Đana LUŠA, Hrvoje JAKOPOVIĆ*

WEBSITES AS A GOVERNMENT TOOL OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: FRAMING THE ISSUE OF UNEMPLOYMENT*

Abstract. *This article analyses how online public diplomacy in two Western Balkans states, Croatia and Serbia, framed the issue of unemployment through official government websites. It looks at the topics associated and represented with unemployment in each government's online news releases and the main subject of officially released photos. This paper uses the concept of online public diplomacy as the "bridge concept" which targets foreign publics, but at the same time reaching domestic publics as "side effect". The content and the formal structure of the Croatian and Serbian Governments' home pages were empirically analysed by looking at the frames in news stories on unemployment, but also by comparing how the aforementioned states harnessed "online communication tools" in their effort to reach audiences regarding specific policies. We focus on how both countries managed online public diplomacy during the peak of the economic crisis from January 2009 to December 2014.*
Keywords: *online public diplomacy, official government web sites, framing theory, unemployment*

Introduction

This article deals with how governments frame the issue of unemployment by examining Serbia and Croatia's approaches to online public diplomacy, understood as public diplomacy by means of online communication, particularly through official government websites. This paper conducts a comparative analysis of Croatian and Serbian public diplomacy through government websites. Both countries acted according to their respective public diplomacy or public affairs doctrine, by using it as an instrument of

284

soft power in order to present the country in a more attractive light and to promote their policy agenda to the domestic and foreign publics. The Internet has provided public diplomacy with a new, digital turn, giving it the potential to profoundly change the practice of diplomacy. Therefore, this paper argues that the Internet (specifically official government websites) not only provides governments with the means to more effectively pursue their interests and traditional strategies through a different channel of communication, but also has a revolutionary influence on the practice of public diplomacy.

Focusing specifically on the use of websites as a tool of public diplomacy, the primary goals of this article are to establish, firstly, the extent to which public diplomacy can benefit from the use of online communication. And secondly, how the Croatian and Serbian Governments have organised their public diplomacy and public affairs practices in regards to the structure and objectives of the communication about unemployment published on their official websites. Within this context, the differences in each state's approach to online public diplomacy will be observed by examining official government websites, focusing on the issue of unemployment as one of the biggest contemporary challenges for governments in Europe[1]. We conduct a content analysis in order to extract the secondary meanings from the news published on each website and explore how the issue is framed. The content and the formal structure of the home pages are empirically analysed by looking at the frames deployed in news stories on unemployment. We also compare how Croatia and Serbia both harness online communication tools in their effort to reach audiences (foreign and domestic) related to specific policies. Our study deals with the management of the mentioned issue from January 2009 to December 2014, at the peak of the economic crisis, which severely hit the countries of South East Europe. Serbia and Croatia were chosen as our case studies because of their high unemployment rates during the crisis (Serbia 20,1% and Croatia 21,6% in 2013[2]) to which similar economic policies, as well as similar forms of online public diplomacy strategies were expected.

Nevertheless, one point of contention stems from the difficulty of sending one message to international audiences and another to domestic audiences in an information environment that lacks territorial borders. We

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[1] *The government official websites is not a proper methodological source of data to investigate public diplomacy of a state. Rather, the latter should be confined only to websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, diplomatic representations or merely the Office of the Prime Minister/ President of the state, who are official representatives of the state in international relations. However, by using the concept of online public diplomacy and by analyzing Croatia and Serbia's government website we are bringing together the intention to target foreign public and to reach domestic public as "side effect".*

[2] *http://www.indexmundi.com/factbook/compare/serbia.croatia/economy (January 15th 2017)*

argue that as a result of the Internet and other forms of communication it is nearly impossible for governments to regulate the flow of information to target specific groups. Therefore online public diplomacy can be seen as a "bridge concept" that brings together the intention (targeting foreign publics) and its "side effects" (reaching domestic publics) in that state's use of public diplomacy.

There appears to be a presumption that public diplomacy only involves engaging with foreign publics and is only conducted abroad. However, social media and the increasing mobility of global citizens have blurred the distinctions between domestic and international audiences (Huijgh, 2013: 63). This supports our starting position that the online world of the Internet has provided governments the ability to simultaneously reach international and domestic publics, but the governments must be careful not to focus primarly on one or the other. By framing the issue of unemployment, governments are simultaneously focused on domestic and foreign audiences. "Over the years diplomacy's walls have been crumbling and a myriad of actors have pushed their way in, while the boundaries between international and domestic public and policy spheres have simultaneously blurred". Although some governments try to present conflicting stories abroad and at home, internal legitimacy remains a precondition for international respect. Therefore domestic concerns, such as unemployment, are increasingly linked to international events (economic crisis and recession), having become a part of the diplomatic process (Huijgh, 2010: 126).

The aim of this article is to perceive Croatian and Serbian online public diplomacy in terms of its influence on domestic and foreign publics by analysing the issue of unemployment on official government websites. We found that both countries' efforts concerning unemployment resulted with different issues coming to the fore, such as concrete investment projects, foreign direct investment, as well as economic restructuring and different legal frameworks. Unemployment is mostly a domestic policy issue. Yet, while thinking about the broader context of the global economic crisis, it is easily translated to the online public diplomacy agenda (Leonard et al., 2002: 12).

The article is divided into four parts. The first section presents the theoretical framework for discussing public diplomacy by means of official government websites in the light of presenting the issue of unemployment. The next two sections present the methodology along with the results of our research. The last part sets out the main conclusions with lessons learned from the two countries under study.

