

## CONTEXT APPEARANCE OF FEMALE POLITICIANS IN THE SERBIAN PRINTED MEDIA

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**CITATION:** Subotički, D. (2014). Context appearance of female politicians in the Serbian printed media. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Entrepreneurship*, 1 (9), 624-635.

### ABSTRACT

This work represents the analysis of daily and weekly newspaper editions from the gender perspective in order to find the contexts in which the female politicians are represented. The aim of study is to find out if daily newspapers confirm or deny social reality of female politicians in Serbia concerning their appearances in politics, whether they are informing about female politicians and which attitudes about politicians they support. I used the quantitative and qualitative method of analysis of media discourse and I have interpreted the contents of articles in the following daily newspapers: Politika, Dnevnik, Blic as well as in weekly newspapers: Kikindske novine and Nove kikindske novine. I have focused on newspapers discourse linguistic characteristics in writing about the mentioned topics. The analysis has shown a very small number of news articles about female politicians which was expected due to our social reality. Most represented genres were informative ones on how the linguistic point of view are characterized by a reduced linguistic expression, and gender sensitive language is rarely used, therefore female politicians are often “invisible” when job positions are mentioned. Having in mind that daily newspapers can and should contribute to promotion of role of female politicians, as well as have an influence in forming positive attitudes in readers about female politicians, I give recommendations on how the media should report about them in order to make them more visible.

**Key Words:** *discourse linguistic characteristics, media discourse, female politicians, gender perspective, written media*

### Introduction

The increase of women participating in decision making processes is one of the priority topics of many international conferences, organizations and action programs which emphasize the fact that insufficient presence of women in positions requiring decision making prevents the

acknowledgement and of interest and needs of society in general. The right of equal participation of men and women in decision making processes concerning public affairs is guaranteed by the constitution of the Republic of Serbia, and other domestic and international documents related to human rights. The election laws introduced a measure for obligatory attendance of 30% of candidates of the less present gender in all electoral lists. The introduction of quotas, as a legitimate measure in the implementation of the equal possibility principles, was fruitful.

The fundamental role of the media, during the election processes as well as in general, is to inform the citizens, because 'to live effectively is to always be informed' (Viner 1973: 32). In the book 'News as Discourse' (2008), Van Dijk states that the media, as central carrier of public discourse, have an even broader influence than the opening of public topics and discussions. This theoretician explains that understanding the news does not imply only the reader's adoption of thinking models identical to the ones of the journalist, but that the influence of the media is more indirect and more of a structural type. Therefore, newspaper articles do not recommend certain opinions to the readers. They are dominant forms of public discourse which make general frames of social, political, cultural and economic models of social phenomena, as well as dominant knowledge and relation models needed in order to understand these phenomena.

Taking the ascertainment that the social power of the media is reflected in the way of reporting about certain people, events and phenomena as basis, I have conducted research on the topic of portrayal of women politicians in selected newspapers in Serbia. It is about female politicians' role, which is, by its native code, typically male, in a patriarchal environment, which makes this work contribute to the feminist theory of the media.

In the domestic feminist theory of the media there are no records of strong influences of the feminist movement, which was criticized by the media, but there are significant research contributions to understanding the media practice from the gender perspective (Svenka Savić, Vera Vasić, Dubravka Valić-Nedeljković, Jamina Lukić, Snježana Milivojević, Veronika Mitro etc. have written on this topic)

Even with a number of research results and recommendations (a great number of which originates from the Faculty of Humanities in Novi Sad) the media portrayal of women worldwide, including our country, is worrying.

'Although women are becoming state presidents, prime ministers, ministers and have other valuable positions, they are still subject to various forms of discrimination. It is not uncommon for the society to mock, disparage and ridicule people because of their gender, ... (Raine 2012:48)

This means that special attention should be paid to the use of speech, avoiding images and speech which promote stereotypes or insult social groups or individuals. This is where the media plays the key role. To what extent the printed media portrays women politicians as highly educated individuals, with knowledge, expertise and authority expressed in many activities, and

whether the readers get the impression that certain activities are reserved for one gender only, meaning that only men can chair meetings or that only women can be flight attendants, are the basic issues I started from when writing this paper.

