BETWEEN PRO-NATALIST POPULATION POLICY AND WOMEN’S REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS: THE ANALYSIS OF EXPOSURE OF THE TWO DISCOURSES IN PRESS MEDIA AFTER 2000

APSTRAKT Tekstom se pokušava da proceni u kojoj meri i na koji način se dva različita pristupa problemu ljudske reprodukcije – označena sintagmama reproduktivna prava i slobode, i pronatalistička populaciona politika – pojavljuju u pisanim medijima, u Srbiji, posle 2000. Prvi pristup se zasniva na principu individualnog samoopredeljenja u pogledu reproduktivnog ponašanja, dok drugi pretenduje na oblikovanje tog ponašanja u ime višeg cilja opstanka nacije. Ova dva pristupa imaju jasne i često protivrečne implikacije po različite aspekte državne politike. U prvom delu teksta se konstruišu dva diskursa na osnovu deklaracija i dokumenta njihovih zagovornika. U drugom delu se kvantitativnom analizom ustanovljava rasprostranjenost i celovitost ovih diskursa u tekstovima objavljenim u Blicu, Kuriru, Vremenu i Nin-u. U kojoj meri zainteresovane grupe koje promovišu ova dva diskursa uspevaju da skrenu pažnju na probleme od posebnog interesa za njih, kao i u kojoj meri uspevaju da u javnosti predstave probleme reproduktivnog ponašanja kroz filter svoje sopstvene retorike, neka su od pitanja na koja u tekstu pokušavamo da odgovorimo.

KLJUČNE REČI reproduktivna prava, populaciona politika, analiza medija

ABSTRACT The paper is an attempt to assess the exposure of two distinct approaches to reproductive behavior – the claims for reproductive rights and freedoms, and the pro-natalist population policy – in the press media in Serbia after 2000. The first approach is grounded on the principle of self-determination in respect to reproductive behavior, whereas the second attempts to modify reproductive behavior so that a higher goal of the survival of Serbian nation is achieved. The two approaches have clear and contradictory policy

implications. In the first part of the paper two discourses are constructed based on relevant declarations and other publications by the proponents of the two discourses. In the second part, by the means of a descriptive quantitative analysis, we assess the frequency and the coherence of the discourses in the articles published in Blic, Kurir, Vreme and Nin. The questions we attempt to answer are: To what extent interested pressure groups get to place the elements of their agendas in the press? To what extent these groups manage to frame public discussions and to dominate the instances of media coverage with their own imagery and rhetoric?

KEY WORDS reproductive rights, population policy, media analysis

Reproductive rights vs. pro-natalist population policy agenda

This paper is an attempt to assess the exposure in selected newspapers of two discourses that are well developed in relatively narrow circles of interested parties – one promoting reproductive rights of women and the other promoting pro-natalist population policy in which women are frequently relegated to "the status of depersonalized policy targets" (Shiffman, Scrabalo, Subotic, 2002). The two discourses cross paths since they both claim access to the means of fertility regulation.

Contemporary concept of reproductive rights encompasses series of rights and freedoms related to human reproduction, based on the principle of self-determination of individuals in respect to whether, when and how many children they will have (Konstantinović-Vilić, Milosavljević, Petrušić, 1999). An important segment of these rights demands the highest possible standard of sexual and reproductive health, including sexual education, fertility treatment, safe pregnancy and delivery. Some authors extend the interpretation of the right to give birth to encompass the right to alimony, family allowance, and paid maternity and parental leave. In case when the right to not give birth is exercised, high standard of sexual and reproductive health is obtained through the right to contraception and safe abortion. As the so-called second generation of human rights, reproductive rights and freedoms involve a set of institutional guarantees by the state agencies providing access to all the relevant information and creating the necessary conditions, primarily concerning socio-economic position of women, for their enactment (Simović-Hiber, Kartag-Odri, 1996, pp. 84).

