were very bad students.

However, my advice to you, at the end of this address is:

Escape the past;

Try not to be influenced or infected with history myths, tales or facts with the capital F. Instead - prefer contemporary, modern knowledge and sciences;

Try, as much as you can, to select your point of view from which you can have the best pictures, and perspectives, of the future;

Try to escape, whenever you can, the people's wisdom and common sense, if any, of the Balkan peninsula.

This should be among your "credo-s" in the communications with the media.

With the hope my address was not boring to you, thank for your attention.

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*Course 1 was attended by participants from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Kosovo and Metohia and Serbia and Montenegro. Ohrid, Macedonia, 3 - 5th June 2005

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