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New media and gender inequality during political campaigns in Kosovo

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Abstract: Political parties in Kosovo randomly adhere to legal obligations to quotas for women in parliament. But, during campaigns, female candidates do not appear as leaders in debates and political activities. This paper focuses the campaign for parliamentary election in 2019. We have monitored the stories about campaign in three online media, presented on their Face book pages. The results obtained from the content analyses argue that women are presented only as integral part of the political parties' lists and electoral activities. Consequently, during political campaigns, they are under presented within the parties and in media coverage.

Key words: electoral campaigns, women, Kosovo, gender equality, media

Introduction

Women and men are considered equal in the race for seats in the most important institutions in democratic countries. Constitutional and legal provisions equate them, guaranteeing them the right to compete and be represented in the leading institutions of democratic states as well as those aiming democratic standards. These rights stem from the freedom to elect and to be elected, from the right to vote and its equality. But, in the practice of different countries, the realization of these fundamental rights is at different levels. Gender equality still remains a controversial issue and often requires additional incentive mechanisms for its implementation. According to research by well-known international organizations, such as the OSCE,

“In the early twenty-first century, the goal of achieving meaningful gender equality in politics continues to remain elusive” (OSCE, 2014: 12).

Even in the most democratic countries, the realization of gender equality, through qualitative and quantitative representation in main state or public institutions still remains the goal of the political system and social ambition. In numbers, the number of women leaders or their achievement to the top of the leadership pyramid is limited. To cross the threshold of limited representation and to offer the goal of achieving gender equality, various countries have adopted

norms and requirements arising from documents of international organizations. But even the strictest application of norms, such as quotas for a necessary percentage of representation in parliament, does not imply the immediate realization of quality in representation, nor does it have the chain effect of influence on other actors acting as equal parts in the overall process of political communication, media and citizens / electorate. Studies conducted in different countries show that the presentation of women candidates by the media in competitions for political positions is not the same and equal to male candidates.

In one of these studies, authors provide a systematic overview of research on gender differences in the coverage of politicians, using 86 studies in 66 publications and covering over 3,500 women politicians in over 750,000 coded media stories. Authors of the study concluded that:

“Male politicians in PR systems have a clear advantage over their female colleagues. Also, the gender bias in the way politicians are covered in the media is beneficial for men: their electability is covered more positively and there is less focus on their personal lives” (Pas, Aaldering, 2020: 134)

According to authors, Pas and Aaldering present-day politics is strongly mediatized and voters rely almost exclusively on the media as their source of political information.

“Disadvantageous reporting by the media can hurt the electoral chances of women candidates and threaten the political longevity of sitting women politicians. Aside from affecting the career prospects of women in politics and, as such, directly contributing to the underrepresentation of women in politics, the media images of men and women politicians in the media are likely to strengthen the association people have of politics as a masculine realm” (Pas, Aaldering, 2020: 115).

Media reporting is one of the main and influential elements on the decision of the electorate about political candidates. Studies of the political systems of developed democracies also identify additional problems faced by women candidates. From congressional or presidential election campaigns in the USA, for example, researchers still address the issue of the quality in media coverage of women candidates and, consequently, the impact of reporting on citizens' votes. Women candidates and in special cases the media have highlighted the additional barriers they face. In the 2016 presidential election campaign, for example, the media raised the question:

whether the US was ready for a woman president. In the run-up to the 2020 election, most American and other global media outlets made headlines with just one simple sentence by Senator Kamala Harris in the debate with Mike Pence: "Mister Vice President I am speaking." Indirectly, her request, repeated several times during the televised debate between the candidates for vice-president, conveyed the message that women candidates still need to insist on the realization of the guaranteed right to equal space even at the public appearances as TV debate, where equality has to be guaranteed and mutually respected. In a broader context, her simple, but fundamental request can be interpreted as part of the cultural approach and mentality towards women who become part of political contests. In one of the studies in the USA, it is found that:

"The key to increasing women's representation, therefore, lies in making sure that potential candidates, journalists, political elites, and the public know that when women do run for office, they won't face a unique set of additional barriers" (Hayes, Lawless, 2016 :11).

