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Political Implications of the COVID Epidemic and Sources of Power Authority: Comparative Study of BiH, Croatia and Serbia

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Abstract

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia and Serbia, which are three neighboring countries that have shared a common state framework in Yugoslavia for the most of the 20th century, not only share many common elements of history and culture, but also have significant differences that are also manifested regarding the future projection of Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries. Croatia is a full member of the EU and NATO for years now, and from that position, had faced the pandemic that hit the region in early March. Serbia has expressed a willingness to join the EU, while it has a negative attitude towards NATO, trying to take a neutral position in relation to the world's largest political centers, including Washington, Moscow, Brussels and Beijing. On the third side, BiH, despite declarative expressions of political will towards Euro-Atlantic integration and opposition of Serbian political parties in the Republic of Srpska entity when it comes to NATO membership, lags behind on that path with numerous problems and ethnic tensions between political parties which share power on various levels of government representing different nations. The first cases of COVID-19 virus occurred at approximately the same time in all three states, which since the 1990s have had complex relationships burdened not only by different interpretations of events from the end of the twentieth century (and even earlier), through existing disputes involving open border issues, migration policies which include migrants from Syria but also other countries from Algeria to Pakistan, energy policy, Yugoslavia legacy, ethnic and minority issues, and, as we said, projections of the future EU and NATO integration.

The initial thesis of this study is that the three mentioned post-Yugoslav states at the beginning of the epidemic adopted similar measures in terms of state security, public health and national economy, but communicated them with their own publics on different models, inheriting, despite numerous political and cultural similarities, different political styles of management. These different styles will be the subject of analysis and comparison, especially in terms of the relationship between politics and the profession(s). Furthermore, given that two of the three countries (Serbia and Croatia) conducted general elections during the epidemic and that BiH was preparing to hold

local elections in the autumn, we would compare how the epidemic – as a topic and context – reflected on the election campaign and election results, and how the epidemic is reflected in the case of BiH where campaign *de facto* have started already. The following hypothesis is that the COVID-19 epidemic has strengthened the rule of existing political elites despite the objects coming from part of the general and professional public especially regarding the transparency and consistency of certain decisions.

The basis of our research field will be official documents of the authorities in the research countries, media appearances of political leaders and other entities involved in crisis communication related to COVID-19 epidemic, as well as news from public media and state agencies as authentic transmitters of public policies.

Keywords: COVID-19 epidemic, political styles, sources of authority, power, political and professional elite, crisis communication, election campaign, elections

Introduction and setting the hypothesis

The coronavirus epidemic is a planetary event with its intensity and spectacularity most similar to modern warfare, with stage lights directed at it as an expression and explosion of power understood in the sense how Foucault sees and describes it. Namely, Foucault believes that power lies in the event (Gordon, 1980) and not in the structures as claimed by Althusser and the structuralists (quoted in Cekic and Blagojevic, ed, 2012). Yet both French scientists agree that rituals are the scene of power, which is important for this text and about which there will be much talk. Because, is there a ritual today without a media dimension?

Regardless of the great and fruitful theories about power, the origin of power and where power lies, in the face of the COVID-19 epidemic, humanity has shown *non-power*, the absence of power to defeat the enemy *in real time*, another "living" species, invisible but lethal. Although COVID-19 is not largest nor the deadliest pandemic, this is the first that took place before the eyes of mankind (and still taking place) with continuing coverage of the world media in the world society (Sloterdijk, 1994).

On a personal level, the average or ordinary citizen of a country in Southeast Europe - let's focus here on three from our comparative analysis: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia - followed the news without delay, as the World Health Organization (WHO) as an important institution in the multipolar world declared an epidemic; then with greater or lesser interest the far news from the Far East; then regionally worrying news from Italy and Spain when the globality of the phenomenon was already apparent, and then the virus appeared in these three countries as well, at about the same time. Here, too, the *live broadcast* proved to be

an indicator of human powerlessness: We first experienced a chilling anticipation of the first cases with the vain hope that the epidemic would by some set of circumstances bypass the borders of a given nation-state. This was followed by the alarming finding of the first infected person, with a multitude of details (name, surname, place of residence, nationality, movement, where he/she became infected, etc.). This was followed by the expectation of the first infected person in the local community and/or the capital of the country, so that the transmission of the infection by COVID-19 culminated with the first deaths at the national level, then in the local community, etc. Of course, this was not the end of the media-accelerated production of psychosis, which follows the curve of the infected, the cured and the dead, which have become regular sections of all relevant media.

