International Assistance and Media Democratization in the Western Balkans

A Theoretical Framework

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CHAPTER 1

International Assistance and Media Democratization in the Western Balkans: A Theoretical Framework

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Introduction

Countries of the Western Balkans[1] are undergoing a process of democratic transition in the course of which media institutions are also being created and transformed. The transformation paths of media systems in the region emulate what is considered the European media model. This is not the least the result of media reforms to conform with accession requirements of the European Union (EU) and the standards of the Council of Europe, among others. With varying intensity international media assistance (IMA) programs accompanied the democratic media transition in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia.

This edited volume is the outcome of a regional research project which explores the creation of sustainable and functional media institutions in the democratizing countries of the Western Balkans, and the discrete contribution of international assistance programs and conditionality mechanisms in the context of constraints posed by local political, cultural and economic conditions. Of particular interest is the question of what happens to imported models when they are transposed onto the newly evolving media systems of transitional societies in the Western Balkans.

While recognizing the progress made in various areas, sustainable and functioning media institutions are rare in these Western Balkan coun-

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[1] In the EU's definition, the Western Balkans comprise Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (i.e., the Republic of Macedonia), Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo. Montenegro is not included in the research project behind this book.

tries. The reasons why the emergence of key media institutions has not been achieved are similar throughout the region, that is, the nature of local media markets, lackluster implementation of media reforms, political interference in the media sector, and weak professionalization but strong instrumentalization of journalism.[2] And while democratic media transformation has never been a linear process, retrogressive developments have already offset some of the progress made.

The transformation of local media systems is not considered in isolation but as part of a larger transformation process of the social and political system.[3] The research framework, which is deployed throughout this edited volume, combines three strands of literature: first, theories on democratization and democratic consolidation; second, transition in postauthoritarian countries and Europeanization, and; third, concepts of international assistance and development. The data collection in the five countries follows a unified methodology that revisits these theories in the local context. Building on the chapters with country studies cross-national analysis is used to query how the varying intensity of international assistance impacts the democratic transformation of media.

This chapter sets the scene and introduces the theoretical background underpinning the research into the processes of democratic media transformation in the five Western Balkan countries. The chapter is structured as follows: It starts with an explanation of the theoretical framework and the methodology that has been deployed by all authors contributing to this volume and its limitations. It continues with a brief introduction to the five Western Balkan countries and their sociocultural and historical traits and where they stand in political and economic terms before zooming in on the particular issues with the democratic transition of local media systems.

Theoretical Framework

In the following we will set out the research framework that underpins the methodology, which contributors have deployed throughout this edited volume. The theoretical framework combines several bodies of literature that we grouped as, first, theories on democratization and democratic

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[2] Irion and Jusić, "International Assistance and Media Democratization" (2014).
[3] Jakubowicz, "Lovebirds?," 75.

consolidation; second, transition in postauthoritarian countries and Europeanization, and; third, concepts of international assistance and development. Conceptual contributions on democratic media transition, media reform and media institution building have been reviewed and incorporated in the theoretical framework.

There is a voluminous body of theories explaining democratization. As an umbrella, democratization covers the transition and the consolidation phase, whereby a country's development can meander back and forth without necessarily progressing to the stage of a consolidated democracy. Following Huntington, the countries in the Western Balkans form part of the third wave of democratization, which swept away communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, among others.[4] There is now agreement across the democratization and development literature that the transformation of local institutions is contingent upon the political context and the overall state of democratic consolidation in the country. The literature emphasizes that democratic development is a nonlinear and open-ended process.

Consolidation of democracy starts once critical institutions and procedures for democratic governance are in place. There may be situations where certain policy subsystems and institutions develop ahead of the average pace of democratic transition but the interdependencies with other state institutions and practices can severely obstruct their ability to consolidate.

The literature on media systems generally concurs that local media systems cannot be considered in isolation but they exhibit synergies with the attendant political system and culture.[5] While this research draws from Hallin and Mancini's seminal book *Comparing Media Systems*,[6] the theoretical framework for Western Balkan countries is more appropriately based on theoretical extensions for non-Western democracies.[7] In countries undergoing democratic transition, media reforms and media institution building form part of a larger transformation process of the social

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[4] Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," 16.
[5] Jakubowicz, "Lovebirds?," 76; Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*; Humphreys, *Mass Media and Media Policy*; Voltmer, "Building Media Systems"; Zielonka and Mancini, "Executive Summary."
[6] Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*.
[7] Jakubowicz and Sükösd, "Twelve Concepts," 9f.; Sparks, "Media Theory"; Voltmer, "How Far Can Media Systems Travel?," 224f.; Zielonka and Mancini, "Executive Summary," 2.

and political system.[8] In postauthoritarian countries, media's transition is aggravated by "legacies of undemocratic structures, politicians, and traditions."[9] As Jakubowicz aptly observed, the media first has to disentangle itself from the structures of the state and political entities[10] and new media organization with previously unknown roles have to be constructed from the scratch.