Different views on public diplomacy

Since the end of the Cold War, public diplomacy has traditionally been associated with states imparting information to a foreign public, while similar communication with a domestic audience has frequently been defined in terms of public affairs[3] (Huijgh, 2013: 66). According to Heller and Persson (in Snow and Taylor, 2009: 225–233) the fundamental division between the two aforementioned concepts can be found by comparing the core commitments, purposes and primary audiences. On one side, the core purpose of communication in public affairs is to inform specific domestic audiences, while public diplomacy's core commitment is to shape the global mental environment in such a way that the opinions, actions and perceptions of people in other nations are more in line with the country's national interests. While public affairs must inform a domestic population about government actions and motives, public diplomacy is about influencing the publics and leaders of foreign nations. On the other hand, some scholars consider public diplomacy to be the international face of a foreign ministry's domestic public affairs agenda and stress that both use similar activities and techniques directed towards domestic and international audiences (Potter, 2009). In this sense, our article looks at online public diplomacy as a tool of communication with both, foreign and domestic publics.

Public diplomacy as practiced today engages its target audience in a dialogue. There are some researchers who argue that the use of social media is a form of propaganda, as it only promotes a positive image and does not highlight the full policy objectives of a country. However, this article looks at public diplomacy as it entails real-time responses to events and newly innovated and adapted instruments that leverage the networks, technologies and demographics of our networked world. Furthermore, social media amplify the ability of public diplomacy to reach more audiences (who are crucial to traditional diplomacy objectives) virtually instantaneously, thus speeding up the process of communication (Hayden, 2009: 533–548).

In general we can distinguish three categories of public diplomacy action: monologue, dialogue and collaboration. Monologue consists in one-way, closed-container forms of communication for addressing mass audiences, while dialogue refers to a two-way information flow leaving room for the audience to engage. Collaboration consists of the effort by citizens of different countries to complete a common project or achieve a common goal (Cowan and Arsenault, 2008: 10–13). One can therefore conclude that

287

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[3] *There is a difference between public relations and public affairs. Public affairs relates to matters that concern the public directly, such as legislation, policing and public administration, while public relations focuses more on a company's relations with the public. See more in: https://www.prdaily.com/Main/Articles/Public_affairs_vs_public_relations_What_is_the_dif_16506.aspx (January 15th 2017)*

framing the issue of unemployment on official Croatian and Serbian government websites can be classified as a monologue, but also as a collaboration by promoting different investment projects and possibly stimulating different publics to focus on achieving a common goal of opening new working places and making a profit.

Public diplomacy is a "term to describe the efforts by nations to win support and a favorable image among the general public of other countries, usually by way of news management and carefully planned initiatives designed to foster positive impressions" (Connor and Bean, 2012: 203–220). As the Internet has created an international space where communities around the world are more connected than ever, it is imperative for states to utilise new media tools to communicate with domestic and foreign publics (Harris, 2013: 1–16). Some even claim public diplomacy is one of the most salient political communication issues in the 21st century. However, the concept is not new and designates diplomacy oriented at the foreign public to foster an understanding for the nation in question, as well as its policy (Kersaint, 2013).

There are different definitions of public diplomacy. While Cowan and Cull (2008: 6–8) understand it as a an international actor's attempt to advance the ends of public policy by engaging with foreign publics, Armstrong (2008) argues public diplomacy involves "understanding, influencing, developing a relationship with and providing information to the general public in order to create a favorable environment for achieving national security, political, cultural and economic objectives". Our research supports Armstrong's argument in terms of promoting economic goals and attracting foreign investment. Furthermore, public diplomacy serves as a promotion of national interests by informing and influencing the citizens of other nations (Pratkanis in Snow and Taylor, 2009: 111–153). Nye (2008: 94–110) ends up defining public diplomacy as an important tool in the arsenal of smart power strategies that combine hard and soft power resources. There is a hierarchy of impact that public diplomacy can achieve: increasing people's familiarity with one's country, increasing people's appreciation of one's country, engaging people with one's country and influencing people (Leonard et al., 2002).

Online public diplomacy as an "internet moment" in foreign policy

British foreign secretary Lord Palmerston reacted to the introduction of the electric telegraph with the words: "My God, this is the end of diplomacy" (Hocking and Melissen, 2015). However, social media have added an important real-time dimension to diplomacy, making communication faster,

but also often less precise. Barrack Obama used Web 2.0. social media platforms as a strategy to win the 2008 presidential election (as well as Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in 2016), leading to social media being used as a tool to cultivate relations between the government and the individual (Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011: 189–213). Social media have shown their strategic value as a political tool. Therefore, in order to enhance public diplomacy initiatives abroad, one needs to account for social media's development, and incorporate the new tools that currently dominate communication worldwide (Harris, 2013: 2–3).

The question is why has social media become such an important asset in influencing public opinion and how is it being used as an effective tool within public diplomacy? More or less it depends on a willing receiver. This is the starting point of our research, meaning that influencing policy in a democratic country demands reaching out to the public. This understanding presents the fundamental premise of online public diplomacy. As the public has become increasingly active, and the Internet has become an important source of information, the state has needed to pick up the pace in dealing with these issues. Since reputation has always been a considerable factor in foreign policy, the abundance of free information and diverse heterogeneous voices increase the need for convincingly embedding policy choices into a narrative (Nye, 2003). Government administrations have come to the conclusion that they need to incorporate new tools such as websites and social media into their public diplomacy practice; resulting in the relatively new concept of online public diplomacy (the use of the Internet and new information communication technologies to help carry out diplomatic objectives). This has led to public diplomacy's adjustment in embracing social media, with an e-diplomacy or online subcategory, public diplomacy 2.0. This stage of development of the Internet has been characterized by the shift from static web pages to dynamic or user-generated content and the growth of social networking. Therefore, it features a spectrum of new possibilities related to emotion, sensation, the simulation of real life experience and the construction of parallel, virtual worlds. The rise of Web 2.0. technologies has presented every individual with the opportunity to share information with the world, which in turn has resulted with traditional diplomacy losing its position as the main facilitator of contact and communication across diplomatic boundaries (Payne et al., 2011).