Such an amount of exposure to media content and social media activities even before the extreme situation with COVID-19 produced a paradigm shift of the normal, and with the pandemic showed extremely negative side effects of *online* life in which reality turns into a mixture of dystopian Terry Gilliam's "12 monkeys" and Steven Soderbergh's film catastrophe "Contagion". This is the context of new normal in which Sloterdijk's prophecy that the genus *homo sapiens* power their outrageous investments in audio-visuality won the dimension of time, had been fulfilled.

At the beginning of the epidemic in the South-East Europe, in the three countries, political decision-makers found themselves in the position of non-power from which they should respond to the unprecedented challenges that can be summarized in three key dimensions: first is *preventive* and refers to decisions that will reduce contamination ("lockdown", modeled after the People's Republic of China which had closed Wuhan, the city in which they recorded the first COVID-19 cases). The second is *health* and concerns the strengthening of the health system through the procurement of testing tests, construction of facilities, such as hospitals and isolators for patient accommodation, procurement of medical equipment and materials, increasing human capacity, in general all measures that contribute to reducing mortality in the fight against the virus. Here is also China as ideal, because this state is in record time, of just ten days, has built two hospitals in Wuhan. The third dimension is *economic* and concerns the measures taken by policy makers in a given society to reduce the scale of the damage caused by lockdown and the mutual closure of state borders¹.

¹ Here we are served simpler scheme, although a reduced extent and in two field : health and economy . However , social and state of organization fight against the epidemic is much more complex and can be broken down into many more factors that need to dissect, which can be seen on the website of the World Health Organization (WHO), a link to <https://www.who.int/Emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance> , last time accessed on August 25th 2020.

As we can see, this is a complex state management, which deals with numerous participants *stakeholders* from the public field, from the Presidents and the Prime Ministers of the states, a significant number of administrative and government institutions, various experts and inter-teams, to various medical and economic experts and general practitioners. To all this we must add the existing interest groups, to which the measures apply, such as trade unions, associations of civil servants and workers in the economy, associations of private entrepreneurs and employers, parents of students, guild associations of health and education workers ... The list is almost inexhaustible and shows the complexity of observing the problem of responding to COVID- 19 in one society¹.

The issue of power is crucial is for this text. If Foucault is right and if power is not in the institutions but in the event, and if rituals are the “scene of power,” what rituals in today’s online world of *real time* reporting can we primarily talk about? In most national European countries still exist those classic rituals like laying flowers on the altar of the homeland, the inaugural ceremony of initiation of the new President, imperial and royal weddings, military parades, great sports festivals with the presence of the highest figures ... etc. However, these rituals are time-limited, usually to the day, a spacious on the original or secularized *axis mundi* (Ellieade, 1971), although through media and in direct transfer and subsequent application for viewing (free or for pay *video on demand* - VOD) they become both *indirect and unlimited*. But if the epidemic situation of permanent confrontation is humanly possible through electronic and new media and social networks, then this field is where it should show the answers. Media rituals in *realtime* - press conferences that are held without time delay have become the scene of power. And here the question to on the press conferences addressed? The president of the state? Prime Minister? Minister of Health? A spokesman for a particular ministry? Experts from working groups? It depends on several factors, but we will here comparatively investigate and provide answers in the three countries which, according to our initial hypothesis, in addition to a number of similarities (similarity which has much more than the difference, especially in the masses), characterized some differences, and one of them is the difference in the nature of the authority of the leader as the supreme emanation of the political elite.

¹ Here we have not dealt at all with the special phenomenon of the explosion of content on social networks , content that is not journalistic in the sense that it brings something new as the core of news or some analytical journalistic genre like commentary because it is not based on facts. The word is about the phenomenon of the production of the text which no use-value or deafening and contaminate virtual space which adorn a kind of vagueness distinction public and private. This phenomenon rests the entire industry of fake news articles and on the relevant answers civil sector and the state only have to provide relevant answers . Something on the muted this author has written : Boric, F. (2013). (Self)regulation of social and online media: Against virtual windmills. Sarajevo: Center for Policy and Governance, available at http://www.cpu.org.ba/media/21170/ANALIZA-cpu-regulacija-BOS-2014_1_22.pdf