In one newspaper article, authors Hayes and Lawless say that their book *"Women on the Run: Gender, Media, and Political Campaigns in a Polarized Era,"* show that:

"The vast majority of women who run for office are treated — by the media and voters — no differently than men. Women are under-represented not because of what happens on the campaign trail, but because they are much less likely to run in the first place". (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/05/24/how-much-does-gender-bias-affect-u-s-elections/>).

In the context of political communication in Kosovo, where the research for this paper focuses, it is noticed what researchers in communication theories consider as a need for control. As researchers estimate:

"Those who exercise power are resistant to the empowerment of others, the status quo is what suits them" (Griffin, Ledbetter, Sparks, Budini, George, 2015: 471).

Legislation in force guarantees women active participation in political life. They are part of the electoral lists of political parties, based on the provided quotas for years (30 percent of the total list of party / coalition candidates). But the quota system does not guarantee or enable equal action within party structures led by powerful leaders, who realize the "need for control" over the

decision-making process within the party and in relation to other political partners. As for the media, during the election campaigns they use and follow the reporting model, according to which the determination of the weight of the news depends on the political weight of the person who communicates with the electorate, within the party or institution.

Methodology

The process for the early elections in 2019 is characterized by the intensified use of social networks, especially Facebook, both by political parties and the media. Political parties have used it as a way to communicate more directly with groups of voters and potential ones. The media in Kosovo have used Facebook to distribute the produced content to as many users of this network. The ecology of the media has undergone changes and “the advent of digital technology is changing the electronic environment” (Griffin, Ledbetter, Sparks, Budini, George, 2015: 317). The trend of using Facebook has been observed since the time of the pre-electoral campaign. Assuming that in the official days of the campaign, this trend will intensify, then data collection for this research is conceived in order to summarize several elements simultaneously. In the last five days of the campaign, which are traditionally the days when political parties carry out their main activities and when the media are focused in covering electoral activities, the official Facebook pages of the four selected media were monitored, based on certain preconditions. Every 24 hours (every day from 07:00 in the morning until 10:00) are collected / copied from the official websites of the selected media, all posts related to the campaign (articles from rallies, live TV and distributed on Facebook, sponsored programs, news that focus on the attitudes of other actors who evaluate the campaign, such as non-governmental organizations, international political factors, etc.) they include: the headline and description of the event, the accompanying photograph or appearance. The selection of media was made based on: the number of followers it has official Facebook page and aspects related to the specifics in categorizing the media into traditional and new. Based on the number of followers, the Express newspaper was selected. Meanwhile, 3 other media have been selected: the Koha.net website because it includes information from television and newspapers belonging to one of the leading media companies in Kosovo, in the last two decades. Blic newspaper has been chosen as an example of media that have developed only on the Internet in recent years, ie as new media without the support platforms of traditional mass media: television or newspaper. RTK is included in the monitoring

list based on the determination that it is the only public media in Kosovo and as such has special responsibilities in covering election campaigns. The method used to interpret the data from the above selection is content analysis. This method provides the opportunity quantity in data collection, which serve as a basis for interpreting the media reporting process about important events and processes, such as the campaign for the October 6, 2019 elections. Each of the posts was analyzed based on the initial division: the ratio between the total number of articles focusing on the campaign and those focusing on women candidates in the campaign. In the next phase, only posts / articles focusing on women in the campaign were analyzed, making the distinction between: the only nominee for prime minister and other women candidates for the legislative body. In the third phase the data are categorized for two aspects of the candidates in the electoral processes deriving from the functional theory of political campaign discourse: issues and character, but only for the female candidates participating in the electoral process.