Snow (in: Snow and Taylor, 2009: 3–12) defines Web 2.0. technology as an increasing and substantial new domain for public diplomacy – a public diplomacy campaign led by people, not by the government. Therefore the terms "grassroots" public diplomacy and citizen diplomacy have emerged to encompass the multitude of international engagement activities undertaken outside the purview of government sponsored outreach.

289

The emerging scope of diplomatic activity, augmented by new communication tools and technologies is less autocratic, more democratic and provides myriad opportunities for the involvement of individual citizens. Publics do not represent passive elements of political structure anymore, but engaged individuals who use social tools to demonstrate their presence in local, as well as international, relations. There are networks through which all users can correspond with each other horizontally, rather than as passive receivers of information (Payne et al., 2011).

The Internet has provided public diplomacy with a change in its practice or as the U.S. State department calls it "the Internet moment in foreign policy" (http://www.state.gov/statecraft/overview/index.htm (August 15th 2016). The first generation of web technologies known as Web 1.0 embodies and facilitates one-way communication strategies in which users are passive recipients of the information supplied by different sources on the Internet. Websites built in the Web 1.0. style provide users with access to information on various subjects. The handicap is that there is little or no possibility of interaction with the audience. On the other side, the second generation of online technologies, Web 2.0, is primarily designed to encourage user contribution and interaction. The content is predominately user-generated, and participation is through opportunities to comment, like, forward, and retweet. The Web 2.0. model supports two-way communication exchanges and encourages active users participation. It is expected that the next generation of web technologies Web 3.0. will be based on semantics and personalisation (Payne et al., 2011).

We decided to focus on Web 1.0 diplomacy by analysing the official government websites, which "live" or " die" based on whether they can convince users to visit their pages either through cross-linking, search engine placement and/or viral popularity. Netratings.com (2008) estimates show that an average user visits 1522 web pages each month, but spends only an average of 48 seconds on each site, which presents a challenge for governments that want to convey their message through this media. Notwithstanding their popularity, social media and other 2.0. technologies have not replaced Web 1.0, just as public diplomacy 2.0 will not replace the need for more traditional forms of engagement. There are still largely informational, "read-only" websites prevalent on the web and many websites, particularly those belonging to governments, use a combination of Web 1.0 and 2.0 features. Despite being focused on the content analysis of the official government websites as a Web 1.0 tool, we acknowledge the possible feedback from the audience expressed through different channels. Therefore, the starting challenge for online public diplomacy is to understand the target audience, based on the response one desires. We argue it is possible to initiate a response and to receive the desired results also by simply delivering

a message to an audience through a website. This was demonstrated in our research, particularly through each government's efforts to present the issue of unemployment by promoting a healthy investment climate and foreign investment projects aimed at opening new working places, thus bringing a positive, government response to the fore. The aforementioned approach was focused on changing the negative perception of each country's economic environment among domestic as well as foreign publics. The issue of unemployment in Croatia and Serbia helped foster this negative image for each country in general and for each government in particular.

## Online public diplomacy and the issue of unemployment

Accepting public diplomacy as a tool for presenting a country's foreign policy agenda and building the image of the nation among foreign publics, we argue that the issue of unemployment is simultaneously a domestic and foreign policy issue. As the financial crisis of 2007–2008, also known as the global financial crisis, is considered to be the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, and lead cause of the 2008–2012 global recession, which contributed to the European-sovereign debt crisis, we decided to take one of its outcomes as the core subject of our analysis. Namely, the rise in unemployment in a majority of European countries presents one of the most dramatic consequences of the protracted crisis in Europe. Therefore, our research focuses on framing the aforementioned issue on official Croatian and Serbian Government websites, particularly on promoting the measures to mitigate this problem and prevent the deepening of the unemployment crisis as a major undertaking in Europe.

Policies for economic growth and issues such as unemployment have been viewed as domestic problems largely separate from foreign policy. However, the global financial crisis and high unemployment have brought the domestic economy more into the focus of national security and foreign affairs. The economy has entered into national security and foreign policy debate through its impact on the nation's hard power, the efficiency of which depends greatly on the ability of a country to provide for it through an ever growing and innovative economy. At the same time, national security and foreign policy depend also on the soft power or the ability of a country to use its economic power to project its national values. This entails providing economic security in the form of income and business opportunities for individuals, as well as in promoting a secure investment. Therefore, unemployment presents both, a domestic and foreign policy issue. Namely, by using their official websites to address the issue of unemployment, governments inform domestic and foreign publics simultaneously; in the first case to gain public support for their policies, and in the later to attract foreign

291

investment by presenting a healthy investment climate within the country. One of three mayor elements of a country's foreign direct investment (FDI) strategy, besides product and price, is promotion. The promotion process used by states is one of the key controllable factors that influence the success of states in attracting FDI (Schuster et.al., 1987: 268–272). Our analysis of the issue of unemployment on official government websites gave some interesting and tangible information on each county's investment climate and image, as well as details concerning Croatia and Serbia's policy on attracting FDI.

Effects of the global financial crisis and problems concerning unemployment in Croatia were noticed at the beginning of 2009, when the unemployment rate began to grow. The unemployment rate measures the number of people who are actively seeking work expressed as a percentage of the overall labour force (tradingeconomics.com, 2015). From 1996 to 2015, Croatia had its lowest unemployment rate in July of 2008, 12,20% (Figure 1). The unemployment rate reached an all time high in January of 2014 at 23,60%. As Figure 1 shows, the unemployment rate in Croatia has started to rise by the end of 2008.