Here, clearly, we have in mind the classical theory of the German sociologist Max Weber who, more than power, which for him is amorphous because it can refer to all conceivable circumstances, studied domination as a special kind of power. He defined domination as “the likelihood that orders with certain content will be adhered to by a certain group of people” (Allen, 2004). This particular group of people in our case the citizens of a state, and the three of them, who will, to a greater or lesser extent, adhere to commands with specific content. How much and to what extent they adhere during an epidemic depends on the type of authority that establishes dominance and seeks obedience, and there are three pure manifestations: traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational authority. The three neighboring countries in Southeast Europe have predominantly different sources of authority. We will compare how much they strengthened their positions on the elections held during the epidemic.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia, which are three neighboring countries that shared a common state framework in Yugoslavia for most of the 20th century, not only share many common elements of history and culture, but also have significant differences that are manifested in the political projection of Euro-Atlantic integration. Croatia is a full member of the EU and NATO, and from that position it welcomed the pandemic that hit the region in early March. Serbia has expressed its will to join the EU, while it has a negative attitude towards NATO due to the direct conflict of the 1990s, trying, according to official Belgrade, to take a neutral position in relation to the world's biggest political centers, including Washington, Moscow, Brussels and Beijing. BiH, despite declarative expressions of political will towards Euro-Atlantic integration and opposition from Serbian political parties in the entity Republic of Srpska when it comes to NATO membership, lags behind with numerous problems and ethnic tensions between parties representing different constituent peoples¹. The first cases of COVID-19 virus occurred at about the same time in all three countries, which since the 1990s have had complex relationships burdened not only by different interpretations of late twentieth-century events (and even earlier) but also current and existing disputes involving open issues. borders, migration, energy policies, mutual ethnic issues, all the way to the projection of future integration into the EU and NATO.

BiH, Croatia and Serbia (in alphabetical order) are three of the six former Yugoslav republics that are made up roughly territorial and population majority in Yugoslavia (1945-1992) and previously in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941). Three ethno-

¹ Numerous scientific works from various fields have been written about the specifics of the constitutional and legal system of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Here we refer to Sarcević, E. (2010). An emergency constitution. Consolidation of the Constitutional Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo: *Rabic* ; Pejanovic , M (2017). The State of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Democracy. Sarajevo: *University Press*

national communities, Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks, were formed very specifically for the Balkans, identically connected with three religious traditions¹. The citizens of the three countries shared history of the twentieth century, but also a identity differences that the email does not coincide with the boundaries of the state, so we have a community Croat and in Herzegovina and Bosnia and who are part of the national community of Croats from the Croatia; Bosniaks from the Sandzak region in Serbia, who are part of the Bosniak national corps with Bosniaks in BiH, as well as Serbs from the entity Republic of Srpska who are part of the national community of Serbs from Serbia. However, as independent states, each of the states in accordance with its specifics creates state administrations, and the pressure of the European Union for reforms includes numerous reforms from general democratic political standards to concrete measures in 33 areas². The three countries are at different levels of interaction with the European Union. Did these differences lead to different leadership styles, or did different leadership styles increase the differences between countries? And is there a correlation between authority styles with the measures taken especially at the beginning of a pandemic?

Traditional authority as a source of power: Bosnia and Herzegovina

The existing constitutional structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the result of the Dayton and Paris Peace Agreement of 1995, and implies a unique system of *power share* with significant elements of consensual democracy or consociation (Lijphart, 1999), which constitutionally recognizes the three constituent peoples (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) and other citizens (national minorities and those who do not declare themselves ethnically). The State of BiH has a three-member Presidency of BiH (from the ranks of the Bosniak, Croat and Serb people) and the Council of Ministers of BiH as the executive body that elects the bicameral Parliament of BiH. The state is constructed by two entities, the Republic of Srpska and the Federation of BiH, one of which is centralized (Republic of Srpska) and the other decentralized (the Federation of BiH consisting of ten cantons). Let us add that the Brcko District is also under the jurisdiction of the state, which gives us a complete picture of the complexity of the

¹ On the history of the development of national communities in Southeast Europe, see more at: Altermatt, U (1998). *Ethnonationalism in Europe*, Sarajevo: *Svjetlost*.

² Each year, the European Commission issues a progress report for the candidate countries for membership of the European Union, and on which teams of experts work. They also contain general assessments of political criteria, the rule of law, democracy, public administration reform, etc. Report for Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2019. *Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership of the European Union* available at <https://ec.europa.eu/neighborhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-bosnia-and-herzegovina-analytical-report.pdf>, Serbia Report 2019, *Serbia 2019 Report*, available at <https://ec.europa.eu/neighborhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-serbia-report.pdf>.

state system of BiH. All these levels - state, two entities, ten cantons and the District Brcko, have to some extent the executive powers of the sectors that we are interested in this analysis: ministry of health, ministry of economy and ministry of public security.

