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**MEDIA – INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS INTERACTION MODEL**

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What role do media play in international relations is the major question that this article attempts to answer. It argues that media have quite limited impact on international affairs and foreign policy process and that the political discourse still prevails over the one of the media and the public in the contest of power in democratic societies. The contribution of the article is to conceptualize the highly scattered knowledge about media-international relations interaction and to present a model which places media on the complex terrain of world politics.

Media do not always have a clear cut concept about their function either in foreign policy process or in international relations. The concept of news values could explain to some extent how the news flow is managed in everyday journalistic practice. There is a pleiad of groupings of criteria for an event to be newsworthy but according to Bulgarian media researcher Maria Neikova three news values dominate the scene – “significance, proximity and drama”<sup>1</sup>. This means that the event should be highly important, scandalous and should have happened nearby in order to get into the news. This approach to journalism however could hardly explain how media actually work because it is too much instrumental and too less fundamental. Rather, it is the functional approach that could be more of use when discussing media performance in high politics. The important question is what are and what should be media functions in foreign policy process and in international relations.

International communication<sup>2</sup> has endeavoured to explain the role of the media in world politics and has come up with different hypotheses that push political theory into media frames. Let’s have a glance. “The free marketplace of ideas” concept that emerged during the Cold War is an expression of the intention of the West to spread its democratic values worldwide. However in the 80s this hypothesis faces the opposition of “The New World Information and Communication Order” (NWICO) – an attempt of the third world countries and the Soviet bloc to counter the one-sided and dominated by the West news flow. This is the time of the McBride Commission and its famous report “Many Voices, One World” and also the time when the US, the UK and Singapore withdrew their membership in UNESCO. In addition there comes the modernization theory which presents media as instruments for modernization and democratization of the developing societies in the western model. The

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<sup>1</sup> Мария Нейкова, „Пресечна точка“, София, Изд. къща „Гея“, 2003, р. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Lucky Madikiza and Elirea Bornman, ‘International Communication: Shifting Paradigms, Theories and Foci of Interest’, *Communicatio*, Vol. 32(2), 2007.

dependency theory is another product of the Cold War. Media role is seen as destructive and counterproductive for the development of the third world societies. The structural theory of imperialism of Johan Galtung<sup>3</sup> is even harsher. Media are perceived as instruments of the elites of the countries from the center to dominate the countries in the periphery. The world system theory deals with the problem with inequality everywhere in the system that it exists. International media in the theory of hegemony propagate worldwide the ideology of the dominant powers in the system. From the political economy perspective media are powerful transnational corporations that stick to the Washington consensus ideological model. The critical theory stands that the commercialization of news makes the audience less critical towards politics and government which has negative impact on the society. One of the most influential hypotheses in the field is the concept of the public sphere of Jurgen Habermas. He perceives media as important participants in the public debate, which is the best way to produce rational politics. He is however strongly disappointed at the current state of the public sphere, which is “refeudalised”, i. e. actually ruined by power relations and commercialization. The emerging theories of information society and network society are trying to explain the rising international “interconnectedness”. And while they focus too much on technology, the globalization theory is more sociological. In both cases media are perceived as active participants and apologists of this new dynamics.

All these concepts confirm that functional approach to media research is more productive than the instrumental one which is too much media-centric. The problems with the functional approach however are various. The communication science is still far away from an encompassing theory about media role on the international scene. Most of the hypotheses are strongly influenced by the current developments in international relations and are not applicable either to the past, or to the future. They do not correspond to the international relations theory and therefore they fail to perceive international relations as a stable system where media have their permanent role and functions, which are changing only when the structure or the dynamics of the international system itself changes. Moreover, the above hypotheses stick too much to the political theory which makes them biased and one-sided. Finally, such a perspective is hardly compatible with media diversity. For a long time now media have not been only Western and their role could not be limited to the West/East, North/South, Rich/Poor, Center/Periphery or other dichotomy.

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<sup>3</sup> Johan Galtung, ‘A Structural Theory of Imperialism’, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 8, №2, 1971, p. 81 – 117.