### **Presence of Women in the Serbian Parliament**

Presence of women in the Serbian Parliament from 2008 to 2013 is slightly higher than the world's average, higher than on the previous convocation, but lower than the percentage on electoral lists and expectations of today's female MPs (Members of Parliament). Women (and soldiers) in Serbia got the right to vote for the first time after World War II, during the elections for Constituent Assembly of the People's Republic of Serbia. All citizens of Yugoslavia on the territory of the People's Republic of Serbia who were over 18 years old had the right to vote. Pellets were used for voting up until the 1953 November elections, when ballots were introduced for the first time.

The first woman who chaired a conference was Milka Minić (at the session of the Great Anti-fascist People's Liberation Conference, 12th November 1944.) M.A Boro Majdanac, archival advisor in the Serbian Archives, in the text about the history of the Serbian Parliament from the Second World War onwards, notes that 9 female MPs were in the Constituent Assembly of the People's Republic of Serbia in 1946. In Parliamentary elections in 1963, 71 women were selected as MPs, in multi-party elections in 1990 only three, and in the elections in December 2000, 28.

PhD Zorica Mršević, in her book 'Towards the democratic society - system of electoral quotas' (Institute of Humanities, Belgrade 2007 ), says that at the first multi-party elections held in 1990 1.7% of women were elected. That was the lowest number in all of Europe. Women were not present in a much larger number in the following elections in 1992, when there was 4.4% of them, and in the following year, 1993, the number rose to 6%. After the 1997 elections, the percentage of women in Parliament was still only 6.4%.

After democratic changes in 2000 in the Parliament, there were slightly more than 11% of women while there was even less, 6-7% in the municipal Parliaments, which is equal to the presence of women in Parliaments of Arabic countries. From the year 2000 up until today, Serbia twice had a female acting president: Nataša Mičić in 2002 and Slavica Đukić- Dejanović in 2012.

After early elections in 2003, the presence of women has slightly increased to 12.4%, and when legal provisions of the new Law on Local Self-Government, which predicts quotes of 30% for the less present gender on electoral lists, were first applied in local elections in 2004, the number of women in local Parliaments rose significantly. After that, the same provisions were applied in the Parliamentary elections, thus after the 2007 elections there was 20.4% of women in Parliament, and after the 2008 elections, 21.6%.

At the end of April 2011, the amendment of the Bill of changes and amendments to the Law of MP elections was adopted, which lays down regulations that the less present gender has to be in every third place on the electoral list. After 2012 elections five women entered the Serbian Government, while in the Serbian Parliament in December 2013 the percentage of female MPs was 33.6 in contrast to 66.4 male MPs (there are 166 men and 84 women). Unfortunately, after the reconstruction of the Serbian Government in the second half of the 2013, only two female ministers remained. Out of 250 MPs in the 2008-2012 Parliament convocation, only 22% were women.

Disregarding the fact that the Serbian public in the recent years started to realize that the presence of women in politics is a necessary confirmation of legitimacy of the democratic and non-discriminating political process, the women in Serbia are not yet considered to be a driving force of political change. The majority of female MPs of the Republican Parliament, in both the ruling party and the opposition, are of this opinion. They find justification for all of this in patriarchal upbringing, inertia and authoritative behavior of men.

Slavica Đukić Dejanović, president of the Serbian Parliament, has declared publically, several times, that female MPs, with the help of their colleague parliamentarians, have succeeded in winning at least one battle. It is the change of the Law of MP elections, according to which on the 2012 Parliamentary elections every third candidate on the electoral list had to be a woman. This created the possibility that the Serbian Parliament has 30% less of the dominant gender. After the May elections in 2012, out of 250 mandates, women had 32.4% and men 67.6%, which means that there are currently 169 male and 81 female MPs in the Serbian Parliament.

### Subject and Purpose of this Paper

The subject of this paper is the portrayal of female politicians in daily newspapers (*Politika, Blic, Dnevnik* and the local weekly newspaper *Kikindske*) in a specific social and political community (Serbia) and in a specific time period (December 2011) from a specific perspective (gender perspective). In Dušan Đurić's journalistic lexicon (2003:90) it is defined that the daily newspaper – news journal is the main model in the typology of periodicals, and is printed daily (5 or 6 times a week) and read for less than 18 hours.