At the state level, within the Council of Ministers of BiH, there is a Department for Health at the Ministry of Civil Affairs (Ministry of Civil Affairs, Sector for Health, 2020). The Ministry of Civil Affairs is the address to which international donations in the form of tests were sent (Ministry of Civil Affairs, August 12, 2020). Security Minister has been appointed to the beginning of the epidemic for the head of the Coordination Body of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the fight against the pandemic coronavirus (Bosnian National Network, 2020), which had a coordinating role and a specific order-like decision to close the borders (Savez za bolju buducnost, 2020). The foreign Affairs received the donation of humanitarian aid (BHRT, 2020). The media announced that the Council of Ministers in 2009 adopted a national plan for the fight against the pandemic, a national strategy for the protection of the then pandemic swine flu, but that in the case of an epidemic caused by a coronavirus has not been conducted (Klix, 2020).

The entity authorities have much greater competencies in the health sector than the BiH Council of Ministers. In the Government of the Republic of Srpska there is the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (Vlada Republike Srpske, 2020), and the line minister at the beginning of the pandemic, Mr. Alen Seranic was very active and convened press conferences on a daily basis (RTRS news, 2020) at which he reported on the number of infected, cured and dead, as well as prevention measures (Anadolu Agency, 2020). At the beginning of the pandemic, the Government of Republic of Srpska appointed two crisis headquarters, the Headquarters for Monitoring the Epidemiological Situation in Republic of Srpska, in connection with the new coronavirus, and the Headquarters for Monitoring the Harmful Consequences of the Crown Virus on the Economy of Republic of Srpska (Dnevni Avaz, 2020). The RS Government website contains 26 measures to mitigate the harmful effects of the coronavirus on the economy of the Republic of Srpska (Vlada Republike Srpske, 2020). The Prime Minister of the RS, Mr. Radovan Viskovic, along with the health minister, will be one of the most media-exposed figures in RS and BiH in general during the epidemic.

The other entity in BiH, the Federation, also has a competent Ministry of Health (without social protection, social policy is a separate ministry in this entity), and all ten cantons in the FBiH have their own ministries of health. Given that the ten cantons have different socio-economic characteristics (population, level of development), some of them rely more on the Federation, some are more independent and developed, which makes the Federation virtually asymmetric. Assistant Minister of Health in the Government of FBiH Mr. Goran Cerkez was a

person who imposed himself at the beginning of the epidemic as a person fighting the coronavirus, and the Federal Ministry of Health formed a Crisis Staff to monitor the situation and take measures to prevent and detect early cases of new coronavirus in the Federation (BHRT, 2020). Subsequently, the Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina had a thematic session at which they brought nine measures related to the epidemic, of measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus, over indebtedness Civil Protection Federation, to recommendations for banking and tax system as well as recommendations for employers and workers (FBiH Government, 2020, March 16). The FBiH government then formed a Crisis Staff for the economy sector, which was to work in the coming period to implement economic measures to alleviate the coronavirus pandemic (Dnevni Avaz, 2020). The legislative body in the Federation, the bicameral Parliament of the Federation of BiH, adopted the Law on Mitigation of Negative Economic Consequences two months after the beginning of the pandemic (BHRT, 2020). On the FBiH Government website one can find a few more things related to coronavirus: Economic Stabilization and Recovery Program of the Federation of BiH 2020-2021 (FBiH Government, Program, 2020), Orders of the Federal Civil Protection Staff, including those on the distribution of medical equipment and resources from donations, orders restricting public gatherings and work, reviews of delivered material, etc. The website of the Ministry of Health contains 20 orders and recommendations of the Crisis Staff of the Federal Ministry of Health (2020), as well as the conclusions and decisions of the FBiH Government, eight of them (Federal Ministry of Health, 2020). At one point, the Federal Government has organized daily press conferences and midday and early evening at 18.00, at which the public addressed the Prime Minister of the Federation of BiH Mr Fadil Novalic, Minister of Health Mr Vjekoslav Mandic, Assistant Minister of Health Mr Cerkez, Director of the Institute of Public Health of the Federation of BiH Mr Davor Pehar, and the Director of Civil Protection of the Federation of BiH Fahrudin Solak (Federal News Agency - FENA, 2020). As we can see, the FBiH Government has created a special page (www.covid-19.ba) where one can find basic information and indicators on the number of infected, dead, tested, gender and age structure, etc.