It is not only the past that affects the development of democratic media institutions. Throughout the transition process an "enabling environment" is deemed necessary for media institutions to develop and to operate in the public interest.[11] Research on media systems in postcommunist Central and Eastern European countries pinpoints at shortcoming in the political system that seriously hamper democratic consolidation. Zielonka and Mancini identify in these countries that media, politics and business form an iron triangle, that is, a self-enforcing power structure serving local, albeit sometimes competing, elites.[12] Characteristics are the politicization of the state, weak rational-legal authority and floating laws and procedures in addition to business parallelism and fuzzy ownership.[13]

The politicized state means a situation in which political parties and other vested interests try to conquer public and state institutions in order to extract resources from them.[14] In short, public policy and administration are informed by the ad hoc needs of the politicians in power and the informality of rules to the detriment of formal institutions and the rule of law. As conceived by Weber, rational-legal authority connotes whether essential tenets of the rule of law are asserted in a country, namely public authorities' impartiality and adherence to formal rules of procedure.[15] This is contrasted by forms of clientelism where individual interests and private relationships can take precedent over impartiality and formality.[16] Floating

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[8] Jakubowicz, "Lovebirds?," 76; Zielonka and Mancini, "Executive Summary," 2.
[9] Price, Davis Noll, and De Luce, "Mapping Media Assistance," 57.
[10] Jakubowicz, "Lovebirds?," 76.
[11] Kumar, "One Size Does Not Fit All"; Price and Krug, "The Enabling Environment" (2006), 95f.
[12] Zielonka and Mancini, "Executive Summary," 2f.; Irion and Jusić, "International Assistance and Media Democratization in the Western Balkans" (2014).
[13] Zielonka and Mancini, "Executive Summary," 2f.
[14] Grzymała-Busse, "Political Competition," 1123.
[15] Weber, "The Three Types," 1; Zielonka and Mancini, "Executive Summary," 55.
[16] Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*, 58.

laws and procedures are oftentimes the visible outcome of such informality but also a principle lack of governmental authority.[17]

Business parallelism connotes the overlap between media, its owners and politics, which is symptomatic in Central and Eastern Europe. Sparks observed the "close set of relations between politicians, businessmen and the media that leads to a routine interchange between different groups in post-communist countries."[18] Media ownership, in addition, is often fuzzy[19] and media outlets depend on subsidies, which are rarely transparent. All of this points to conflict of interests for the media toward its owners and their political affiliations.

Following the theoretical framework it is indispensable to explore the nexus between political and media systems and markets. The authors of the country chapters have been asked to consider and reflect on these theories in relation to the local political system and the media system. There are a variety of reasons for floating laws (for example, whether the political system is conducive to media reforms depends very much on the political system but also on the local capacity to implement).[20] The aim was to produce contextual information before describing international media assistance and the specific case studies. The common structure deployed also aids the type of cross-national comparison this edited volume is ultimately concerned with.

The next body of literature relevant to this research are Europeanization theories, which conceptualize how a country stirs toward greater influence by the EU. While most of these theories are set against the perspective of an already EU member state, Europeanization explains the dynamic of EU integration as an incremental process "by which domestic policy areas become increasingly subject to European policy-making."[21] Associate and candidate countries could be said to undergo rapid Europeanization by entering into accession negotiations with the EU. All five Western Balkan counties aim for EU integration.

EU conditionality refers to a strategy by which the EU sets rules ("conditions") that aspiring new members have to gradually fulfill in order to progress through the various stages until EU membership.[22] As a mech-

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[17] Zielonka and Mancini, "Executive Summary," 6.
[18] Sparks, "Media Theory," 42.
[19] Zielonka and Mancini, "Executive Summary," 5.
[20] Tsebelis, *Veto Players*; Zielonka and Mancini, "Executive Summary," 2.
[21] Börzel, "Towards Convergence in Europe?," 574.
[22] Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, "Governance by Conditionality," 669.

anism to promote and reward political and economic reforms, conditionality is closely linked and intertwined with the wider transition process toward democracy and market economy. For the Western Balkan countries the catalogue of political, social, economic and administrative reforms has been extensive also in view of the recent armed conflicts and ethnic tensions in some countries and the overall challenging political situation.[23]