**292**

Figure 1: CROATIAN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE FROM 2007 TO 2015
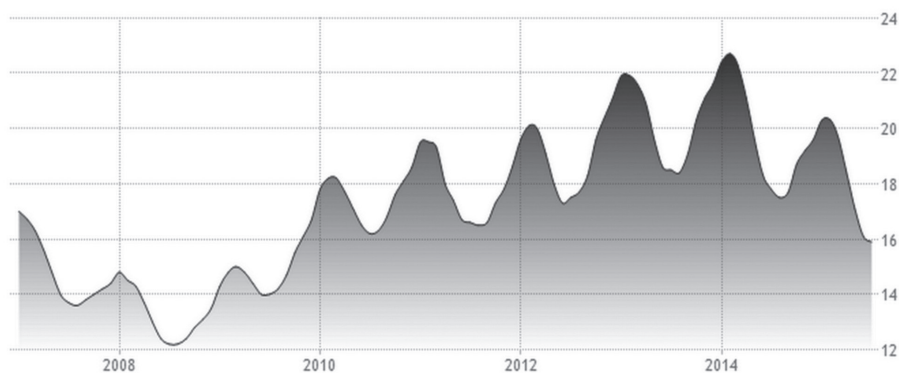
Source: Trading Economics and Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2017.

Serbia's unemployment rate history shows that an all time high of 25,50% was reached in the first quarter of 2012, while its lowest point of 13,30% was recorded in the first quarter of 2008 (Figure 2). By the end of 2008, Serbia's unemployment rate began to rise.

Figure 2: SERBIAN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE FROM 2008 TO 2015
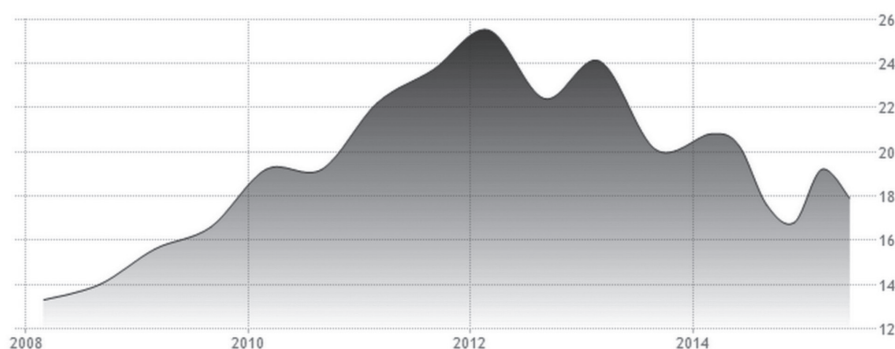
Source: Trading Economics and Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2017.

Framing theory is used as a theoretical background for our empirical research. Framing explains how and why individuals use mental maps and shortcuts (frames) to understand the world that surrounds them. This theory first emerged from anthropological (Bateson, 1955: 39–51) and sociological (Goffman, 1974) perspectives. It was soon embraced by media studies as one of the main theories of mass communication (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007: 9–20; Kunczik and Zipfel, 2006; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000: 93–109). Moreover, it can be understood as an extension of agenda-setting theory. Framing theory goes one step further by explaining not just how stories and events are selected and set in media, but also how media audiences interpret and takeover media frames, and how this affects their decision making process.

293

Material and methods

Research questions and hypotheses

The empirical part of this article focuses on determining how Croatia and Serbia's public diplomacy frame the issue of unemployment through official government websites. The research was structured around the following three research questions:

RQ1: Which topics associated with unemployment are mostly represented in government, online, news releases?

RQ2: Who is the main source of information in government, online, news releases associated with unemployment?

RQ3: Who is the main subject of news release photos?

The goal was to test following three hypotheses:

H1: As unemployment presents a serious political and economic issue for Croatia and Serbia, government websites mostly frame it through activities that suggest possible solutions (i.e. investment projects, new work places and an openness to foreign investments).

H2: The importance of the issue of unemployment is enhanced by the dominant appearance of the prime minister as the main source of information and the main actor in online news releases.

H3: The Croatian Government's online news releases are more focused on laws and socio-economic rights associated with unemployment than the Serbian Government's.

Sample

We collected data on the Croatian (www.vlada.hr, May 20th 2016). and Serbian Government's (www.srbija.gov.rs May 25th 2016) websites, which were selected based on the assumption that Western Balkan states displayed different dynamics and online public diplomacy patterns during the economic crisis. We searched for and extracted online news releases that were tagged with the word "unemployment." The aim of the research was to observe the period of time defined by the economic crisis in the Western Balkans, dating from 1 January 1, 2009 to 31 December, 2014. The reason why previous years (when the global crisis started) were not included in the analysis is due to the fact that officially, according to concrete parameters, the crisis started in the Western Balkans in 2009 (Dalić in Novotny, 2013: 67–88). From that year the seriousness and consequences of the financial crisis were manifested in the decline of GDP and a steady rise in the unemployment rate.

The research material that we collected consists of online news releases in English as it is considered that news releases published in English are intended for foreign and more diverse publics. Nevertheless, we observed online news releases in all three languages, English, Croatian and Serbian, to identify whether there are differences in the content. We noticed that Croatian and Serbian Government websites actually represent a three-sided tool for online public diplomacy, public relations (PR) and public affairs (PA) by using similar content in different languages. From one side, the websites are communicating with domestic publics and functioning in terms of PR as a "strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics." (PRSA, 2011/2012). In addition, it is also a mode of public affairs with the "aim to influence public policy, build and maintain a strong reputation and find common ground with stakeholders" (PubAffairs, 2017). On the other side, communication with

294

foreign publics through government websites functions as a form of public diplomacy – "government *communication* aimed at *foreign* audiences to achieve changes in the 'hearts or mind' of the people" (Szondi, 2008: 6). In this context, the observed thematic issues are of interest of both – foreign and domestic policies because of the proportion of the economic crisis. Online news releases in English published on Croatian and Serbian Government websites are the unit of analysis. Every single online release associated with the issue of unemployment published in the period from January 1, 2009 to December 31, 2014 (N = 339) was examined. During the aforementioned timeframe the Croatian Government published 141 online news releases related to unemployment, while Serbian published 198 in English.