Unlike the Republic of Srpska, the Federation is decentralized in structure, with shared competencies with lower levels of government (cantons), and the authorities are made up of representatives of political parties that often do not have agreed common policy. The responses to the coronavirus pandemic were unequal first between the two entities and then in the Federation of BiH entity itself. As a plastic example of non-functioning of the Federation, we can mention that in this entity is still in power, the Government of the Federation from 2014-2018 mandate, because the party the winner after the general elections of 2018 have not

been able to agree on the new composition of the government or certain political issues that are tied to the choice of the Government FBiH.

The first case of infection in Bosnia and Herzegovina was recorded on March 5 in Banja Luka, Republic of Srpska entity (Faktor, 2020). Then, the Minister of Health, the Director of the RS Institute of Public Health, the Director General of the University Clinical Center and the Mayor of Banja Luka addressed the press conference. The RS Minister of Health will be one of the most exposed in the media in the coming weeks as the number of patients grows. The first death was recorded on March 21 (Anadolu Agency, 2020). According to the World Health Organization, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as of the 27th of August, reported 18,324 confirmed cases of infection and 554 deaths (World Health Organization, 2020). The curve shows that the number of infected and dead has been growing since the beginning of July, and corresponds to the easing of measures at all levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The University of Oxford has compiled an index of the severity of the government's response to the COVID epidemic 19, based on nine criteria, including a ban on work and travel, the closure of borders, schools, etc. According to the Government's Response Stringency Index on a scale of 0 to 100 (where 100 is the most stringent response), Bosnia and Herzegovina had a value of 59.26 according to the latest available measurements (August 20), while the highest value was recorded in April at a time when BiH introduced curfews and restraining orders, and amounted to 92.59 (Our World in Data, 2020).

Bosnia and Herzegovina is complex state, which can be seen from the division of competencies and responses to COVID-19. At the beginning of the epidemic, the representatives of the state, the three-member Presidency of BiH, did not stand out at press conferences or make permanent statements, but left it to lower-level executive bodies, entities, and the Council of Ministers as a state government of limited capacity. If we look at the political constellation of forces in BiH, and the obvious dominance of ethnicity in politics and the state, a clear conclusion emerges that political authorities draw power from tradition, that is, to transform Parkin Weber's traditional authority into an explanatory construction: "Submit because that is what our people have always done" (Allen, 2004, pg 100).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, unlike the other two countries, no general elections were organized at the time of writing, but local elections are scheduled for the fall, in which mayors and city and municipal councils will be elected (Centralna izborna komisija, 2020). This level of government has almost no authority over the health system or other elements of the system directly related to the response to the epidemic. Therefore, it is difficult to make a correlation, but it can be said with certainty that a significant number of mayors will retain power in their

local communities because citizens will vote, to paraphrase Parkin, or Weber, "as they have always voted."

Charismatic authority as a source of power: Serbia

The first case of coronavirus infection in Serbia was recorded on March 6 (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 2020), and according to the World Health Organization, 31,099 cases, 707 deaths, were confirmed by August 28, with two clear upward trends in April and July, which corresponds to the first wave that affected the region, and the second that is a consequence of the easing of measures. Serbia started introducing strong measures in mid-March, which resulted in an absolute lockdown in the last third of this month, so according to the aforementioned Index of the Stringency of the Government's Response to the COVID-19 epidemic, Serbia recorded a maximum of 100 points. In mid-May, Serbia relaxed the measures (51.85 on May 17), and ahead of the elections held on June 21, due to better epidemiological conditions but also due to the election campaign, the measures were even more significantly weakened: in the period from 6 to On June 28, they amounted to 24.07, to gradually return to an index value of 45.37 on August 20, 2020 (Our World in Data, 2020).

The General Election was won by the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), led by current President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, who achieved a result in the Serbian Parliament that has not been recorded in the recent history of this country. His party won over 60 per cent of the vote, or 188 seats in the state parliament out of a total of 247. Vucic's longtime partners in power, the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), won 32 parliamentary seats with 10.38 percent of votes. The only opposition party in the Serbian Parliament will be the list "Aleksandar Sabic - Movement for Serbia", which won 11 seats, and the assembly will still include representatives of national minorities, namely Hungarians, Bosniaks and Albanians (Republička izborna komisija, 2020).

The central figure of political life in Serbia for years is Aleksandar Vucic. For the past eight years, he has served as First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense (2012-2013), then Prime Minister (2013-2017), to become President of the Republic in the 2017 presidential election. Vucic was the general secretary of the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) until 2008, when together with the deputy president of the party, Tomislav Nikolic, he founded the SNS, which he has headed since 2012 (Predsednik Republike Srbije, biografija, 2020).