A better way for describing the complex media role on the international scene could be called “media-international relations interaction model”. The basic hypothesis is that media could be both – a part of the international system and beyond the system, i.e. a part of the international environment. It all depends on the functions embodied in the specific journalistic product. Most of the functions of the international news, commentaries and other genres are typically media-centric. Their aim is to inform, to amuse, to analyze, to educate, etc. In this case media are not actors in the international system – they are only a part of the broader social environment, i.e. they are beyond the international system. However, in other circumstances media could certainly act as real international players like other non-state actors. The interaction model suggests that media are international players only when they exert influence on the functioning of the international system. This means that a local radio station in a small NATO country, for example, informing that two NATO soldiers have been killed in Kabul could not be counted an international actor. But a one state’s television broadcasting that this state’s soldiers in Afghanistan have burnt Koran and as a consequence of the report the attacks towards the state’s military contingent in the country have been multiplied could be considered an international actor. In that case the television station has real impact on the functioning of the international system. This is the case when media have an active role during civil conflicts, in cases of mass human rights violations and other developments that provoke international reaction.

How do we determine that media influence the functioning of the international system? There could be multiple criteria but here are some: 1. when media manage to change foreign policy or international relations agenda; 2. when media provoke actions/reactions by participants in the foreign policy process or by actors in international relations; 3. when media initiate a distinct and firm change in the public opinion about a decision, event or process in international affairs or foreign policy.

If media could affect international relations, the next element of the interaction model is to show what this impact is – weak or strong. Generally speaking, media effects concerning international relations and foreign policy in democratic societies are neither strong, nor weak by default. It all depends on the accompanying environment. This situation is best defined by Majid Tehranian: “The media may be thus viewed as neither powerful nor powerless but power-linked”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Majid Tehranian, ‘Global Communication and International Relations: Changing Paradigms and Policies’, *The International Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol. 2, №1, Jan 1997.

Most studies on the issue of media – foreign policy interaction usually focus exactly on the question of power. Therefore media impact is often measured by a scale spreading between the lowest possible point – the Lippmann’s “manufacturing consent”, where media are nothing but an instrument of the government, and the highest point – the “CNN effect”, where media are perceived to have hegemonic features.

Among researchers mostly convinced in the powerful media effects is Bernard Cohen, whose famous quote says that “the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about”. Then McCombs and Shaw come up with their agenda setting theory. The new concept for the media might emerges after the First Gulf War and tries to explain the phenomenon of 24/7 TV news networks with worldwide coverage. The “CNN effect” hypothesis may have been inspired by the surprising innovation in the news making. Its essence has been explained most successful by Steven Livingston<sup>5</sup> who says that “CNN effect” has at least three dimensions – 1. media accelerate the policy process and produce “real-time diplomacy”; 2. media turn into an impediment to the achievement of certain policy goals by provoking emotional, irrational, dysfunctional reaction in the general public towards a certain policy decision; 3. media are an agenda-setting agent.

Mighty media hypothesis, embodied in the “CNN effect” theory, however has been strongly criticized and eventually disproved by empirical research. It becomes clear that this hypothesis is an exaggeration of the real media role on the international scene and that foreign policy still follows the logic of the scheme “need – interest – goal – prognosis – decision – action” rather than media coverage. It is a common fault in communication theory to attribute considerable social effects to every technology innovation. There is not valuable evidence that media innovations like the emergence of worldwide live TV news coverage in the 80s and 90s or online social networks in the 2010s do produce any automatic social effects that are able to perform a major transformation in the dominated by politics media environment.