Research on international assistance ties in with democratization theories in that development at the local level is contingent on political, social and economic circumstances.[24] Moreover, it is not possible to orchestrate results but only processes that may be conducive to buttressing democratic values and practices. International media assistance can be delivered in various forms, including outright external intervention and soft power conditionality mechanisms, or through locally driven reforms with limited external assistance. Kumar's report emphasizes that all efforts to create and support democratic media institutions have to be highly specific to a country's societal needs.[25]

It is important to recall that international assistance to the media is not only motivated by building democratic media institutions but a means to promote democratic development, importantly appeasement, accountability and good governance.[26] International media assistance is thus motivated by the convoluting objectives to assist overall democratic transition and build independent media institutions. Rhodes's report "Ten Years of Media Support to the Balkans," which is central to this edited volume, summarizes that media assistance [in the Balkans] proved itself an effective way to promote democracy by removing barriers to the enjoyment of fundamental rights to information and expression as protected by international law, and without intervening in political choices themselves. When media support was perceived as being primarily driven by political objectives, it was in danger of being like the problem it sought to alleviate and obscuring the concept of independent media.[27]

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[23] Anastasakis, "The EU's Political Conditionality," 365.

[24] For a literature overview, see Dietz, "International Media Assistance."

[25] Kumar, "One Size Does Not Fit All," 4.

[26] Norris, *Public Sentinel*; Myers, Dietz, and Frère, "International Media Assistance," 2.

[27] Rhodes, "Ten Years of Media Support," 36.

Research Questions and Methodology

The research project compares the extent to which the media institutions that have been significantly supported or established by international assistance programs and conditionality have actually been able to reach a level of sustainability and functionality.

Our comparison rests on a combination of a multilevel, case study approach within each studied country and a comparison across countries.[28] The research methodology allows us to combine country-level studies with embedded case studies on selected media institutions. The five Western Balkan countries are a suitable testbed for this combination of methodologies because across the countries fairly similar general conditions prevail but approaches to international media assistance have been distinct for a relevant period during which local media institutions underwent transformation.

Moreover, throughout the region the transformation paths of the media systems converge in what can be considered the European media model. This means that an independent media supervisory authority and a public service media organization have been set up in each country together with a number of other media institutions that play a role in this setup, which lend themselves to a cross-national comparison. It helps to appraise how the national context impacts on democratic media transformation, since the outcomes invariably differ from ideal institutions of the European media model.

The comparative "multilevel case study" approach entails two layers. First, within each country, the transformation of and international assistance to domestic media institutions are juxtaposed in order to investigate why certain policy subsystems flow better through transformational stages than others. Within each country three to four selected media institutions were studied in depth (table 1.1). For their central role in the national media system, the media supervisory authority and the public service media operator are covered for each country. Additionally, one or a couple of other country-specific media institutions are included—such as a commercial media outlet, a media self-regulatory body or a media advocacy organization—allowing for diversification across countries, provided the organization was the beneficiary of international media assistance.

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[28] Sartori, "Comparing and Miscomparing," 243f.; Lijphart, "Comparative Politics"; Hopin, "Comparative Methods."

Table 1.1. Country Reports and In-depth Case Studies

Country	Media Regulatory Authority	Public Service Media Operator	Other Media Institution
Albania	National Council of Radio and Television (Këshilli Kombëtar i Radios dhe Televizionit, KKRT). In 2013 replaced by Authority on Audiovisual Media (Autoriteti i Mediave Audiovizive, AMA) .	Albanian Public Radio and Television (Radio Televizioni Shqiptar, RTS)	Union of Albanian Journalists (Unioni i Gazetarëve Shqiptarë, UGSH)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Communications Regulatory Agency, CRA (Regulatorna agencija za komunikacije, RAK)	Public Service Broadcasting System, PSB (Javni RTV sistem)	Open Broadcast Network (OBN) Center for Investigative Reporting (Centar za istraživačko novinarstvo, CIN)
Kosovo	Independent Media Commission, IMC (Komisioni i Pavarur i Mediave, KPM)	Radio Television of Kosovo, RTK (Radiotelevizioni i Kosovës)	Press Council of Kosovo (Këshilli i Mediave të Shkruara të Kosovës)
Macedonia	Broadcasting Council (Sovetot za radiodifuzija)	Macedonian Radio Television (Македонска радиотелевизија, MRTV)	Macedonian Institute for Media (Македонски институт за медиуми, MIM)
Serbia	Republic Broadcasting Agency, RBA (Republička radiodifuzna agencija, RRA). In 2014 succeeded by Authority for Electronic Media (REM).	Public Service Broadcasting of Serbia (Radio-televizija Srbije, RTS)	B92 (Private TV station) Center for Investigative Reporting Serbia (Centar za istraživačko novinarstvo Srbije, CINS)

The chapters with country studies on Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia briefly explain the political and media system. They are based on desk research, contact with donors and qualitative research.[29] The authors of the chapters containing country-level studies conducted between six and ten interviews with local media experts and representatives of international donor organizations about

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[29] See the contributions of Londo, Jusić and Ahmetašević, Miftari, Dimitrijevska-Markoski and Daskalovski, and Marko in this volume.

the influence of IMA on media institution building. The chapters assess and compare the experiences between and across policy subsystems in a country.