Method

The main aim of our research is to determine how Croatia and Serbia's online public diplomacy frame the issue of unemployment through government websites. Therefore the method of content analysis, that highly corresponds to the concepts and ideas used within the framing theory, was implemented. Furthermore, the content analysis was used as a quantitative method for analysing online news releases. "Content analysis is any technique making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Bryman, 2012). Tonkiss (in Seale, 2004: 367–382) defined it as a method "to analyse texts in terms of the presence and frequency of specific terms, narratives or concepts". It can be used for analysing both textual and visual content as implemented in this research. Two independent coders analysed the content of online news releases using the same coding scheme. An inter-rater reliability was tested with Holsti's method on 10 online news releases, randomly selected from the sample. The inter-rater reliability test showed that all variables ranged from 0,81 to 1,00 while the average inter-rater reliability coefficient was 0,91. We also observed the frequency of words, sentences and phrases, with the computerised keyword analysis in those online news releases in which unemployment was the main topic.

We came up with a coding scheme with a focus on following variables concerning unemployment on both governments' online news releases:

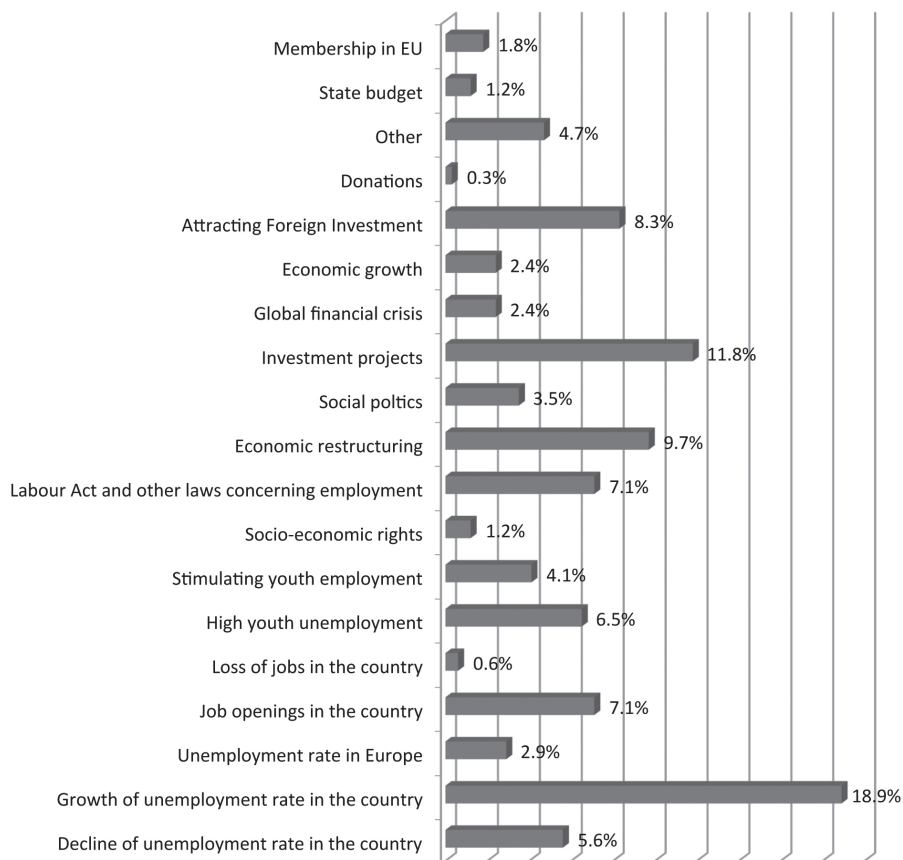1. Subject matter – 32 categories for identifying main (dominant) topics represented in the online news releases;
2. Subject matter significance – 4 categories for identifying the importance of the represented topic;
3. Information source – 11 categories for identifying the main (dominant) source of information in the online news releases;
4. Graphic content – 11 categories for identifying the main (dominant)

295

subject in the graphic content (photography, illustration or video) of an online news release.

Results

The issue of unemployment, as one of the major problems experienced by Croatia and Serbia's Governments in the last few years, was presented through various topics. This not only demonstrates the complexity of the issue of unemployment, but also shows in what ways Croatia and Serbia's Governments tried to maintain a healthy business climate for possible investment. In the overall presence of different topics from Figure 6, it is possible to notice that several of them are dominant and give a brief overview of Croatia and Serbia's approaches to communication on the issue of unemployment. Not surprisingly, the most frequently used topic in online news releases was the growth of the unemployment rate (18,9%), as in the following examples: "Stabilization of economic situation necessary" (www.srbija.gov.rs, September 26th 2012) and "Interview with Prime Minister Zoran Milanović in Jutarnji list: I will be satisfied when we will have a better credit rating" (www.vlada.hr, March 31st 2012), where the high unemployment rate is emphasised as a key problem. Furthermore, one can notice the most regular occurrence of the following topics: investment projects (11,8%), economic restructuring (9,7%), attracting foreign investment (8,3%), job openings in the country (7,1%), the Labour Act and other laws concerning employment (7,1%). Investment projects are presented through new job opportunities, for example: "Bujanovac area convenient for investment due to Corridor 10 proximity" (www.srbija.gov.rs, April 7th 2011). Economic restructuring often refers to the transformation of the tax system as in "Deputy Prime Minister Branko Grčić: projects co-financed with EU funds and change in tax system will contribute to growth of GDP" (www.vlada.hr, August 29th 2014). In the case of "Diaspora called on to invest in Serbia" (www.srbija.gov.rs, July 5th 2010), the focus on foreign investments is justified with the comparative advantages of the "diaspora" knowing the language, culture and circumstances, which facilitate the process. The results presented in the Figure 3 indicate that the topics dealing with attracting foreign investments and investment projects, if they are put together, have the highest frequency and therefore support the first hypothesis (H1).