Finding / Results

The under representation of women in the campaign and in the media

In the elections for the parliament of Kosovo, the principle of a quota of 30 percent of deputies is applied. This requirement has been in place since the election and at the time of the UNMIK administration. The quota was intended to guarantee space for women's representation in parliament, in a social environment dominated by parties where leaders and other key figures were men, and in a mentality where politics was largely seen as an activity for men. As such, it made Kosovo a country where the UN Declaration on the Representation of Women was implemented, despite the fact that Kosovo is not a member of the UN. If only the percentage of representation in parliament is analyzed, then according to the OSCE estimates, Kosovo performs better than many other countries:

“According to OSCE, until 2014 less than a dozen countries have achieved the 30 per cent target for women in decision-making positions set by the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action” (OSCE, 2014: 15).

Meanwhile, in 2015, the law on gender equality was adopted in Kosovo, which sets the goal of increasing the level of women's representation to 50%. Article 6, (Special measures) of this law defines as follows:

“7. Legislative, executive, judicial bodies at all levels and other public institutions shall be obliged to adopt and implement special measures to increase representation of underrepresented gender, until equal representation of women and men according to this Law is achieved.

8. Equal gender representation in all legislative, executive and judiciary bodies and other public institutions is achieved when ensured a minimum representation of fifty percent (50%) for each gender, including their governing and decision-making bodies” (Law No. 05/L -020: 2015).

In the parliamentary elections of 2019, there were reactions for non-compliance with this law. The court rejected the Ombudsman's lawsuit for a temporary measure against parties that do not respect the provisions of the law in their lists of candidates for MPs. Women's rights organizations challenged the court ruling.

"The Kosovo Women's Network once again considers unacceptable the lack of knowledge of the laws of the human rights package in Kosovo and the lack of willingness of justice institutions to react according to legal requirements, endangering the implementation of these laws in practice. . KWN also condemns the unwillingness of relevant institutions to further investigate the issue of discrimination against women on voter lists and their unwillingness to contribute to equal gender representation ”(<https://www.koha.net/zgjedhjet-2019/187133/rrgk-per-refuzimin-e-padise-se-avokatit-te-popullit-gjyqesori-deshtoi-ne-mbrojtjen-e-barazise-gjinore/>)

In the political reality of Kosovo with a parliamentary system, participation in electoral processes takes place controlled by the party leadership. The initial selection, of the candidates for deputies, is made by the governing bodies of the parties. Each of the candidates runs a collective campaign in parallel as part of the overall party list and an individual campaign. Within the party campaign, the holders of electoral activities are only a small group from the list of candidates. The media attention is generally focused on this small group and depending on the weight they have within the party. Gender equality is not an issue that is treated with priority, during the electoral process, neither by the party nor consequently by the media. The research for this paper shows that the news for the media is the electoral activity, where the main space is usually occupied by the party leadership. Women candidates are focused automatically when the party leadership has appointed them as carriers of electoral activity.

Table 1: Ratio between male-female candidates in the news

Date	30/09/2019	01/10/2019	02/10/2019	03/10/2019	04/10/2019	Total
Total/Women						
Gaz. Express	53/3	49/5	66/4	72/7	41/6	281/25
Koha.net	53/17	57/5	61/8	60/15	47/3	278/48
Gazeta Blic	88/11	92/6	97/13	105/17	81/11	463/58
RTK	25/0	32/0	35/2	27/0	28/3	147/5
Total	219/31	230/16	259/27	264/39	197/23	1169/136

In this way of functioning of the political structure, women candidates for MPs are under-represented in the media. They are less present than men in electoral activities and in the media news about the campaign. Exceptions to this approach have been found in special cases, when the media have produced news about a particular candidate, outside of daily party activities, in cases where female candidates have presented themselves in media party programs presenters and in the case of the women nominee for Prime Minister from the Democratic League of Kosovo.

Competition between women for the parliament of Kosovo

In the race between female candidates participating in the campaign for the 2019 early parliamentary elections, attention has been focused on one woman. For the first time in the history of parliamentary election campaigns, a political party has nominated a woman to lead the government. As a result, the focus of attention has been on the nominee of the Democratic League of Kosovo, Vjosa Osmani. The following statistics confirm this.