In its turn population policy, to the extent to which it is concerned with the magnitude of population, claims access to the means of fertility regulation so that it could modify reproductive behavior in the socially desirable direction (Konstantinović-Vilić, Milosavljević, Petrušić, 1999, pp. 21). Depending on its objective, population policy could take a course of population control – representing
the attempt to reduce fertility rates in the population or in its particular groups\(^2\) – or of pro-natalist population policy – representing the attempts to enhance the fertility rates in the population as a whole or in some of its groups. The latter course of population policy was particularly actualized in Serbia in the late 1980s and during the 1990s\(^3\).

In this paper we look at the form pro-natalist population policy agenda assumes in Serbia after 2000, and the place it takes in selected press media relative to the place taken by the reproductive rights and freedoms. After 2000, with the regime change, Serbia entered a period of comprehensive constitutional, political, economic and social reform involving diverse actors striving to place their interests on political agenda. How do the defenders of reproductive rights of women fare in this respect, in this period? Do they get enough exposure in mass media in terms of influencing public opinion and policy-makers themselves in relation to the relevant policy issues? We particularly focus on possible threat to the reproductive rights of women stemming from a pro-natalist population policy to the extent in which it is framed in terms of a selective concern for fertility rates and population growth of just one national group, with regard to a “proper” family form, and with a postulated either “natural” role or social responsibility (duty) of women as mothers.

Regarding policy recommendations, the objectives immanent in the complex of reproductive rights of women and in the pro-natalist population policy are not necessarily conflicting in themselves. If the state chooses to enhance the fertility rates by actively creating social, economic and cultural conditions which enable individuals to bear and care for children if they want them and when they want them, but at the same time equally eagerly guarantees and facilitates the right to not give birth to the individuals who do not want children and when they do not want them, the two agendas are not at odds. From the perspective of feminist scholars the best family planning is based on exercising reproductive rights without any social or legal coercion – allowing giving birth to wanted children and avoiding giving birth to the unwanted ones (Blagojević, 1997, pp. 160).

The two agendas clash if the goals of pro-natalist population policy are achieved at the expense of women’s right to self-determination. In that sense few themes particularly stand out in the writings of certain social actors: associations of concerned citizens, Church, political parties, experts’ publications…The first theme stems from a conviction that individual choices of women in respect to giving birth are secondary to higher goals which are in their turn decided by someone else. Given the low birth rate among Serbs, Serbian women should mobilize towards the

\(^2\) This was the dominant paradigm shaping population policy between 1950s and the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (Shiffman, Scrabalo, Subotic, 2002).

\(^3\) For a detailed overview of the treatment of reproductive issues in Serbia in late 1980s and 1990s see Shiffman, Scrabalo, and Subotic (2002), and Drezgic (2004).
survival of the nation by performing their role of mothers. There is also a Providence of God’s Will, which one should not dare to challenge by avoiding to give birth whether it is with the help of contraception or through abortion. The second and closely related theme is that still quite liberal abortion legislation in this country is one of the sources if not the main source of the reduced fertility rate among Serbian population. The third theme has its foundation in traditional patriarchal attitudes which direct population policy towards a “proper” family form in which heterosexual married women (mothers) give birth to as many (Serbian) children as possible. Reproductive and sexual rights of the women who do not fit this form have been neglected by such pro-natalist population policy. The fourth theme evolves around moral disqualification of women who do not comply with any of the described higher goals. For example, a woman who chooses not to give birth and instead pursues a career is referred to as "selfishly indulgent in materialistic goods", and has "distorted value system". Closely related to their convictions are the policies affecting reproductive behavior recommended by the proponents of the two discourses.4

**Media and policy-making**

Before assessing the exposure of these discourses and the policy agendas they inspire, in selected press media after 2000, let us briefly discuss the role of mass media in terms of influencing public opinion. In this paper we work under several assumptions: that mass-media are powerful means in influencing policy debates; that groups and agencies interested in policy change and implementation attach considerable “importance to favorable media coverage and exposure”; that inflammatory coverage – such as in tabloid press – as well as coverage hostile to particular opinions or social groups may clash with thoughtful policy making based on universal principles and argumentation (Liddiard, 2003, pp. 85).