The purpose of this paper is to determine:

1. whether the chosen newspapers maintain or deny the social reality of female politicians considering their presence in politics (which are the contexts containing information about the life of female politicians);
2. how the daily newspapers write about women politicians;
3. which stands on women politicians they support

### Method and Corpus of this Paper

I consider discourse to be a larger unit than that of a sentence (spoken or written information) which is achieved between interlocutors in a certain context (Savić 1993: 29–33).

A discourse includes written communication as well, even written interaction, taking into consideration that the reader, i.e. listener in this research, and the author do not interact face to face (Van Dijk 1998: 2–3).

The media discourse is a broad term which can relate to overall reality represented through printed and electronic media (O' Keeffe 2006: 1).

Teun van Dijk defines critical analysis of discourse as a type of analytical discourse research which primarily studies how the abuse of social power, dominance and inequality occur and reproduce in written and spoken forms of language use in the social and political context. According to his opinion, such 'dissident research' has an explicit position trying to understand, explain and resist social inequality (Van Dijk 2008: 352).

The feminist approach to scientific research is based on the assumption that patriarchy is not an ahistorical category (Rihtman-Auguštin, 1988), thus it strongly, being qualitatively different by the mechanism of its action at the same time, influences the value-system, the way and quality of life of women and children as well as men. Having adopted this approach, I conduct my research.

I analyze the use of the *gender sensitive Serbian language* which is not standardized, but contains codices and recommendations about the ways of its use in the public and official sphere. The term refers to the fact that demands for the designation of a social category – gender, in this case women, are seen in the form of language (Savić 2009:7)

A corpus consists of texts published in national daily newspapers: *Politika*, *Blic*, the provincial daily newspaper *Dnevnik* and local weekly newspaper *Kikindske*. I selected all issues of the last week of 2011, since the end of the year is the period when journalists invite different influential people who analyze the year on the wane, when what has been achieved is summarized, and various lists published. I wanted to see whether that is the period when there are perhaps more female politicians in the media than usual (in several previous researches such as the master's thesis of Veronika Mitro, the results showed an extremely low presence of women in the media, in the simplest of genres).

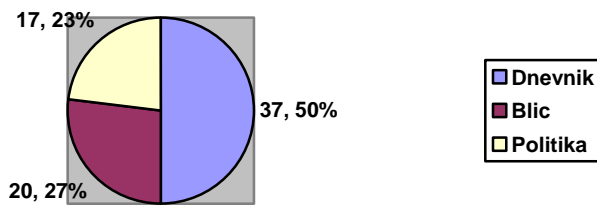
### Results of the Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of the Content and Discussion

During the observed period from December 26<sup>th</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2011 and December 31<sup>st</sup> and January 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> (it is about triple issue), the majority of texts about women politicians were published in a Vojvodinian daily newspaper *Dnevnik* (37). At the same time, this is the only

paper out of observed three that in the New Year’s triple issue did not have a single text mentioning female politicians (Graph 1).

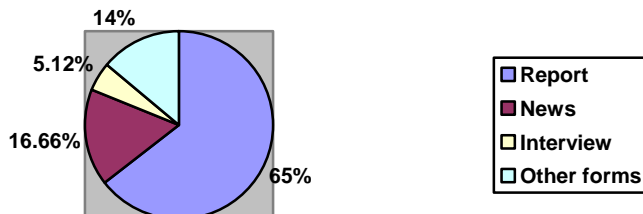
I registered in *Dnevnik* the same number of texts like in *Blic* and *Politika* altogether and I could not foresee those results. If you take into consideration that *Dnevnik* is a paper which is daily printed in Novi Sad and is more oriented towards events in Vojvodina than national papers such as *Politika* and *Blic*, I can positively state that *Dnevnik* took the first place of this list in the number of texts in which female politicians are mentioned since it contains a larger number of informative texts about Parliament issues from the National Parliament of Serbia.

In the local weekly newspaper *Kikindske* which is issued on Fridays, edited by Željko Bodrožić, women politicians appear in four articles, with which I justified my expectation to find more women in politics in pre-New Year issue, and on the other hand one must keep in mind that this is about only one analyzed edition.