Second, a cross-national comparison is used to query how the varying intensity of international assistance impacts the democratic transformation of media. Thompson's chapter in this book compares the evolution of public service broadcasting across these five Western Balkan countries. Ršumović contraposes two centers for investigative journalism, one in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the other in Serbia. A separate chapter is dedicated to a conceptual critique by Voltmer of explaining the democratic transformation of media institutions in the Western Balkans against media system theory and normative media ideals that were developed against the backdrop of Western democracies. Our concluding chapter synthesizes all country-level chapters to a cross-national comparison and derives high-level policy conclusions from it.

With regard to the comparative analysis, we assume that the contextual factors are similar enough across the five Western Balkan countries. The chapters covering five Western Balkan countries lay the basis for identifying variations in media assistance approaches and in outcomes in terms of sustainability and functionality of media institutions. Although there are inevitable differences among the five countries in terms of paths and dynamics of their media democratization and overall democratic transition, basic contextual characteristics surface throughout the chapters with case-level studies, namely the nature of the media markets, political interference in the media sector, weak professionalization but strong instrumentalization of journalism, and lackluster implementation of media reforms, to name only few.

This allows us to focus on the two aspects of interest to our study and compare them across the five countries: the extent to which media institutions are sustainable and functional in relation to the relevant international assistance programs and conditionality linked to those institutions in a given context. As media institutions in the Western Balkan region are often modeled after similar institutions in Western European democracies, the outcomes invariably differ from the prototype. The contributions shed light on the question of what happens to imported models when they are transposed onto the newly evolving media systems of transitional societies in the Western Balkans.

However, in spite of the efforts to gather new information, the research is limited by insufficient documentation of international media assistance. Available data is highly fragmented and does not permit reli-

able insights on funds invested across international media assistance projects in the Western Balkan countries. In fact, the estimations in Rhodes's 2007 report are still the most cited, including in the country studies in this project.

Table 1.2. Media Assistance in the Western Balkans, 1992–2006 (in million Euro)

	Training	Direct Support	Media Environment	Total Euro
Albania	6.9	1.8	1.9	10.6
Bosnia-Herzegovina	17.4	42	27.7	87.1
Croatia	2.4	19.7	14.5	36.6
Macedonia	3.4	9.2	11.2	23.8
Montenegro	1.3	2.9	3.4	7.6
Serbia	5.4	26.4	13.1	44.9
Kosovo	6.1	45.6	6.9	58.6
Balkans	42.9	147.6	78.7	269.2

Source: Rhodes, *Ten Years of Media Support to the Balkans, 15.*

Conditionality is even more difficult to approach empirically since local stakeholders carry out democratic reforms in order to comply with the requirements of third parties, notably in the run-up to EU membership. Thus, it is hard to determine which reforms were externally imposed and which correspond to local demands, or whether they (most likely) developed as a combination of both.

Moreover, economic indicators that would measure local media markets are not gathered systematically, thus obfuscating media revenues, such as from advertisements, subscriptions or subsidies. This lack of transparency makes it impossible to establish how local media are financing their operations as well as whether, and which, media can be considered sustainable businesses.

The Countries of the Western Balkan region: Common Traits and Differences

Although the countries of the Western Balkans share significant social, political, historical and economic traits, the region's recent trajectory has not been very coherent. Since the collapse of communism in the 1990s, all five countries are undergoing a difficult transition to democracy and a free market economy. They have in common a postauthoritarian legacy, relatively small territories and weak economies. However, these similarities should not obstruct the recognition of important differences in political traditions, local cultures and ethnic composition of the population throughout the region.

In the past, political traditions of statehood differed significantly, characterized by periods of bloom and decline as well as external influences, notably from the Ottomans and the Austrian empire. The region's conflict-ridden history has inspired the term "Balkanization," which is widely used to describe a process of geopolitical fragmentation. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia and war with the Serbian hegemon, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo were founded as modern states. Macedonia was also affected by a limited conflict between its two majority peoples—Macedonians and Albanians. NATO undertook extensive military interventions against Serb forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, and in Kosovo and Serbia in 1999. Albania alone went through a peaceful transition albeit the country took in many war refugees, mainly from Kosovo.