Unlike Bosnia and Herzegovina, where three members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina are not nearly has not appeared in public, leaving leadership in the fight against Covid-19 a lower level (executive) authorities, the President of Serbia since the beginning of the epidemic emerged as the leader of the battle, which was fought always and near cameras

and media. Earlier, the President of Serbia introduced the practice of press conferences that are broadcast live, without time lag and editorial interventions. During the epidemic, this, in a way, escalated into frequent addresses to the nation. Thus, the official website of the President of Serbia records the following addresses to the nation: March 12, when he announced the establishment of two crisis headquarters, one that will deal with the health situation, the other that will be responsible for eliminating the consequences for the economy (Predsednik Republike Srbije, press centar, 2020). Both staffs are headed by a president. Three days later, Vucic chaired the crisis headquarters and made a decision to declare a state of emergency. Two days after that decision, Vucic addressed the nation and announced the new measures adopted by the Government of Serbia, and two days later, on March 19, he addressed the public and announced new and stricter measures. At a press conference on March 21, the president announced that it was "the most difficult day for Serbia" in terms of the number of newly infected. President Vucic also addressed the public on March 23, March 27, and April 2. In addition to press conferences, President Vucic visited Serbia and delivered medical equipment, and on May 11 he addressed the public to ask the participants in the political race to run the campaign without violence and large gatherings (President, pres centar, 2020).

In addition to the figure of the President of the Republic, the Government of Serbia also paid attention to the presentation of the fight against coronavirus. On the official website www.covid19.rs it is possible to find statistical data, reports of the Institute of Public Health, news about COVID-19, important telephone numbers, and various other important information (Ministry of Health: COVID-19, 2020) . On the second page related to the page of the Government of the RS, www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs, one can find the listed regulations and other acts related to COVID-19, divided by the entity that passed them on the acts of the National Assembly (Three laws and one decision), decrees passed by the Government with the co-signature of the President of the Republic during a state of emergency and confirmed by the National Assembly (15 decrees), acts of the Government (32 decrees, decisions and conclusions), acts of the Ministry (11 ordinances, orders and instructions), and acts of the National Bank (six decisions) (Pravno informacioni system, 2020). Among the publicly recognizable figures from the Crisis Staff, which has a double-digit number of public figures and is composed of political decision makers and experts, Dr. Darja Kisić Tepavčević from the Institute of Public Health "Dr Milan Jovanović Batut", Prof Dr Branislav Nestorović, pulmonologist and Dr Predrag Kon from the City Institute for Public Health in Belgrade can be singled out. Through their media appearances, they imposed themselves on the public as experts more than the Prime Minister

Ms. Ana Brnabic or the Minister of Health, Dr. Zlatibor Loncar, who manage the staff (H1, 2020) .

Yet the President of the Republic dominated public appearances much more than any member of one of the two crisis staffs. Not only when it comes to the fight against the coronavirus, but also many other aspects of politics, including the election campaign, Aleksandar Vucic is more focused on the media and tools of new technologies than any of his political predecessors or opponents. An example of this is the first online pre-election rally of the SNS, in which Vucic, as party president, appeared in front of a hundred or more sympathizers who are in their homes and to whom Vucic presents the party program, with applause and glitter (Aleksandar Vucic, 2020) . Examples of Vucic's charismatic approach are press conferences that are broadcast live by the state news agency and other public and commercial media without editorial interventions (Tanjug News Agency official, 2020). No Serbian president in recent history has so skillfully used the power of the media to promote his policies. Vucic really took power with promises that he would change the lives of citizens - eradicate corruption, raise the standard, build infrastructure. "Obey because I can transform your life," is the sentence construction by which Parkin interprets the charismatic type of domination (Allen, 2004, pg 100).

Legal-rational authority as a source of power: Croatia

The Republic of Croatia is the Western neighbor of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. A significant part of Croats lives in BiH, who, together with Bosniaks and Serbs, are constituent peoples. Croatia is the only one of the three countries (since 2013) that is a member state of the European Union, although both BiH and Serbia have declaratively expressed their will for membership in the European Union since the late 1990s. However, according to many experts, the membership of BiH and Serbia will be absent in the coming years and election cycles.

Somewhat earlier than the rest of the observed region, Croatia registered its first infected patient, on 25 February (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2020). The first case was announced to the public by the Prime Minister of Croatia, Andrej Plenkovic, after a meeting of the National Civil Protection Headquarters. By August 29, 9,549 cases of infection and 180 deaths had been confirmed in Croatia. The first fatal case was registered on 25 March (World Health Organization, 2020). Although with significantly fewer cases than in BiH and Serbia, Croatia has seen a certain increase in infections since mid-August, as a result of both weakening measures and the tourist season, which is crucial for Croatia's gross domestic product (GDP).