While using them as our starting point we are fully aware of these assumptions being questionable in themselves in several respects. “What type of impact do the mass media really have upon public attitudes towards different social problems?” (Liddiard, 2003, pp. 87) Could media coverage change public perceptions? If so, are these perceptions relevant at all for the policy-makers? Notwithstanding these dilemmas, it seems that an agreement has been reached among academics in terms of what could be considered a minimal impact of the media upon public attitudes. At the least, the media have the ability to sensitize millions of people to certain social issues and policy concerns which they may not otherwise have been involved with or particularly interested in. Also, media

4 These policies are schematically listed in Boxes 1 and 2.
coverage of a socially relevant issue could offer some new material (arguments and evidence) or articulate into a coherent stand-point what individuals already embrace as their own belief.

A separate but still related question is the influence media may have upon policy-makers, for example by promoting the importance of some issues or particular viewpoints over others. Media analysts hold that “the media certainly perform an important role in the initial stages of policy germination providing a space for pressure groups to place certain issues on the political agenda” (Liddiard, 2003, pp. 89). On the other hand the impression about media influence on policy makers could derive from the coincidence of media coverage with the already predominant political ideologies and agendas. Thirdly, policy-makers and politicians, in their turn, could attempt to secure favorable media coverage for government’s accounts or interpretations and its own policy initiatives.

This brief discussion helps us formulate the questions immediate to our research in the more general context of media influence. Which themes, viewpoints and policy concerns related to reproductive behavior most frequently appear in the media under study? To what extent interested pressure groups get to place the elements of their agendas in the press? To what extent these groups manage to frame public discussions and to dominate the instances of media coverage with their own imagery and rhetoric? What is the space government agencies get in the press related to the same issues, relative to the space obtained by the interested pressure groups?

**Major stakeholders and their agendas**

The starting point of our research was to construct the two discourses whose exposure in the press we wanted to assess. The complex content of reproductive rights of women we found already elaborated and well defined in documents by international (women) organizations, and further discussed and interpreted as it applies to domestic legislation, practice and citizens education by feminist activists and feminist scholars with various academic backgrounds.

---

5 The view that media messages are directly absorbed by a passive audience has been largely discredited and gave way to a view that “public select and interpret media messages according to their existing viewpoints” (Liddiard, 2003, pp.89).

6 Most important in this respect are Women’s Declaration on Population Policy, prepared for The International Conference on Population and Development ICPD, 1994; Cairo Program of Action, a document developed at ICPD in 1994; Women’s Convention CEDAW; and the documents by WHO.

7 Among many women’s and human rights groups promoting the agenda of reproductive rights and freedoms we can only mention few: Association for Women’s Initiative, Autonomous Women’s
We had to construct pro-natalist population policy agenda from several sources: in particularly salient and most elaborated way it could be found in publications by academics and activists associated with "Opstanak"; other elements of the agenda were taken from the Church documents; a very important insight into this agenda came from proponents of the reproductive rights, as they recognized the major sources of threat for themselves as well as the most immediate points of their claims which have been under attack.

The Serbian Orthodox Church is a stakeholder with the clearest position on women's reproductive rights. In a word, the Church does not acknowledge them. Three major ideas are particularly relevant in this respect. First, the Church is against any kind of contraception and abortion, regardless of the duration of pregnancy. Second, it promotes the biological revival of the Serbian nation. Third, it condemns the selfishness of career-obsessed women who neglect their maternal duties. The Church's position is presented in Serbian Orthodox Church's official journals such as "Pravoslavlje" ("Orthodoxy"), the paper of the Serbian Patriarchy, epistles, and press releases (which is the topic of this analysis).9