This is particularly true for the newest invention in the theory – the ‘Al Jazeera effect’, which recurs the mistake with the ‘CNN effect’. The term ‘Al Jazeera effect’ has gained prominence by the book of Philip Seib ‘The Al Jazeera Effect – How the New Global Media are Reshaping World Politics’<sup>6</sup>. The idea is that the rise of satellite television and Internet creates virtual communities, mediates terrorism or even fosters democracy that can

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<sup>5</sup> Steven Livingston, *Clarifying the CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention*, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Seib, *The Al Jazeera Effect – How the New Global Media are Reshaping World Politics*, Washington, Potomac Books, 2008.

significantly influence politics in the Arab world. Al Qaeda and Kurdistan are cited as examples of such virtual states which exist not only by political will, but also by communication. Media are conceived to be able to redistribute political power. The main fault of this hypothesis is that media in the Arab world are seen as actors that are independent from politics, while they are actually instruments in the hands of the power elites in certain countries. Therefore, it is not the media that reshape politics in the Arab world, but political interests. ‘The multitude of Arab satellite stations did not primarily serve to inform and enlighten the oppressed Arab people, due to several elements: (1) the fragmentation of the Arab media, whereby each country’s satellite channels primarily serves its own political endeavours; (2) the weak economic base, or the concentration of wealth in the hands of the ruling families in the Gulf, disabling purely private entrepreneurs from establishing broadcasting firms on a wide scale; (3) the government control policies and the lack of free media expression; and (4) the lack of professional media practice, with very few exceptions... Even Al-Jazeera, the first all-news channel widely considered independent, is primarily a tool in the Qatari government’s hands to consolidate its existence, and fight its media wars with Saudi Arabia, provoking anger in the Arab and Western world’, says Rasha El-Ibiary<sup>7</sup>. There has been no proof so far that social and political developments in the Arab world could be attributed to some strong autonomous media impact that has been called ‘Al Jazeera effect’.

The other major hypothesis for media-foreign policy relationship – “the manufacturing consent theory” of Walter Lippmann, also limits the complexity of the interaction. In this view media just transmit the messages of the dominant political elites. They are nothing but instruments of power and therefore – endorse the status quo.

The majority of the authors however rely on more complex and balanced approach. Nicholas Berry<sup>8</sup> for example considers that media are neither an active participant in foreign policy process nor could be so easily manipulated by the government. Their impact on foreign policy is limited and weak. His important finding is that media impact could be stronger or weaker in the different stages of the foreign policy process. Media are less critical in the initial stages – when foreign policy decisions are formulated and executed. The criticism is much higher later on when the results of the decision are clear and especially when the policy is going to fail. “Alas, the press becomes critical when policy fails, no matter how much the administration in Washington attempts to manipulate it. Failure is the sunlight that illuminates

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<sup>7</sup> Rasha El-Ibiary, ‘Questioning the Al-Jazeera Effect: Analysis of Al-Qaeda’s Media Strategy and Its Relationship With Al-Jazeera’, *Global Media and Communication* 7(3), Dec. 2011, p. 203.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Berry, *Foreign Policy and the Press: An Analysis of the New York Times’ Coverage of U. S. Foreign Policy*, New York, 1990. p. xii.

foreign policy performance and unleashes a critical press. The press is incapable of inciting a debate or checking a foreign policy heading for disaster as it is being formulated and executed. The press acts after the fact”, Berry says<sup>9</sup>.

The author of the “Uncensored War” Daniel Hallin and his colleague Lance Bennett also deem that if media have at all any influence on the foreign policy process, it is negligible. They are famous for their concept for the ‘indexed’ media coverage, i. e. news framed by the dominant political messages. The smooth functioning of this symbiosis highly depends on the political consensus. When the political elite is in a state of consensus over a specific strategy or policy decision, media contents is in accordance with the general view. If there are contradictions, media tend to take the opponents’ side. According to Hallin media coverage of the Vietnam War is the best proof for such hypothesis. At the beginning of the war when there is still consensus about the intervention, media are either supportive or at least not opposing. Later, after the Tet Offensive, when the consensus starts cracking because of the bad perspectives for the end of the war media turn into an opposition of the administration.