Figure 3: TOPICS RELATED TO UNEMPLOYMENT

| Topic	Percentage
Membership in EU	1.8%
State budget	1.2%
Other	4.7%
Donations	0.3%
Attracting Foreign Investment	8.3%
Economic growth	2.4%
Global financial crisis	2.4%
Investment projects	11.8%
Social poltics	3.5%
Economic restructuring	9.7%
Labour Act and other laws concerning employment	7.1%
Socio-economic rights	1.2%
Stimulating youth employment	4.1%
High youth unemployment	6.5%
Loss of jobs in the country	0.6%
Job openings in the country	7.1%
Unemployment rate in Europe	2.9%
Growth of unemployment rate in the country	18.9%
Decline of unemployment rate in the country	5.6%

N = 339
Sources: Authors

The issue of unemployment is, except from the growth of the unemployment rate (15,60%), presented on the Croatian Government's website through the topics related to the Labour Act and other laws concerning employment (14,20%), followed by the decline of the unemployment rate (12,60%) and investment projects (8,20%) (Figure 4). The Croatian Government is highly focused on regulations and laws when dealing with the issue of unemployment, which could be related with Croatia's EU accession process and the need to promote the country through "the rule of law".
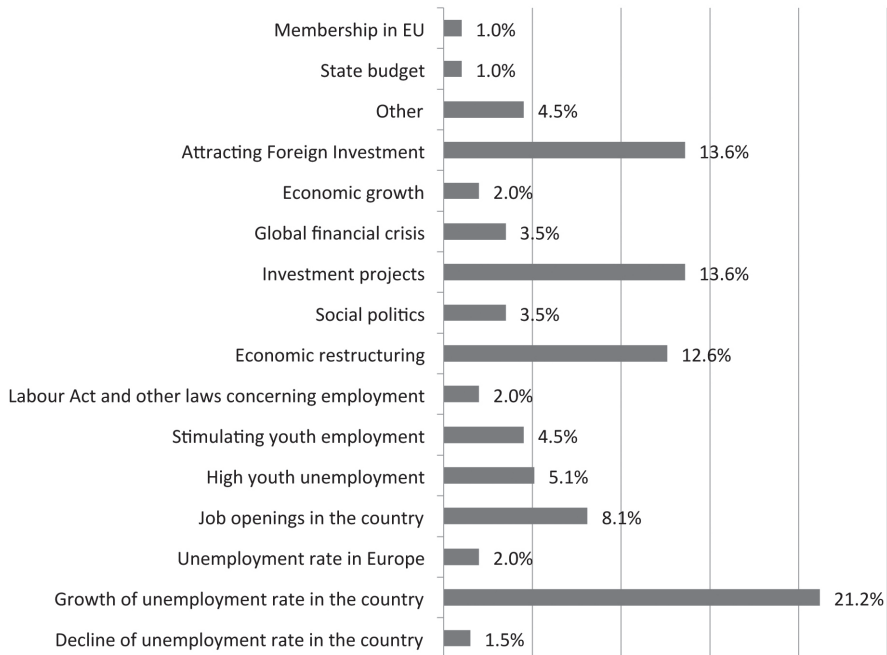
Figure 4: CROATIAN GOVERNMENT TOPICS RELATED TO UNEMPLOYMENT

N =141
Sources: Authors
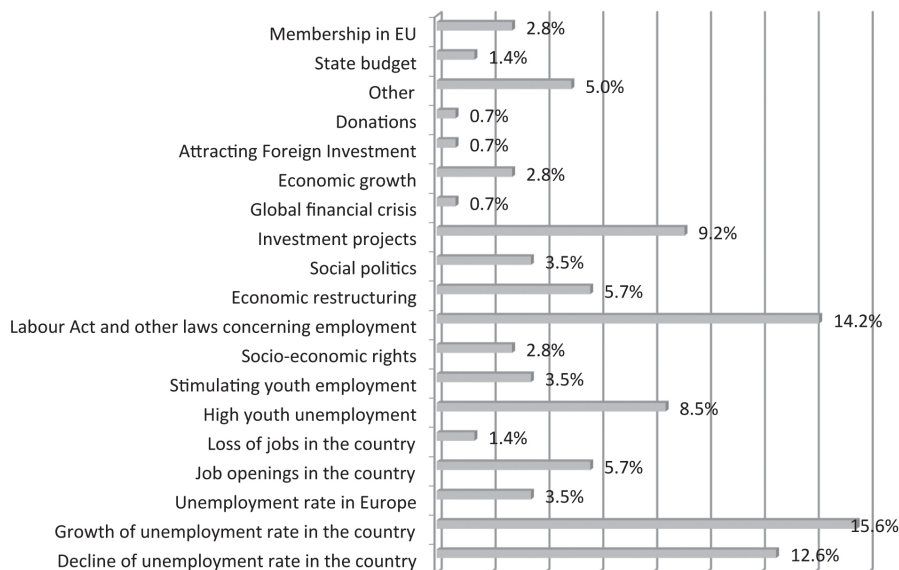
The Serbian Government was, besides the growth of unemployment rate in the country (21,20%), mostly focused on attracting foreign investment (13,60%), investment projects (13,60%) and economic restructuring (12,60%) (Figure 5). The issue of communication with the corporate sector was of more interest to the Serbian than the Croatian Government. On the other hand, laws and regulations were of secondary importance, with the Labour Act and other laws concerning employment being mentioned in only 2% of cases.