**Graph 1: Texts about women politicians**

Quantitative-qualitative analysis of the genre in printed media shows the dominance of the more trivial genres (news, report), and the absence of more complex genres, such as stories and interviews. In the corpus of 78 articles, reports consist of over 65% of articles, news 16.66%, interviews 5.12%, and the other forms less than 14% (Graph 2).



**Graph 2: The genre in printed media**

Among the articles of *Dnevnik* only one interview with a woman politician is issued, along with four news and 32 reports. In *Politika*, out of 17 articles, there are nine reports, six news and two comments. In *Blic* in the corpus of 20 articles, there is only one interview and two biographies, while there are nine reports, and two news. In *Kikindske* two interviews, one survey, and one report are presented.

With the authorship category, the analysis showed that it is almost impossible to draw any parallels between the gender of the article's author and the contents, because more than a half of the articles are unsigned or signed by initials so it is impossible to determine the gender. In fact, in *Dnevnik* out of 37 articles, only 16 are signed, or 17 if you count the agency; in *Politika* two articles are signed by a full name and surname, another seven have initials or shortened name and listed surname, while there are five agency articles. In *Blic* there are four articles signed with full name and surname and another five have initials, and one has the agency name, so by observing the percentage of the authorships (50% of analyzed articles) it is best shown in *Blic*. The authorship is by a full name and surname shown in three out of four articles in *Kikindske*, but as the two of the articles are very similar, it is the assumption of the researcher that both articles are the work of the same author. The agencies visibly neglect signing and by analyzing the contents of a considerable part of the unsigned articles, it is clear that those are shortened versions of agencies' news.

A positive piece of information is that the majority of identified articles have photographs. In *Dnevnik*, out of 37 articles, 26 of them have a photograph, out of which 18 photographs show a woman. In *Blic* out of 20 articles, as much as 19 have a photograph and all of them are women politicians, while in *Politika* out of 17 articles, there are 11 photographs issued, and women are shown on nine photographs. In *Kikindske* three out of four observed articles have a photograph.

It is conspicuous that *Blic* which leans towards tabloid reporting has the richest graphic and photo display, so in accordance with that, this paper has the most columns which consist of extremely short articles, such as columns 'The hit of the day', or 'Winner/Loser'.

It is presumed that the use of gender-sensitive language can affect the awareness of the ones who are using that language towards gender equality (Savić 2009:9).

The analysis of articles' headlines has shown that women politicians are not visible. Concerning the total number of articles (78), women politicians in headlines are recognized or hinted in an inconsiderable number.

In the headlines containing their surnames, they are given in nominative case, so it can be deduced that it is a woman politician and not a man only if there is a photograph or if the reader can recognize the surnames of politicians.

Examples from *Dnevnik* and *Politika*:



Đukić-Dejanović: On the budget until 30<sup>th</sup> December (*Dnevnik*, Dec 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

Kolundžija: Tight with Serbia (*Dnevnik*, Dec 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

Kalanović: URS will not compromise (*Dnevnik*, Dec 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

Tabaković: The end is near (*Dnevnik*, Dec 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

Tahiri: Unmik controls two thirds of Kosovo, Serbia the rest (*Politika*, Dec 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

Jahjaga has the biggest salary (*Politika*, Dec 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

Delević: Instead of a crystal ball, we need results (*Politika*, Dec 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

Kalanović: We will not compromise on a decentralization (*Politika*, Dec 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

Đukić-Dejanović: On KiM only on request from 84 delegates

The only positive example of the headline showing that it is a woman politician was in *Dnevnik*:

(Female) Minister surprised (*Dnevnik*, Dec 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

And in *Politika*:

Success of the first woman president (*Politika*, Dec 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

Two positive examples are noted in *Blic*:

Michelle Obama (*Blic*, Dec 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

(Woman) President of Argentina diseased with cancer (*Blic*, Dec 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

In *Dnevnik* there is a section where on a page for foreign affairs there are three stories on a daily basis about people and on the same day three foreign female politicians are listed in this order:

Ana Botella (Dec 29<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Angela Merkel (Dec 29<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Christina Fernandez (Dec 29<sup>th</sup> 2011)