Piers Robinson<sup>10</sup> further develops the consensus hypothesis differentiating among the sphere of consensus, the sphere of legitimate controversy and deviance. According to Robinson media stick to the first two spheres, which means that journalists either conform to the consensus among the elite or cover the official debate, including the views of the legitimate opposition, but never deviate beyond the politically consonant contents and therefore could not be agents of political and social innovation. Unlike Hallin and Bennett Robinson does not think that media never have any independent effect on the foreign policy process. Therefore, he is deeply interested in the exact conditions under which media exert influence over policy decisions in a state of dissensus or legitimate controversy among the elite. It is first the inconsistent policy which is wavering, unstable and not supported by strong arguments when media could have stronger impact on politics. According to Robinson’s ‘policy-media interaction model’ in a state of dissensus among the elite and chaotic policy making negative media framing could tip the balance to a specific policy option that is alternative or directly opposing the one of the elite. So under such conditions media effects could be strong.

Warren Strobel’s research concerning four cases of US peacekeeping operations – Yugoslavia, Somalia, Rwanda and Haiti, confirms that in none of them media were the only

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>10</sup> Piers Robinson, ‘Theorizing the Influence of Media On World Politics. Models of Media Influence On Foreign Policy’, *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 16(4). 2001. P. 523-544.

factors for redirection of the foreign policy decisions. That's why he rejects 'the push effect' or 'the pull effect' of the media and considers that media have only supplementary role in endorsing already made decisions. There could be stronger media effects when politicians fail to produce firm policy or to communicate their decisions properly and mobilize the support of the public. So the wrong communication could be another source for relatively strong media effects.

The factors for media autonomous impact on foreign policy are a central issue in Gadi Wolfsfeld's<sup>11</sup> research. His major thesis is that media usually reproduce the dominant political views but there are cases like the Palestinian intifada in 1987 for example, when media express the interests of marginal groups. The level of the political control over power by the authorities is the determinant factor for the lack or the existence of autonomous media role during a conflict. If authorities fully control the power it is most likely that media will play a negligible autonomous role. Wolfsfeld studies the so called uneven conflicts, where one of the parties is in possession of much more powerful resources than the other – for example like in cases of insurrection, civil war, etc. In his political contest model Wolfsfeld says that media role will vary from faithful servant to the authorities to an advocate of the underdog. The space between these two extreme cases is called continuum of media influence. Which role media will play depends on the political control over the situation of the official government, on the control of the access to information, and on the level of political consensus in the elite.

Theoretical and case studies research has shown that in the current international system despite the revolution of communication technologies politics still exerts more influence on media than reverse. However, under specific conditions media could exert significant pressure over foreign policy or international relations – 1. when there is a lack of consensus in the elite over strategic issue or a specific policy option; 2. when the policy of the government or of international units is inconsistent and wavering; 3. in cases of loose political control over the situation; 4. when the foreign policy process is in its final stages; 5. in cases of bad communication to the public about the decisions taken; 6. when there is a high level of free access to information.

Another important element in the media – international relations interaction model is the role of the public opinion. In foreign policy theory media and the public are often used interchangeably and are seen as almost identical actors in the foreign policy process and international relations. However this could be quite misleading and could provoke wrong interpretation. Actually, media have never been 'magic bullets' and their messages do not have any direct or reserved access to

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<sup>11</sup> Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict. News From the Middle East*, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

public minds. Media impact on public opinion is highly dependent on many variables: the two-step flow of communication<sup>12</sup> (a concept which states that media messages first pass through the interpretation of opinion leaders and then reach the general public. So opinion leaders have a decisive role in public communication); the cognitive consonance (which means that messages that are in accord with the previous understandings of the audience are much easily perceived than innovative information or those that contradicts the established outlook of the audience); the complexity of the message itself (people usually prefer simplistic explanations); the characteristics of the audience (mass media audience is widely dispersed and is not a coherent entity so media messages have diverse effects. For example, the more educated the audience is, the more critical it is to media messages); the access of the audience to alternative information sources<sup>13</sup> (people are less dependent on media if they can access alternative sources), etc. It is obvious that public opinion is not so highly dependent on media. Therefore, no dramatic change in public perceptions could be explained by media coverage only, including cases like the Vietnam War, the first Gulf War, etc.