In general, the results show that unemployment does not present the main issue in the Croatian and Serbian Governments' online news releases that were tagged with the word "unemployment" (Figure 6). In the case of Croatia it is mostly a "secondary issue" (41,1%) and "just being mentioned" (36,90%). In Serbia the situation is similar with 42,40 percent for unemployment as a "secondary issue" and 34,10 as "just being mentioned." Unemployment is perceived mostly as a sensitive and a negative issue, avoided or combined with other more positive stories and events, as the main issues in the published news items.
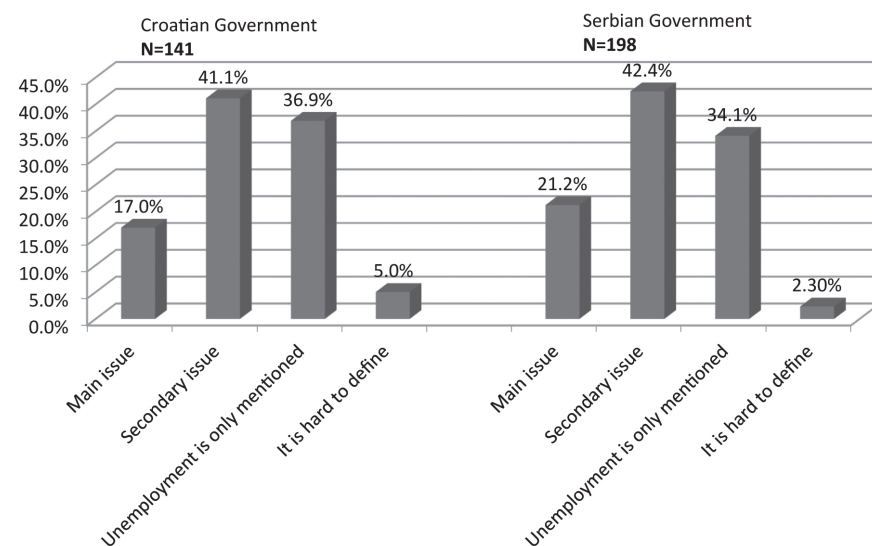
Figure 5: SERBIAN GOVERNMENT TOPICS RELATED TO UNEMPLOYMENT

Membership in EU — 1.0%
State budget — 1.0%
Other — 4.5%
Attracting Foreign Investment — 13.6%
Economic growth — 2.0%
Global financial crisis — 3.5%
Investment projects — 13.6%
Social politics — 3.5%
Economic restructuring — 12.6%
Labour Act and other laws concerning employment — 2.0%
Stimulating youth employment — 4.5%
High youth unemployment — 5.1%
Job openings in the country — 8.1%
Unemployment rate in Europe — 2.0%
Growth of unemployment rate in the country — 21.2%
Decline of unemployment rate in the country — 1.5%

N =198
Sources: Authors

Figure 6: IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUE OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Croatian Government N=141:
Main issue — 17.0%
Secondary issue — 41.1%
Unemployment is only mentioned — 36.9%
It is hard to define — 5.0%

Serbian Government N=198:
Main issue — 21.2%
Secondary issue — 42.4%
Unemployment is only mentioned — 34.1%
It is hard to define — 2.30%

Sources: Authors

After we determined in which online news releases unemployment was the main topic we analysed the frequency of words and phrases. The criteria and the reason for conducting a computerised frequency analysis of one word, phrases with 3 words and phrases with 7 words was to obtain insight in not only the key words concerning unemployment, but also to get a clearer perspective, meaning and context in which certain key words are mentioned. Table 1 displays that certain hidden messages can be derived from the word frequency of news releases, when unemployment is the main issue. For example, seasonal hiring in the tourism sector was presented as one of the solutions for unemployment. Furthermore, the issue of unemployment for persons with disabilities also appeared. By using the word count, we came to the conclusion that youth unemployment is particularly emphasised as a serious and significant issue.

Table 1: UNEMPLOYMENT AS THE MAIN ISSUE ON CROATIAN GOVERNMENT WEBSITE – WORD FREQUENCY (N = 20)

Some top phrases containing 7 words (without punctuation marks)	Occurrences
"thanks to seasonal hiring mostly in touristic"	3
"Minister of Labour and Pension System Mirando"	3
"providing accommodation and preparing and serving food"	3
Some top phrases containing 3 words (without punctuation marks)	**Occurrences**
"persons with disabilities"	14
"employment service for"	8
"employment of persons"	7
Word count	**Occurrences**
percentage	119
unemployed	50
unemployment	49
employment	39
government	34
persons	31
Croatia	30
youth	30

Sources: Authors

In online news releases, where unemployment is the main issue, the Serbian Government mostly referred to Government sources, but also promoted investments through the Serbian Investment and Export Promotion Agency and the Ministry for Economic and Regional Development (Table 1). Moreover, it was consistent in emphasising general employment as well as detecting the problem of unemployment among young people. The results show a frequent mention of the EU and its regulations (Table 2). In

accordance to the previous results, derived from the content analysis, a word frequency count shows that the Serbian Government is positively oriented towards resolving the problem of unemployment by accenting the regional development agency that promotes investments and national employment.