The analysis of the identification of the women politicians in the published articles shows inconsistency in the usage of the gender sensitive language, as for the journalists and/or authors of the texts and for the ones who should be correcting and editing the texts. MP from LSV (Liberal Socialists Party) as the founder of a new party (*Dnevnik* Nov 27<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Gordana Matković for the Minister of Work (*Blic* Dec 30<sup>th</sup> 2011)



These two headlines, or articles, are examples of the inconsistency of the application of gender sensitive language. Namely, in the text about the MP from LSV (Liberal Socialists Party) as the founder of a new party they talk about Olena Papuga who is named as the male MP and in the next passage they quote Aleksandra Jerkov and she is named as a female spokesperson. In *Blic*, 90% of the analyzed women politicians are called by a gender sensitive language during the elections for the new government and there it suggests more women and their titles and functions are in a female gender but whenever they write about Gordana Matković the formulation 'male minister' remains.

The general impression is that all four analyzed newspapers generally accepted the manner of displaying the titles and functions of women in female gender, however it is noted that in all of the newspapers, and even in the same articles both forms (opposite) are still used which implies the insufficient article review (lecturing and editing), but also possible inconsistency as a result of lack of norms or at least the internal rules/directions of the editorial board.

The analysis has shown that the majority of the observed articles of the selected media, excluding the two negative cases, have neutral value attitude on the subject of the report, namely the content of the women politicians' expressed statements.

However, two articles are disturbing:

On Dec 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011 *Politika* issued the article 'The Queens of the Red Carpet' in which the actresses' dresses were analyzed, and the large photograph shows the wedding dress of Kate Middleton with a bride's maid dress of her sister Pippa, which implicitly puts a person from the British royalty in the same lot with the people from show business, that is with the actresses who have no political role.

The second article that causes concern is signed by the agency TANJUG under the headline 'BBC suggests a panda for the woman of the year' in which it is written that the British public service received severe criticism after enlisting a female panda in its list of 'women of the year' where previously among the 12 appointed women one could find persons like prince William's sister-in-law Pippa Middleton, American congresswoman Gabriella Giffords, Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff etc. The positive thing is that the news was disapproved right away, but the information that the oldest public service in Europe allows itself such insulting of women is a very troublesome fact.

The woman politician who is most often present in analyzed articles is the president of the Assembly of Serbia Slavica Đukic-Dejanović. Among the few interviews issued in the observed period, she was interviewed for *Dnevnik*, and among 12 questions, two are explicitly showing gender non sensitive attitude of the journalist (uncertain if male or female) signed as D. Milivojević:

“It was interesting to hear that you as a woman, the president of the Assembly, hence on the key position, say that you would like to cooperate in future with president Tadić because the cooperation in this mandate was going really well?”

“As a lady in politics and exposed to public opinions, how did you feel when you were elected for the woman of the year? Does it mean that the criticism of your work was not very strict, but the opposite?”

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The analysis has shown that a woman politician is usually invisible in newspaper articles in which she is identified, so in accordance with that, the increase of newspaper articles about women politicians can be interpreted (especially in *Dnevnik*) as a consequence of the articles (mostly reports from National Assembly) generally identifying several persons in the debates, thus the possibility, that one of them is a woman, is greater.

The predominant numbers of articles in which women politicians are identified are of neutral value, because the genre of the majority of articles is like that—they are reports.

It is notable that both in *Dnevnik* and *Blic* appears a long report from Senta in which within the elections held in Municipal organization of Democratic Party in Senta it is reported that Aniko Žiroš Jankelić is the president elected.

Newspaper articles in which a woman is identified are less visible in their structure than newspaper articles about politics in general. Although definite conclusions cannot be made considering the short time period of the research, still the results of the analysis of the observed corpus can point to several important directions of possible future research in this area. It is confirmed that it is necessary to norm gender sensitive use of language or if it is missing at least to initiate the introduction of codes/sets of rules which would help the editorial boards in consistent implementation of women's visibility in articles.

This article can be viewed as a contribution to an aspiration to contribute to the non-discriminatory reporting, to promote female political leaders and to contribute to diminishing stereotypes and prejudices.

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