The attitude of the Orthodox Church to contraception and abortion as an "infanticide in the womb" comes from the dogma and is unrelated to the natality-related tendencies in modern Serbian society.10 Orthodoxy rejects the view that the woman has the right to privacy of her own body, due to the greater value of life given by God himself. The Orthodox Church equally condemns both the abortion and the procedures to prevent pregnancy: "The essence of ‘white plague’11 is in sin... The sin of not conceiving children! Various contraceptives result in many more children not even conceived than those killed by abortion." (Orthodoxy No. 920, 2005) (Aiding and cooperating in abortion is also sinful, and the men who have inseminated the woman, and then allowed the abortion are also condemned.12)
However, whereas most pro-life\textsuperscript{13} organizations belonging to the Catholic Church unify all believers, not making a distinction on the grounds of nationality, the Orthodox Church does not refrain from talking about the natality of the Serbian people in particular, in the context of national survival. "...Serbian women on average give birth 'not to a whole child'. For extended reproduction, a technical term, that is for the hope for the survival of this people, the only term one should really use, the Serbian mother should deliver at least four children" (Glišić, 2005). In the Christmas address of 2004 by His Holiness, Serbian Patriarch Pavle, the 'call for birth' motive reappears: “We call on our spiritual daughters to give birth to children, and not to murder them unborn in their wombs using family planning as a pretext. Let no one use poverty as an excuse. Children do need a lot, but what they need most is love and peace in the family.” We notice that poverty and family planning are recognized as possible motives for people to rationalize not giving birth.

The Church views "women's careerism" as one of the main causes of insufficient number of childbirths in the reproductive period: "Excessive careerism, unreadiness to sacrifice, desire to self-please, are real reasons for which women resort to infanticide" (Glišić, 2005). What is in "Pravoslavlje" referred to as to the "culture of death" - containing approval of abortion, contraception, planned parenthood, sexual education, homosexualism, etc. (Orthodoxy No. 917, 2005) - by the supporters of the reproductive rights and freedoms is recognized as the basic points of individual's selfdetermination.

The Serbian Orthodox Church does not only give sermons and recommendations relevant for reproductive behavior. It also promotes “the education of young Serbian men and women on the holiness of human life” through the project »LIFE« and its three subprojects – »The Baby Knows«, »Fertility«, and »Family«. The goal of the project is to influence the legislators so that the state should provide subsidies to couples treated for sterility, and facilitate child adoption procedures. In addition to its own projects, the Church broadens its influence by calling for the cooperation of all in favour of the pro-natalist policy (for instance, the association “Opstanak” (Survival)).

Another partaker in the pro-natalist scene is the association of citizens “Opstanak” (Survival), which originated in 2003 at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade. Its basic task is said to be the fight against the ‘white plague’ and the accelerated renewal of the population. “Opstanak” program claims that their goal is to use all means of propaganda, teachings, and scientific research so as to put pressure on the authorities to change their childbirth policy and bring improvement in the population

\textsuperscript{13} In Western countries, «pro life» campaigns accentuate respect of life, as the most holy of things. In practice, this entails a broad campaign against artificial interruption of pregnancy and euthanasia, insistence on the elementary right of every human being to be born, etc.
conditions because “the current situation is catastrophic”. The causes of such a situation are listed as: feminism, the media, twisted morality, homosexuality, and bad politics. The founder of the association “Opstanak” is Marko Mladenovic, a sociologist of the family, author of a number of books on low birthrates among the Serbian people. His involvement gives the aura of expertise to the activities of this association. Another supporter of “Opstanak” is the sociologist Milan Vojnovic, author of numerous books in the field with telling titles: *Rebirth of the Serbian People, The Fatal Attrition of the Serbian People, The Emptied Serbia, The Dying of Serbia*, and *Serbs at the Crossroads*.

“Opstanak” clearly intends to institutionalize its ideas through a draft of the Act on the Renewal of the Population and Protection of Children¹⁴, supported by the Ministry of Serbs Living outside the Country, the Serbian Patriarch, and the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The act proposal defines changes to the taxation policy (cancelation of the tax on children's items), suppression of legal abortion, treatment of sterility, increase of mother's and children's allowances, extended maternity leave. There is also a possibility for the mother to receive salary after her third delivery from the Orthodox Church voluntary contributions or other foundations. A “bachelor's tax” is also proposed, to be paid by the wealthy, the unmarried, or married without children. Residential and accommodation policy should also be conducted in favour of families with more children, and children should be systematically educated to cherish marriage and the family. Moreover, there need to be established networks of family and marital counseling institutions, marriage matchmaking agencies and all the media should be included in pro-natality propaganda.