Croatia has already introduced certain measures somewhat earlier, and in the period from mid-March to the third part of that month, according to the Index of Stringency of Government Responses, it reached 96.30. Such a situation persisted until April 26, when at intervals the situation slowly returned to normal (index 89.81 to May 10, 70.37 to May 23), and on June 13, which corresponds to the beginning of the election campaign, it fell at 32.41, as it held throughout the campaign and even the elections. Further on situation in Croatia made even more difficult by the earthquake that struck on March 22, Zagreb, the strongest in the last 140 years (Radio Free Europe, 2020-1).

Elections for the Croatian Parliament (general elections) were held on 5 July. The election was won by the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), a conservative center-right party around which the previous government was formed, which welcomed the COVID 19-epidemic. The new prime minister became the old one, HDZ president Andrej Plenkovic. He has been leader of the HDZ since 2016, when he took over the party from a right-wing political team gathered around then-President Tomislav Karamarko. By the way, the HDZ is a party that emerged from a movement that fought for Croatian independence, and has always contained various structures, from techno-managerial currents from the center of the political spectrum, to Christian-Democrat conservatives to the nationalist right. The arrival of Plenkovic at the head of the HDZ and then the Government of the Republic of Croatia can be interpreted as a departure from the type of charismatic leader such as the founder of the HDZ and the first president of Croatia Franjo Tudjman, HDZ president and Prime Minister Ivo Sanader. the most important section on Croatia's path to EU membership, or the current mayor of Zagreb Milan Bandic, whose party experienced a debacle in the elections. In fact, the Plenkovic and critics from his own party and political opponents and political analysts regularly criticized the lack of charisma (Jutarnji list, 2019), the fact that a good portion of caries he spent in diplomacy and abroad Andrej Plenkovic, 2020). However, the results for HDZ are the best in the last decade and a half: HDZ won 66 out of 151 seats in the Croatian Parliament, and with eight votes of representatives of national minorities (Serbs, Bosniaks, Italians) and two votes of small partners formed a government soon after the election with majority support (N1, 2020-1).

The reasons for the success of the HDZ and the failure of the opposition from the left (SDP) and the right (Homeland Movement) in the elections are the subject of discussion by election experts, political scientists, social psychologists, PR experts, etc. Nevertheless, the successful fight against the coronavirus, both in terms of health and in terms of fighting its consequences, has benefited the HDZ, according to many analysts (Zebic, 2020). If we take into account that on the other side of the Adriatic Sea, Croatia is neighboring Italy with a six-digit number of infected and a five-digit number of deaths, it can be said that the citizens of

Croatia were satisfied with the response of the Plenkovic's Government and HDZ. This is supported by the fact that the Minister of Health at the time of the coronavirus, Mr. Vili Beros, who has been the most exposed public figure for months, received the largest number of preferential votes of all candidates on all lists, followed by Prime Minister Plenkovic (Jutarnji list, 2020). The president of the HDZ had a personal result much better than the leader of the SDP Davor Bernardic, who in addition to the lack of charisma is also criticized for the lack of competencies (Latković, 2020), and the leader of the Homeland Movement Miroslav Skoro, who played the card of the charismatic leader of the right - lost. The winner was the somewhat bureaucratized, goal-rational Plenkovic, who apparently lays out his legitimacy in Parkin / Weber's sentence: "Listen to me because I am your superior by law" (Allen, 2004).

Of all the compared countries, Croatia has the closest chancellery system with a strong prime minister and his cabinet, but Croatia also has a President. As of this year, it is Mr Zoran Milanovic, the former Prime Minister and president of the main competitor to the HDZ conservatives, the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Milanovic won the elections earlier this year (HRT, 2020), so Croatia has *de facto* cohabitation, although the powers of the President have been significantly reduced over time, as have relations between the president and prime minister in Germany, Austria and Italy. However, whatever the actual power, the President of the Republic carries strong symbolism because he represents Croatia in foreign policy, represents all citizens of Croatia, he is someone whom citizens trust and elect in direct elections (unlike the position of Prime Minister, who is elected in Parliament, although is the unwritten rule that the prime minister be the president of the winning party).

With a difference of the President of Serbia, Croatian president did not take an active part in the fight against the coronavirus. On the official website of the President of the Republic of Croatia, you can find news, announcements of visits, speeches on various occasions, there is one address of the President from March 18, 2020, and he stressed that he has no authority to deal too much with these issues. political duty obliges to praise what is good and suggests what more should be done (President, 2020). After this speech Milanovic has not officially addressed on this occasion.