Table 2: Media coverage of Osmani and other women candidates

Date	30/09/2019	01/10/2019	02/10/2019	03/10/2019	04/10/2019	Total
Osmani/Other						
Gaz. Express	1/2	1/4	3/1	4/3	5/1	14/11

Koha.net	16/1	4/1	4/4	4/11	3/3	31/20
Gazeta Blic	4/7	6/3	6/7	9/8	5/6	30/31
RTK	0/0	0/0	2/2	0/0	3/0	5/2
Total	21/10	11/8	15/14	17/22	16/10	80/62

In relation to women candidates from other parties, Osmani manages to get the main media attention. But, Vjosa Osmani was in the double race in this campaign: in relation to the nominees for prime minister from other parties and in relation to the women candidates for deputies, regardless of whether they were within the LDK or from other parties. In relation to rivals from other parties, all men, she gets media attention whenever she appears as a party representative. But, the element that comes to the surface in her case is that during the campaign, she does not come out and is not presented as a dominant figure within the party. Unlike the male nominees from other parties or coalitions, she is consistently one of the leading figures in the party's electoral activities and not the main leading figure in these activities. In public appearances, rallies, visits and media programs during the campaign period, she comes out almost always accompanied by the party leadership and her voice does not prevail. Dominant figures from the party leadership, even when they are not candidates for MPs, occupy its electoral space, maintaining the leading role in the campaign and reducing the space she could have in relation to rivals from other parties. Within the group / party she fails to consolidate herself as a figure around which others gather and as a leader who can convince the electorate that she can achieve the stated goals, which in some cases contradicted the previous policies of the party. As such, her appearances raise dilemmas for the leader who risks becoming a descriptive example for scholars' assessments that "a leader who deviates too much from group standards can be rejected" (Myers, 2003: 301). The media articles have focused this dilemma, expressing in the headlines, her assessments that "she is the guarantor of the realization of the program with which the party sought votes" including especially controversial issues, which contradicted the previous platforms of party. Her example in the campaign for the 2019 elections proves that the functioning schemes of political parties do not enable the empowerment of women candidates. Even when they are put at the top of the electoral race, they fail to break the restrictive barriers

that the party installs. Their credibility and professionalism is used by the party to secure the support of the electorate, and then the party appropriates this support in an attempt to minimize the merit of the figure who has enabled it to achieve this.

Issues or character?

Another important issue for the analysis of reporting on women candidates in the political campaign is whether the media has focused on the ideology of the party, on issues that appears as important social topics at the time of the campaign or on the character of women candidates.

According to the Functional theory of political campaign discourse:

“Candidates establish prefer ability through acclaiming, attacking and defending (candidate may offer claims, statements that stress candidate advantages or benefits; stressing an opponent’s undesirable attributes or policy missteps should reduce that opponents desirability , particularly for voters who value the attribute or policy discussed in the attack” (Benoit, 2007: 36).

Reporting on women candidates in the campaign for the October 6, 2019 elections in Kosovo is focused on issues and not on their character. Based on the articles prepared by the monitored media, it turns out that only a symbolic number of articles focus on the private lives of women candidates, or their personality traits.

Table 3: Reporting on issues and character

Date	30/09/2019	01/10/2019	02/10/2019	03/10/2019	04/10/2019	Total
Issues/Personality						
Gaz. Express	3/0	4/0	4/0	5/2	4/1	20/3
Koha.net	17/0	5/0	6/2	14/1	3/0	45/3
Gazeta Blic	11/0	6/0	11/2	15/2	10/1	53/5
RTK	0/0	0/0	2/0	0/0	2/1	4/1
Total	31/0	14/0	23/4	34/5	19/2	121/11

In this case, too, more attention is paid to the party's political program and party attitudes than to the candidate running for parliament. Women follow party platforms, promote and defend them, they are considered an integral part of ideology and enter into communication with other parties, based on party affiliation. In the case of the candidate for prime minister, in special cases, there are articles that focus aspects of private life such as: about her twin daughters teasing her at the first and last rally of the campaign, or even about her husband, in the context of claims about his ties to Russia. On the last day of the campaign, Kosovo public media on its website published the article which it said was the full article of the American newspaper "Open Source Investigations" in which it was said, among other things:

"Is Russia interfering in the elections in Kosovo?" Putin's congressional ally, Dana Rohrabacher, is Prindon Sadri's mentor. Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu's husband served as Assistant to Congressman Rohrabacher. Both, Vjosa and Prindon Sadriu, have a very close relationship with Dana Rohrabacher. Rohrabacher has advanced Russian interests in Kosovo"
<https://www.rtklive.com/sq/news-single.php?ID=381283&fbclid=IwAR01jNiZaeRcZMjaKLHNUag0oUZyZuOhhuLbNvTqrgMz4QbNHb4ZdHX-ZrQ>

This article was quoted by other portals in Kosovo too, but the reaction of the nominee for Prime Minister was focused only on the public media, which Osmani warned that he would sue for defamation. In this case, in fact, comes to the surface the approach of this specific media to certain political entities that were considered favorites in the race for parliament. The candidate for prime minister in this case is not attacked because she is a woman, but because she is from a political party that warned that she would not enter into a coalition with the main political party that has been in power and that continues to occupy the main space in the news of public media. On the other hand, similar writings (allegations of involvement in various affairs, links to circles that are considered hostile to Kosovo, etc.), were common in the days of the campaign even among male candidates.

In the context of promotional reporting for the nominee for Prime Minister in the days of the campaign, the media in Kosovo, follow the articles of foreign media, in which she is favored in the campaign trial full of male candidates. In Kosovo, this approach has been followed by the Express newspaper, which on the last day of the campaign came out with an editorial in which it

supports Vjosa Osmani for prime minister. The newspaper's argument was based on the interplay between issues and her character as a successful woman.

"Her political path, her internal struggle, her survival in a completely inappropriate environment, speaks a lot about her political character. Winning the nomination to be the next Prime Minister of Kosovo, in a complicated party such as the Democratic League of Kosovo is a school in itself. The balances within this subject are such that very few have believed that Mrs. Osmani will succeed in this battle. She did not win this battle by having organized gangs behind her, nor did she win by spending millions of euros. She won this battle by putting her personality on the table, putting her CV on the table, her votes. Vjosa Osmani's war and victory within the LDK, her election as the next Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, would be an extraordinary inspiration for hundreds of thousands of girls of our state, who feel unequal, rightly, among men strong and full of muscles" (<https://www.gazetaexpress.com/editorial-gazeta-express-ben-thirje-te-votohet-opozita-e-mbeshtet-vjosa-osmanin-per-kryeministre>).

Reporting on other women candidates, retained the general characteristics of the model according to which women are an integral part of the campaign and in the case of reporting on them there are usually no elements of denigrating language or reporting that specifically focuses on privacy and character.

Conclusions

Women candidates in the campaign for the early parliamentary elections of 2019 have been under-represented in the media in Kosovo. Under-representation stems from the political system and legal provisions, based on lists of candidates who are controlled by the party leadership. In electoral activities the key word is leadership and the candidates whether men or women act grouped around the leader.

The media follow the activities of the party focusing on the statements of the main persons participating in the communication with the electorate. When women are not the main figures within the party then they are not considered a priority for media coverage either.

The media do not have and do not follow a strategy that would provide additional space for women candidates during the election campaign. Media editorial policies do not prioritize gender

equality within the overall coverage of the campaign. The space in the news about the campaign is occupied mainly by men who are both a majority as candidates and are the main ones in the party leadership.

News about women candidates in election campaigns in Kosovo focuses on issues and not on their character. The media produce news about women candidates who present the programs and stances of the parties on certain issues and do not follow aspects of their private lives. Exceptions are cases when women candidates personally promote and make part of the election campaign, aspects of their private lives.

With their approach to women candidates, the media act neither as favoring nor denigrating mechanisms for gender equality during election campaigns for parliamentary elections. They just continue to function as a channel that carries messages from candidates / parties to voters.

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