All of the countries covered are multiethnic but their composition varies to a significant degree. In Albania and Kosovo, Albanians are by far the majority people but there is a significant Serb minority in the latter. Serbia's dominant majority are Serbs (83% of the population). In contrast, Bosnia and Herzegovina is the home of three constituent peoples (Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats) and in Macedonia ethnic Macedonians and Albanians coexist, among others.

Today, out of these five Western Balkan countries two are in the antechamber of the European Union (EU). Macedonia (for some time) and Serbia (recently) have had candidate status, but the preaccession negotiations are open-ended. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Albania are still potential candidate countries, and thus further away from their ultimate aim to accede to the EU. Striving for EU membership requires these Western Balkan countries to comply with its democratic and market

economy standards (the so-called "Copenhagen Criteria"). EU condition-
ality is a major driver of reforms in the region.

Media in Transition

When the communist era ceased at the end of the 1980s, the media
systems of all the countries in the focus had a similar point of departure.
Under communist rule, all broadcasting media was operated by the state
and print media was tightly controlled, while propaganda and (self)cen-
sorship were commonplace. The transition paths that local media systems
passed through, however, started to differentiate very early. It was evident
that any transition was delayed in those countries that were a party to the
latest series of conflicts in the Western Balkans.

During the 1990s media, in particular, was instrumentalized: During
the Milošević regime, Serbian mainstream media was serving govern-
ment propaganda. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the media was ethnically
divided and in most cases openly war-mongering. In Kosovo, broadcast
media in Albanian language had been banned entirely by the Serbian
regime.

Moreover, the legal vacuum that followed socialist rule and the
violent conflicts does not compare to orderly liberalization and deregula-
tion; rather, entry into the media market has been more an ad hoc seizure
of opportunity. For Western Balkan countries most of the decade of the
1990s has been characterized as chaotic because the use of the broad-
casting spectrum was disorganized and early commercialization of print
and broadcast media rushed in without a regulatory framework in place.
In all of the five countries studied, media outlets initially proliferated to
hundreds of press products and radio and TV stations. Subsequently the
issued regulation and its supervision had to assert itself before the market
eventually complied with it to a certain extent. For instance, Macedonia,
Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina subsequently granted licenses to most
radio and TV stations in operation, and this was apparently only limited
by technical constraints. However, little consideration was given to the
strategic development of the broadcast media markets.

As of the early 2000s, the transformation paths of the media systems
in the five Western Balkan countries converged into what is considered
the European media model. The general characteristics of this model are
that, firstly, the law distinguishes between press and broadcast media with
a press that should be self-regulating while broadcast media is subject to

extensive regulation.[30] Secondly, the implementation and enforcement of local broadcast media legislation is delegated to independent media super- visory authorities, that is, public bodies that should be formally and in practice independent from both elected politicians and the broadcasting industry. Thirdly, originating in the broadcasting sector, the so-called dual media system provides for the coexistence of independent public service TV and radio and private broadcasters.[31]

With the exception of Kosovo, where the public service broadcaster was built from scratch,[32] the public service media organizations are the product of the reform of the former state broadcasters in the countries.

In the Western Balkans, democratic media transformation involves very intense and complex reform processes. In less than a decade, media systems in Western Balkan countries underwent four fundamental reforms. The first reform abolished monopolies and liberalized the national media sector together with the introduction of new media legislation and a media supervisory authority. Another reform transformed the state broadcaster (radio and television) to one or more public service media organizations. Local media systems saw the introduction of professional codes and other self-regulation alongside the development of professional supporting orga- nizations, such as associations of journalists, specialized training centers, industry associations, etc. More recently, media reforms facilitate the ana- logue switch-off of terrestrial broadcasting, licensing of digital multiplexes together with the overall digitalization of media across all platforms. The cumulative media reform needs had to be tackled all at once, contributing to constant change in Western Balkan media systems, which hardly evokes perceptions of consolidation and stability.

The implementation of these key reforms needed supporting strate- gies, legislation and institutions. Characteristically, media transforma- tion in countries that are undergoing a much larger democratic transition process is least likely to receive optimal support. Typically, local restraints on democratic media transition are threefold: Firstly, media reforms stall because important media legislation and strategies are not adopted while, secondly, pieces of existing media legislation or other norms that have an effect on the local media system are constantly put up for revision by suc- cessive governments. Lastly, media policy objectives and legislation on the

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[30] Pursuant to EU developments broadcast media legislation is extended to audio- visual media services that are broadcast-like.

[31] Thompson, in this volume.

[32] Naser Miftari, in this volume.

one hand, and implementation and practice on the other hand, are out of step to varying degrees, since the rules and policies are often selectively interpreted and applied.