The impact of public opinion on foreign policy and international relations is highly debatable and challenging issue in theory although significant in amount empirical research has been done. Expectedly, realist and liberal schools of international relations have their differentiating views. The liberal notion dates back to the Enlightenment and presumes that the public opinion, which usually prefers peace, will contain politicians who otherwise would easily go to war from mercenary motives regardless of the national interests. In later interpretations, for example in Ole Holsti's contemporary consent model<sup>14</sup>, it is not the fundamental pacifism that usually prevents violent conflicts between democracies but the fact that democratic foreign policy is in consonance with public expectations. Thus, politicians refrain from waging prolonged wars or ones that cannot win. According to British Foreign Minister in 1945 Ernest Bevin, cited by Holsti<sup>15</sup>, 'There has never been a war yet which, if the facts had been put calmly before ordinary folk, could not have been prevented. The common man is the greatest protection against war'.

Realists however are rather skeptical for the positive contribution of public opinion to effective diplomacy. They presume that the public is ignorant, emotional and unreasonable and therefore could be only an impediment to policy decisions based on national interests. Moreover, some of them consider that democracy is itself a disadvantage for foreign policy-making. Realist thinking about the nature of the public is close to the behaviorist and constructivists notions and the observations of the social psychologists from the beginning of the XX century. They study the transformation of the perceptions of an individual when he becomes a part of the mass. According to

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<sup>12</sup> Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence*, New York, Free Press, 1955.

<sup>13</sup> Nikolaus Georg Edmund Jakob, 'No Alternatives? The Relationship between Perceived Media Dependency, Use of Alternative Information Sources, and General Trust in Mass Media', *International Journal of Communication*, №4, 2010, 589-606.

<sup>14</sup> Ole Holsti, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*, Rev. Ed., The University of Michigan Press, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Gustav Le Bon<sup>16</sup> for example in the crowd the individual behaves less rationally, he becomes less critical, more emotional, with primitive reactions and conformist behavior. One of the most prominent skeptics for any positive role of the public opinion in foreign policy is Walter Lippmann<sup>17</sup>. Taking into account his own experience in journalism he opposes the liberalist view that the society could make rational decisions if it is aware of the facts. He is totally doubtful that ordinary people could have any constructive ideas for international politics and would prefer to rely on experts for foreign policy-making than on the general public.

Considering the fact that realist thinking about international relations prevails after the World War II, it is not surprising that research at that time is generally skeptical towards a positive impact of the public opinion on foreign policy. According to the postwar consensus public opinion is not only ignorant for the international realities but also inconstant and wavering. It reflects the unstable mood of the moment and lacks any coherence and consistency. So, this wavering public opinion is an unsuitable ground for a coherent foreign policy. As it has some effects on foreign policymaking however, it becomes disputable whether democracies could at all produce effective foreign policy.

According to Holsti this postwar consensus exists up to the Vietnam War which becomes a catalyst for general rethinking of the previous perceptions for the essence of the public opinion. After the Vietnam War research reaffirms that society is scarcely informed about foreign policy and international relations but rejects the assumption that the public opinion on international issues is inconsistent, unstructured or without any significant impact on the policy making process. Researchers start to rethink the principle 'president knows best' and become more doubtful towards the previous view that government will better serve national interests and international security if it is not dependent to public opinion. Plenty of research appears that states that public opinion is actually not so wavering but stable and rational. It changes only in accordance with a turn in foreign policy or with a change in the international environment.

Although the public has a weak background about what actually happens in international relations, its stance is relatively well structured and complete. Holsti and other researchers such as Maz Kaase and Kenneth Newton<sup>18</sup> has concluded that people may be low informed about policy but this does not hinder them from expressing sensible and rational political positions. The fact that public opinion is rational and predictable is also a major thesis of Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro<sup>19</sup>. To Holsti's view the reason for that is the fact that the public builds simple cognitive models or frames that allow it to organize its perceptions about international affairs. The question of whether or not public opinion has impact on foreign policy decisions is of no less importance according

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<sup>16</sup> Gustav Le Bon, *Psychology of Crowds*, Sparkling Books, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, Transaction Publishers, Rutgers - The State University, New Brunswick 1997.