One would expect that political parties would attempt to mobilize the voters by explicitly expressing their standpoints regarding reproductive behavior in the media. In the Western world in particular, the issues of abortion, women career and homosexual marriages, for example, serve as powerful symbols distinguishing conservative and liberal political ideologies. However, at least based on their programs, Serbian political parties seem to neither clearly differ among themselves, nor they have coherent standpoints in respect to these issues. In their public appearances, representatives of all political parties vouch for the ‘white plague’ problem to be solved. However, the analysis of programs of the most influential parties reveals the traces of both pro-natalist and pro-reproductive rights discourses.

Explicit measures to treat this problem are found in the program of the Serbian Radical Party: “We will commit ourselves to free basic healthcare and full healthcare for children, pregnant women and old people, and also to free sterility

---

¹⁴ “Opstanak”, official website.
treatment.”15 However, this position does not explicitly embrace either the pro-natalist or the pro-reproductive rights attitude. In fact, these words can be acceptable to both sides. In its program G17+ distinguishes between the right of the individual to decide about his or her life and to take care of his or her welfare and fortune, on the one side, and the task of the state to provide conditions in which he or she could do this in a productive, morally grounded, and dignified way, on the other side. However, in the press release on the occasion on the shortening of maternity leave period in Serbia, G17+ expressed its disagreement for the reason that “the state should intensively work on the growth of birthrates and stimulation of childbirth”16. DSS program explicitly supports “wanted parenthood” and the equal distribution of obligations related to child rearing. “Parents should be free to decide on the number of children, and together bear responsibility for their children’s upbringing.”17 Furthermore, “...all kinds of sexual discrimination need to be discontinued. Women must be guaranteed the right to equal opportunity of employment, education, work and promotion, and all the rights in the domain of maternity.”18 At the same time, however, DSS explicitly names the family as the cornerstone of society and the state, which may be at odds with the individual rights and freedoms. DS is also committed to gender equality. However, in their program they do not explicitly address the issue of reproductive behavior. There is an unexpected reference, though, to women in the traditional role of mothers and housewives as well as expressed commitment to the preservation of family values: DS promotes the idea of “economic valuation of a responsible role of the mother and the housewife”. If DS went one step further and expressed this in gender neutral terms – as a support to economic valuation of parenthood and housekeeping - the idea would sound much more promising.

In respect to the groups seeking space in the press media our final remark relates to government’s accounts or interpretations of its own policy initiatives. The period under study was filled with a feverish legislative activity, whose some parts had direct bearing on the issues related to reproductive behavior. The laws which have been discussed, amended or passed in the Parliament in this period include The Law on Financial Support to Families with Children, Employment Law, The Law on Health Insurance, The Law on Health Services, Family Law, and The Law on Social Services. Among other relations relevant for reproductive behavior these laws set up to regulate family allowances, maternity and parental leaves, family violence, state financing of fertility treatments, health services available for pregnant women and infants, etc. While an assessment of the government policies introduced in the period

15 The official website of the Serbian Radical Party.
16 Official website of G17+.
17 Official website DSS.
18 Official website DSS.
under study in respect to how friendly they were to reproductive rights and freedoms is far beyond the scope of this paper, we are interested in the way in which government intentions were interpreted and presented to the readers of the newspapers we looked at, by the various government agencies.

The two discourses as we constructed them from the publications of women’s groups and the main players in the pro-natalist scene are in a stylized way presented in boxes 1 and 2. These ‘schemes’ helped us classify the selected articles in the appropriate way.