The chapters with country-level studies of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia provide ample evidence for all three deficits, sometimes cumulatively; however, issues may accrue over successive governments' terms. Albania is certainly not without setbacks in media transition but judging from Londo's chapter it appears that important media reforms have been tackled, albeit slowly, and central media institutions were left relatively undisturbed by legislative reforms.[33]

Although this research was not tasked with measuring the performance of the Western Balkan countries, a look at the trends from the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) Media Sustainability Index below (figure 1.1) reveals that compared to the point of departure in the early 2000s all countries show progress on specific key dimensions of free media.[34] However, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia outperformed their peers in the recent past only to drop again to what is the regional average, or, in the case of Macedonia, even below.

Possible explanations for the initial progress in local media systems and the recent stabilization at moderate levels could be that early democratic transition was more motivated to correspond with democratic ideals and international best practices. With subsequent governments and political elites this motivation has gradually worn off compared to the will to reach and cement political power (see, for example, the chapters on Macedonia and Serbia). Also, democratic media transition was to a significant extent induced externally, notably as a result of powers given to international actors, such as, for example, in the case with the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina; but this effect is not (yet) showing as forcefully for Kosovo. In many situations it is likely that an amalgamation of both strands, decreasing local motivation as well as retracting international media assistance and monitoring, in practice results in toleration of political influence extending (again) to key media institutions as well as economically fraught mass media being (re)enlisted by political and private interests.

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[33] Londo, in this volume.

[34] The IREX Media Sustainability Index groups indicators in relation to five objectives: free speech, professional journalism, plurality of news sources, business management, and supporting institutions. Cf. IREX, "Media Sustainability Index (MSI) Methodology."
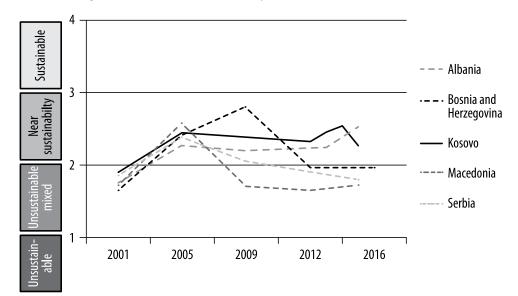
Figure 1.1. IREX Media Sustainability Index for Western Balkan Countries

Source: IREX, sections of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia in the *Media Sustainability Index* between 2001 and 2015.

It is now widely accepted that imported media institutions and standards likely divert from the ideal-type models of similar institutions originating in Western democracies and media theory. The literature advances different theses that explain these variations as a result of the local context and conditions but also of the time required for democratic development and consolidation. Jakubowicz invokes "ontogenesis" as an analogy illustrating how local media institutions pass through similar stages of evolution as media institutions did elsewhere, although perhaps more compressed and with open outcomes.[35] Other authors stress the process of social construction during which imported values blend with local practices, as a result of which "atavistic" or "hybrid" media systems emerge.[36] Consequently, navigating the different trajectories on democratic media transition in the Western Balkan region requires a high degree of contextualization as well as an understanding of the evolutionary development and the social construction of the local media institutions.

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[35] Jakubowicz, "Preface," xvi.
[36] Jakubowicz and Sükösd, "Twelve Concepts," 12; Voltmer, "How Far Can Media Systems Travel?"; Voltmer, in this volume.

Quality of Democracy

For the Western Balkan countries, the starting point has been anything but favorable because efforts toward democratic media transformation are confronted with "legacies of undemocratic structures, politicians, and traditions."[37] The chapters with the country-level case studies confirm a number of contemporary challenges to what would ideally amount to an "enabling environment" for the local media systems, notably that the rule of law and tenets of good governance are, even where they are in place, not effective.[38] As Marko aptly puts it for Serbia: "It has the form (laws, institutions, procedures, party pluralism, etc.) but lacks the substance of a meaningful democratic political culture."[39] The ethnic composition of the local population, which in some cases results in linguistic diversity, very much influences the political system. For Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Macedonia, this has as a consequence that the mass media is also divided along linguistic and ethnical lines. Postconflict situations present in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo pose additional challenges because media can play a role in reconciliation but it can also work against it.

Western Balkan countries share many if not most of the characteristics Zielonka and Mancini identified in relation to other Central and Eastern European countries that undergo democratic transition, namely features that are indicative of the politicization of the state, weak rational-legal authority, in addition to a general implementation deficit.[40] In the country-level chapters accounts of the nexus between political and media systems exemplify a high degree of politicization, which are elaborated below.

Across the region, mass media editorial lines are often partisan; in the case of the public service media organization it was reported to favor the government at the time, whereas the political allegiances of the press and commercial television are distributed across the political spectrum.[41]

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[37] Price, Davis Noll, and De Luce, "Mapping Media Assistance."