<sup>18</sup> Max Kaase and Kenneth Newton, *Beliefs in Government*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995.

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro, *The Rational Public – Fifty Years of Trends in American Policy Preferences*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

to Holsti. Although it is hard to measure, recent research has rejected the old hypothesis that the public has almost no impact on the decision making in foreign policy. During the Cold War in the majority of cases decisions about foreign policy issues are generally in accordance with public preferences. This is probably more a result of elite influence over society but since Gallup polls emerged in 1930s there has been a growing endeavour of the American presidents to pack up their decisions in a form that is amicable to the audience. Actually, the research has shown that public opinion has impact on foreign policy decision making but it is definitely not the most decisive factor in the process. Holsti believes that there is not simple and unidirectional model for 'public opinion – foreign policy interaction' but there are more complex alternatives. Quite a lot of variables determine what will be the impact of public opinion in a democratic country according to the researcher – the level of competition of the political elite; the impact of different interest groups; the way different opinions circle in the public sphere; the media environment; the context in which the decision is made – in crisis or strategic decision in normal environment; the phase of the process of decision making; perception of politicians about what is the public opinion, etc. Researchers introduce many other factors that influence the interaction – the political orientation of the audience, the education of the audience, the quality of the media used (TV, radio, internet sources, the press), etc.

Another major finding of the researchers is their hypothesis that the impact of public opinion on foreign policy and international relations accelerates over time and in the future its importance will grow. This is due to the growing interconnectedness in the world and the consecutive blurring the boundaries between national and international politics especially in economics and global problems such as climate change, diseases, etc. Holsti finally considers that policies that ignore public opinion are much worse than those that engage the public in contemplation and discussion about international affairs. He cites Elihu Root from 1922, former Secretary of State of the US: 'That way [to prevent a people from having an erroneous opinion] is to furnish the whole people, as a part of their ordinary education, with correct information about their relations to other peoples, about the limitations of their own rights, about their duties to respect the rights of others, about what has happened and is happening in international affairs, and about the effects upon national life of the things that are done or refused as between nations; so that the people themselves will have the means to test misinformation and appeals to prejudice and passion based upon error'<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Ole Holsti, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*, Revised Edition, Michigan, The University of Michigan Press, 2004, p. 324.

What are the implications from all these findings for the media? Firstly, there is no simple and unidirectional relationship either between politicians and media or between media and the public or between the politicians and the public. Notwithstanding, the public receives information about foreign policy and international relations predominantly through media and quite rarely has any first-hand experience about international issues. Thus, the most important cycle to study is 'politics – media – the public - politics'. Research has shown that neither media, nor the public opinion are still significant factors with vital impact on the foreign policy decision making process. Nevertheless, the importance of public opinion is growing.

Media may not have any straight-forward mechanisms to reach the hearts and minds of people, but they have their impact on the way people think about international relations. First, the blurring of the boundaries between domestic and international politics makes people more concerned about foreign affairs and increases the appetite for international news. This growing interest will make people more inclined to critical contemplation on international issues which may urge media to divert from the official discourse of the authorities about foreign issues. If this happens, media will also start exerting greater significance in the foreign policy process.

The overview of the research on public opinion has shown that the two mechanisms reliable for the formation of public attitudes where media could be most helpful are the framing of the complex issues and the education of the public about international affairs. It has been shown that although the public has no significant knowledge about the facts and processes in international politics, it has stable and coherent stance about it. Researchers explain this paradox by the cognitive ability of the public to construct simplistic models about the world and to assess the complex reality through these frames.

Framing is widely used by politicians and media and is perceived as a helpful instrument to transmit complex messages to the audience. However, it could be a dangerous instrument considering its ability to create and reaffirm misperceptions. One of the most popular researchers of framing – Robert Entman, maintains that 'framing entails selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution'<sup>21</sup>. A frame is a model, a pattern which has been constructed to produce a specific interpretation of the reality and is an easy way to process complex information. Framing is an instrument not only of media but also of politicians. For example, the US foreign policy interventions after 9/11 were framed

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Entman, 'Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame After 9/11', *Political Communication*, Vol. 20, 2003, p. 417.

by the Bush Administration as 'war on terror'. One major characteristic of frames is their sustainability and high effectiveness. So, media effects over the audience are produced mainly by the framing of events. And as frames are sustainable, they can create misperceptions and become a hindrance for adequate perception of the complex reality. Moreover, framing could be misused by politicians who want to present their decisions in favorable manner to the public. So, media should be especially cautious with framing and even try to reduce resorting to it if they want to create reasonable perceptions in the public.