As for the Government of the Republic of Croatia and its Ministry of Health, on both pages there is a striking banner that leads to a separate, Official website of the Government for timely and accurate information about the coronavirus, www.koronavirus.hr. The page contains data from the Croatian Institute of Public Health on the number of infected, recovered and deceased, for Croatia and collectively for the world (Zvanična stranica Vlade za blagovremene i točne informacije o koronavirusu, 2020). It is possible to download the Stop COVID-19 application, which serves to simply warn citizens that they may have found

themselves in epidemiologically risky contact (Official... 2020). Furthermore, it is possible to find useful information for citizens by counties (central level of government in the Republic of Croatia), section "What I need to know" with subsections "About the disease", "About everyday life", "About travel", "About schooling", "On business" and "On prevention", then "Government measures", where all government measures are listed in chronological order, and it is possible to enter individual subsections such as "Measures to help the economy", "Measures of the Ministry of Finance ", "Measures to help farmers ", "Measures to help farmers and fisheries ", etc. There are also sections "Important numbers", "Tips" on how to deal with a pandemic, practical tips against stress, how to use humor, etc. The site is depersonalized and there is no statement from any official, not even in the news section, which contains news about decisions, recommendations, weekly reports, etc.

As for the personalities who imposed themselves in public appearances, there were representatives of the National Civil Protection Headquarters for months: Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of the Interior and the Chief of Staff doc. dr. sc . Davor Bozinovic, Minister of Health prof. dr. Vili Beros, director of the Clinic for Infectious Diseases "Dr. Fran Mihaljevic" prof. dr. Alemka Markotić, and dr. Krunoslav Capak, director of the Croatian Institute of Public Health (Krnica, 2020). They carried the burden of communicating with the public much more than both the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic (24sata, 2020).

Conclusion: Towards synthesis

Here, we made a comparative analysis of three neighboring states that share both a common past and complicated interrelations, and tried to give general answers to the question of how political and state elites responded to the coronavirus epidemic. For the purposes of the analysis, we have considered the concept of power and domination in order to consider where the elites of the thought-out states draw it from as a source of legitimacy. In order to make a comparison of the source of authority from which power is drawn, we used Weber's classical triple scheme, that is, Parkin's concepts derived from Weber's triple classification of tradition-charisma-legal-rational. We confirmed the initial hypotheses that the sources of power among political elites and leaders in the three countries differ. BiH has such a constitutional structure that in the ethnic key "everyone votes for their own", which in itself gives a strong traditionalist overtone. Serbia has a strong, charismatic leader, who inspires a sense of confidence among followers, voters and sympathizers that he will "make life better for the citizens", and who uses the media and the media stage in a specific format (live conferences) to create and communicate his message. Croatia, on the other hand, as things stand, (is it irreversible?)

has gone through a period of charismatic leaders who brought it independence and membership in the European Union and NATO. According to official indicators, the Croatian response was the best, the most efficient. In that answer, no one stood out too much, especially not the President of the Republic with limited powers in relation to the Government of the Republic of Croatia, but also the Prime Minister who is also the President of the ruling party. Nevertheless, prominent executive figures such as the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Croatia were awarded preferential votes for well-done work in the general elections held in the midst of the crown.

The difference in sources of power cannot be abstracted, if nothing else, because all three parliamentary democracies that conduct elections and inheritance are the principle of change of government, and the ruling parties in BiH and Serbia and not only in Croatia have a legal-rational element of government authority. Of course, it cannot be said that the answers to COVID-19 are *necessarily* related to the type of authority drawn by the leaders and through them the appropriate administration, to which we have not paid so much attention here – which is an objective shortcoming of this text. It would be interesting to explore the relationship between the type of authority and the administration and see how the characteristics of the administration correspond to the types of leadership, which requires separate research. It would be illusory to claim that kind of authority from which it draws only factor and that the second, and probably more important, should look at variables such as the reforms implemented in the period since the breakup of the common state of Yugoslavia until the nowadays. But, given the indicators in the response to COVID-19, we can conclude one of two things: that in the case of Croatia, membership in the European Union has brought a certain dose of more legal-rational than it has in the other two observed countries, or that Croatia introduced a more (but not the only!) legal-rational apparatus into its state, which enabled it to enter the European Union. Maybe it's time to follow the other two countries in order to improve not only respond to Covide-19, but also when you are in comes to other areas in the complex societies of the 21st century who are looking for more efficient management, more meritocracy and rational and harmonious relationship experts and political decision-makers in a society.

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