[38] That is, fairness, impartiality and objectivity of administrative processes. Cf. Kumar, "One Size Does Not Fit All," 14; Price and Krug, "The Enabling Environment" (2006), 97f.

[39] Marko, in this volume.

[40] Zielonka and Mancini, "Executive Summary," 2f.; Weber, "The Three Types," 1.

[41] In this context, Voltmer's contribution is very instructive because it critically engages with existing high notions of media pluralism and objectivity: See Voltmer, "Building Media Systems."

Albania, Macedonia and Serbia report a rise of clientelist media, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina there is a characteristic overlapping of ethnical with political patronage in the media. Partisan media tends to be even more pronounced during election times in Western Balkan countries. This was noted explicitly in the chapters covering Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia.

In each of the countries covered in this volume political pressure on key media institutions is cited as commonplace, notably on the local media supervisory authority or the public service media organization. An additional characteristic is the significant postelectoral vulnerabilities when new governments in power repoliticize appointments to the boards of these bodies, for example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia. New governments would change the legislation on the size of decision-making bodies and the rules for appointments or deploy other methods to disengage individual decision-makers.

Public money, which is a significant source of media revenues across the region, is often allocated in a nontransparent way and arguably follows clientelistic lines. This issue is especially flagged for Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The statutory independence of public service media is de facto undermined by the organizations' reliance on state funding.

Career paths of certain journalists signify a revolving door between media and political affiliations and jobs, as reported for Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia. It has been established that many media owners in Kosovo and Macedonia were or are still elected politicians or cadres in the local partitocracy.

In relation to the media sector, the differences of the political systems in the Western Balkan region have not yet played out significantly. For example, for the local media systems it does not seem to matter whether the country's political system is majoritarian, as is the case for Albania, Serbia, and Kosovo, or polarized pluralist, as is the case for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia. Contrary to what is suggested in the theory developed in the context of Western democracies, neither political system has achieved better media policy stability or has protected independent media institutions better against partisanship and political influence.[42] In other words, neither constitutional veto points nor coalition governments are less likely to conflate political power with influence over the media and its key institutions. The pursuit of genuine public interest objectives,

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[42] Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*, 298; Tsebelis, *Veto Players*, 6.

including media reforms, is often sidelined as a deliverable to satisfy EU conditionality, for example, in Serbia.

The two countries with strong ethnic differences grant veto powers to their respective ethnic constituencies, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a measure to secure peace and in the case of Macedonia in order to protect Albanian minority interests from Macedonian majority rule. The ethnic and corresponding territorial divisions are replicated in the political landscape; however, this polarization often cannot be bridged by consensus. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where three public service broadcasters coexist, efforts to unify public service broadcasting under a common roof have not yet succeeded.[43] Interestingly, the politics of consensus appear to work best whenever elected politicians attempt to retain or increase their influence over the media but are less in favor of independent media institutions. The country report covering Macedonia describes a "pedantic distribution of spheres of influence" of Macedonian politicians over Macedonian media and Albanian politicians over Albania media.[44]

For all Western Balkan countries, civil society is not a decisive factor in public policy. Yet, for each country under consideration one or even more dedicated nongovernmental organizations specialize in media policy and advocacy, most of which have received funding from international donors for their work. They are crucial for claiming transparency and participating in legislative processes that concern the media and for being vigilant and vocal about interferences with media and journalistic freedoms. At the same time it becomes apparent from the country reports that many nongovernmental organizations that used to focus on media freedoms and freedom of expression discontinued or significantly limited their work often due to a lack of funding. Industry associations, however, became gradually more influential when representing commercial media interests in media policy making.

Media Economics

The democratic transformation of media systems in the Western Balkans faces comparatively difficult media economics. Local media markets are very small in terms of audiences, ranging from just below two million

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[43] Jusić and Ahmetašević, in this volume.
[44] Dimitrijevska-Markoski and Daskalovski, in this volume.

inhabitants in Kosovo to seven million in Serbia. Advertisement-financed media competes for very limited sources of revenue, which is further exacerbated by the high number—in relation to the size of the media market and viewership—of print, radio and television outlets. All country reports note some degree of oversaturation in media markets the side effects of which are that private mass media ties in with politics and businesses for revenues. The overall unfavorable economic conditions after the 2008 global financial crisis have led to a further decline in advertisement spending, which disproportionately affects the print media.

In all Western Balkan countries, the public sector, including state-owned companies, is one of the most significant sources of funding for media that carry advertisements, campaigns and other public communications. This issue was specifically highlighted for Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia but appears to be present across the region. The resulting financial dependencies are a cause of concern whenever funds are not transparently allocated and possibly directed toward government-friendly media. Moreover, direct subsidies by the state to media outlets are quite common, for example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina and through local government in Serbia. This is regardless of the financing from public sources of the public service media in these countries, which in addition compete for advertising revenues with commercial media outlets.