Education for foreign affairs through media is another pillar for creating rational public. For example, a survey in 2003, committed shortly after the beginning of the war in Iraq, showed that 41% of the Americans believed that weapons of mass destruction had really been found in Iraq and 22% thought that they had been used against the US. It turned out that people using 'Fox News' had more misperceptions than those who depended on National Public Radio. Respondents who relied on the print media were less likely than average to misperceive the facts about the Iraq situation.<sup>22</sup> Bad information about international issues may not be a hindrance for a consistent public stance but there is serious proof that perceptions on international relations are highly dependent on the level of education. For a better educated audience it will be easier to perceive the complex reality beyond frames and simplistic explanations. Since this is better for society media could be extremely helpful in educating people about international relations.

Although media have relatively weak effects over world politics and not 'magic bullet' effects over public opinion, they could have strong impact on international affairs under certain conditions. So media dealing with international relations should considerably rethink their functions in a direction towards responsible journalism. Otherwise, news about foreign policy and international relations will continue to be boring, distant, incomprehensible, without context, identical with what have been broadcasted last night, last month or last year, or even dangerous if they reaffirm misperceptions or transmit misleading interpretations. The outside world on the TV screen will continue to be confusing, obscure and distortedly full of scandalous or conflict events rather than of consistent and predictable processes.

The path towards responsible and professional international journalism goes through efforts in many areas, but mostly through more independent, autonomous role of media in international relations. This means that media should be less dependent on governments either through ownership and financial grants or through access to information. It is true that if

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<sup>22</sup> Ole Holsti, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy*, Revised Edition, Michigan, The University of Michigan Press, 2004, p. 285.

media have any political and social legitimacy on the international scene, it is tacit and unsound. Every broadcaster could be media – from CNN to Al-Manar (a Lebanese satellite television station affiliated with Hezbollah) or Press TV of the Iranian regime. But the same disputed legitimacy is applicable to thousands of NGOs and other non-state actors. It is true that states and international organizations (and their bodies) are the only actors in international relations with undisputed legitimacy. But there are no other mechanisms for checks and balances on the world scene except from NGOs and media and therefore their autonomous role in international relations should be strengthened. The lack of authentic global or regional perspective of contemporary media does not mean that they could not play a constructive role within their function of monitoring and control. If they are more autonomous from governments they could be used as a semi-institutional mechanism for checks and balances not only in intrastate foreign policy process but also in interstate affairs as well. Most probably their perspective will stay national and ethnocentric (which is normal till state continues to be the most vital actor on the world scene), but it will be less governmental. This may disturb politicians but is more appropriate for the 21st century way of governance whose focus is less on “president knows best” and more on what President Barak Obama calls “collective wisdom”. According to Obama “knowledge is widely dispersed in society, and public officials benefit from having access to that dispersed knowledge” and hence to the “collective expertise and wisdom”,<sup>23</sup>.

In sum, media are international players only when they exert influence on the functioning of the international system. Even then, this influence is relatively weak because media are still much more dependent on politics than politics is dependent on media. The perceptions about mighty media that could transform world politics are quite elusive and imaginary. Notwithstanding, this does not remove their responsibility when covering international issues. The hypothesis here is that if media become more autonomous from governments (by ownership, financing and access to information) they will play more positive role on the international scene and will be a better mechanism for checks and balances.

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<sup>23</sup> ‘The Open Government Partnership. National Action Plan For the United States of America’, Sep 2011, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/us\\_national\\_action\\_plan\\_final\\_2.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/us_national_action_plan_final_2.pdf)

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