Table 2: UNEMPLOYMENT AS THE MAIN ISSUE ON SERBIAN GOVERNMENT WEBSITE – WORD FREQUENCY (N = 28)

Some top phrases containing 7 words (without punctuation marks)	Occurrences
"– deputy prime minister and minister of"	5
"the Serbian investment and export promotion agency"	4
"prime minister for economic and regional development"	4
Some top phrases containing 3 words (without punctuation marks)	**Occurrences**
"deputy prime minister"	20
"the national employment"	15
"and regional development"	13
Word count	**Occurrences**
Serbia	110
employment	83
unemployment	57
minister	54
people	40
EU	34
young	34
Serbian	31

Sources: Authors

When it comes to the source of information, the Croatian Government published news releases from only one source in 34,80% of our observations, often using the form of an interview (25,50%). The Serbian Government was more prone to use just one source of information (65,20%), very rarely publishing new releases without any source of information (0,50%). Table 3 shows that the Croatian and Serbian Governments mostly relied on their Prime Ministers as their main sources of information; followed by Deputy Prime Ministers and other Government members. Investors are rarely seen as a source of information, and never as the main one. Citizens who are mostly affected by the issue of unemployment were also not identified as the source of information. On the other hand, the frequency with which the Prime Minister was the main source of information shows that unemployment is taken as one of the key policy issues for each given country. The Minister of Labour was the main source of information in only 7,30% (Croatian Government) and 5,10% (Serbian Government) cases. The results also show that in its in online news releases the Croatian Government used more

experts (8,1%) as the main sources of information than the Serbian Government (3%), while the Serbian Government was more reliant on sources from their own Government.

Table 3: MAIN SOURCE OF INFORMATION IN ONLINE NEWS RELEASES

Main source of information www.vlada.hr N = 123	%	Main source of information www.srbija.gov.rs N = 197	%
Prime Minister	37,4	Prime Minister	33,0
Deputy Prime Minister	17,1	Deputy Prime Minister	25,9
Minister of Labour	7,3	Minister of Labour	5,1
Ministers	15,4	Ministers	20,3
Mayor	0,0	Mayor	1,0
Local politicians	4,1	Local politicians	5,6
Foreign politicians	2,4	Foreign politicians	4,1
Experts	8,1	Experts	3,0
It is hard to define	8,1	It is hard to define	2,0

Sources: Authors

302

The graphic content indicates that the main actors in the observed press releases were the prime ministers, followed by the deputy prime ministers and other Government members (Table 4). The Serbian Government gave a little more space to foreign politicians and investors as the main subjects of its photo releases, while the Croatian Government was more focused on local politicians and experts from certain fields.

Table 4: GRAPHIC CONTENT IN ONLINE NEWS RELEASES

Graphic content www.vlada.hr N = 75	%	Graphic content www.srbija.gov.rs N = 155	%
Prime Minister	43,7	Prime Minister	36,2
Deputy Prime Minister	10,3	Deputy Prime Minister	23,2
Minister of Labour	2,7	Minister of Labour	4,5
Ministers	16,0	Ministers	16,8
Local politicians	6,7	Local politicians	4,5
Foreign politicians	5,3	Foreign politicians	8,4
Experts	5,3	Experts	2,6
Investors	1,3	Investors	2,6
Citizens	1,3	Citizens	0,6
Something else	7,3	Something else	0,6

Sources: Authors

Conclusion

By presenting two cases based on framing the issue of unemployment, our research cannot offer universal lessons. For that we should have evaluated more countries and compared the results with similar studies. Yet, it is still the first analysis of unemployment as an issue of public diplomacy on official government websites in the Western Balkans and therefore it offers some relevant insights. It both corroborates and questions certain theoretical assumptions about the role of public diplomacy in general, and in two Western Balkan countries in particular, as well as about using websites as a public diplomacy tool.

The key findings of our research focused on framing the issue of unemployment on official Croatian and Serbian Government websites mostly demonstrated an effort by both Governments to mitigate the problem and prevent the deepening of the unemployment crisis. This was attempted by promoting a healthy business climate for foreign direct investments (FDI) and by presenting the public with positive examples of projects aimed at opening new work places. It shows the Croatian and Serbian Governments organising their public diplomacy efforts in regards to their perceived audience, although using a one-way communication tool, which indicates a top-down approach in the Governments' strategic communication. The research also indicated how challenging it is to draw a line between public affairs and public diplomacy, having in mind the lack of clear boundaries between domestic and foreign publics, as well as the issue of unemployment being at the heart of the domestic, as well as of the foreign policy agenda. Therefore, we used online public diplomacy as a "bridge concept". Although there is a proliferation of social media being used as the basic government public diplomacy tool, offering a potential for a two-way communication and direct dialogue, official websites still present an important platform to promote official government policy.

The results show that Croatian and Serbian Government websites mostly frame unemployment through activities that suggest possible solutions (i.e. investment projects, new work places, economic restructuring and an openness to foreign investments). Furthermore, by focusing on their prime ministers as the main sources of information and the main actors in online news releases, they are implying that the issue of unemployment represents one of the priorities for both Governments. These findings related to the issue of unemployment indicate each Governments' efforts to promote a "collaboration frame", which shows that they cannot deal independently with this issue (that is why they are inviting foreign investments and the corporate sector to join in). A comparative analysis revealed that the Croatian Government's online news releases were more focused on legal regulations

303

and socio-economic rights associated with unemployment than the Serbian Government's, which is indicative because of Croatia's accession to the European Union and the need to promote the concept of "the rule of law".

In order to develop more general conclusions regarding the use of websites as tools for government's public diplomacy in framing the issue of unemployment, future research should include more countries, different public diplomacy doctrines and approaches, as well as comparison with social media being used for public diplomacy. To estimate whether Croatia and Serbia' public diplomacy efforts resulted with concrete FDI and the rise of their employment rates, requires further research.

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305

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306