Western Balkan media markets are highly susceptible to "business parallelism," which refers to the residual overlapping of "economics, politics and the media" in postsocialist countries.[45] Where there is no business in media, media becomes the business because it amplifies interests other than the public interest. Especially in highly polarized and politically fragmented contexts, media outlets that compete for rather limited resources can alternatively extract their revenue from political patronage and clientelism.[46] All country reports document fuzzy ownership issues where owners, financial stakes and political affiliations are not transparent. Compared to direct political influence, however, the issues of ownership and cross-subsidization are more subtle means to influence the editorial line of media outlets beyond the reach of constitutional and legal safeguards of media independence.

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[45] Zielonka and Mancini, "Executive Summary," 4f.; Sparks, "Media Theory," 34f.

[46] Johnson, "Model Interventions," 80f.; Zielonka and Mancini, "Executive Summary," 3.

With a few exceptions, foreign media investors are not very prominent in Western Balkan countries. However, the international community did finance a fair number of media operations during the early 1990s in Serbia as well as in postconflict Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. The only notable development is the entry of Al Jazeera Balkans, which began broadcasting in local languages in late 2011.

Journalistic Profession and Professionalism

In these conditions, it is no wonder that the attractiveness of the journalistic profession suffers and that journalists' careers can take many directions. The country reports point out that the career paths of some journalists oscillate between media and political appointments. Moreover, it is important to note that the issue of media professionalism is not just about instilling adequate qualifications and journalistic values in fledgling and practicing journalists. As long as media patrons cannot afford and/or do not value certain qualities in journalistic professionalism even the most capable journalists may find it difficult to apply the highest standards in their daily work. Ršumović's comparison of dedicated centers for investigatory journalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia illustrates well the dilemmas that led to the creation of such specialized journalistic hubs outside mainstream media.[47]

Other consequences of still developing journalistic professionalism are that across the region mechanisms of self-regulation and self-governance symptomatically lack acceptance and support from their own constituency, that is, press and media outlets, journalists and editors. Since under the European media model the press especially should be self-regulating this poses a Catch-22 situation between the local capacity and imported best practices.

Conclusions

The local media systems of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia undergo transformations that are part of a larger democratic transformation process. Media reforms and institutions are

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[47] Ršumović, in this volume.

formed in accordance with the contours of the European media model which is characterized by a separate regulatory treatment of the press and broadcasting media, a dual system of public service television and radio, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, commercial television and radio, as well as an independent media supervisory authority.

In spite of this familiar patterns, local media systems are distinct and created media institutions function differently than the ideal templates they were created after. As an outcome this is hardly surprising as this is recognized in the theory and literature on democratic transformation and institution building. The research framework underpinning this edited volume is thus conscious of the contextual and evolutionary development as well as the social construction of the local media institutions.

Owing to the literature this chapter maps out the characteristics of media systems of postauthoritarian countries, which have informed the methodology throughout this edited volume. Western Balkan countries share traits that are common to media systems in postauthoritarian countries and are additionally challenged by the economic conditions, given that media markets are often very small and oversaturated. The country-level case studies, assembled in this edited volume, follow a unified methodology that is suitable to trace the interdependency of media institutions from the wider political and economic context.

This chapter presents a comparative overview of the transition paths of the Western Balkan countries and summarizes relevant contextual factors. In particular, that in the early transition phase the market developed ahead of the legislative framework. Moreover, democratic media transformation involves very intense and complex reform processes; often not optimally supported and implemented. Western Balkan countries characteristically feature a significant degree of politicization of the state, weak rational-legal authority, in addition to a general implementation deficit. All these factors cumulate in the realization that—after initial progress—democratic media transformation in Western Balkan countries is stagnating.

The differences of the political systems in the Western Balkan region did not have a decisive effect on local media systems. Contrary to political theory developed in the context of Western democracies, neither political system has achieved better media policy stability or has protected independent media institutions better against partisanship and political influence.[48]

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[48] Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*, 298; Tsebelis, *Veto Players*, 6.

The following chapters containing the case studies offer rich contextual explanations relevant to the democratic media transition. Against this background, the reminder of this edited volume queries how the varying intensity and means of international assistance impacts the democratic transformation of media in the Western Balkan countries. Our cross-national analysis concludes that international media assistance of varying intensity is not sufficient to construct media institutions when, in order to function properly, they have to outperform their local context.[49]

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[49] Irion and Jusić, concluding chapter in this volume.