**Box 1: Women’s reproductive rights narrative**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women have right to freely decide if, when and how many children they will give birth to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They also have right to the highest possible standard of sexual and reproductive health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There should be no discrimination of any kind between diverse family forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion is a way to exercise the right to not give birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A state should guarantee access to information and means necessary for women to exercise these rights</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Availability of all the means for birth control, including abortion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A criminal law to incriminate marital rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High standard reproductive health: pregnancy, infant health, infertility treatment, sexual diseases prevention, reproductive health education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care facilities, parental leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal family allowance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acceptable population policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Acceptable” population policy respects the integrity of women’s bodies and their sexual and reproductive rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual rights concerning childbearing cannot be undermined by reference to any higher instance: family, nation, state, experts, church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproductive rights apply to all women regardless of their marital and familial status or sexual orientation. A pro-natalist population policy which channels women into the limiting role of mothers within a marriage setting, is not acceptable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Box 2: Pro-natalist population policy narrative

**Claims**
- Low fertility is a threat to the very existence of the Serbian nation.
- Mothers should mobilize towards the survival of the nation. Individual choices of women are secondary to this higher goal.
- Family with more than two but less than five children, within the setting of heterosexual marriage, is a proper family form and should be differentially supported.
- Family planning, sexual education, homosexual relations make up a culture of death.
- Abortion is a “womb infanticide.”
- A woman who chooses not to give birth and instead pursues a career is "selfishly indulgent in materialistic goods", and has "distorted value system"

**Policy recommendation**
- Ban abortion except in exceptional situations
- Instead of sexual education, education for family and marriage
- Motherhood wage
- Prolonged maternity leave
- Family allowance as a population policy measure
- Financial and in-kind support for families with many children
- Taxing single people and couples without children

**Newspaper analysis**

The unit of our analysis was a whole text published in one of the four selected papers: Blic, daily (2002 to 2005), Kurir, daily (2003-2005), Vreme, weekly (2001-2005) and Nin, weekly (2003-2005). The two daily papers were selected because of their large readership, so that we considered them a good source of information on how much the wider public may know about the issues related to reproductive behavior. The two weekly magazines were on the other hand selected for their expected more elaborative treatment, providing us with information on what a more “ambitious” reader may find out about the same issues. In terms of their editorial policy we perceived Blic as rather neutral and mostly oriented towards news reporting; Kurir has a reputation for its provocative reporting and we expected that its own agenda would coincide with pro-natalist population policy. We perceived Vreme as a liberal and Nin a somewhat conservative magazine. The four papers also have complete on-line archives, which facilitated the realization of our research plan to work on the whole population of articles which met the selection criteria, instead of providing only anecdotal evidence.

We included every text published in the specified period if it could be broadly classified under the one of the following six topics for which we hoped to be broad
enough to encompass all the elements of both discourses but not associated with any discourse in particular:

1. **(Low) fertility rates**
2. **Family structure and demographic issues in general**
3. **Reproductive health issues** (contraception and abortion, fertility treatments, sexual education and the state of maternity …)
4. **Family violence**
5. **The cost of children**
6. **State social, family and health policies** (legally regulated support to working mothers and families with children, health services to mothers and infants, as well as direct support for birth rate increase)

The scope and the variety of articles included in the analysis could be illustrated by few examples: *Krajina is dying out: The number of deaths is twice as high as the number of births in Negotin municipality…*(topic 1); *When girls become mothers: Among 36 adolescents with child, 15 are younger then 16 years of age….*(topic 2); *On sex in high schools: Čačak high schools will be the first to organize workshops on reproductive health…*(topic 3); *What is a cost of a newborn, and how much the state helps child rearing…*(topic 4); *A draft of the law on financial help to the families with children suggested help for a first born too, but the Parliament rejected the motion….*(topic 6).

**Table 1**: Distribution of articles by topics and by newspapers (figures in brackets indicate percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fertility rates</th>
<th>Family structure</th>
<th>Reproductive health</th>
<th>Family violence</th>
<th>Cost of children</th>
<th>State policy</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blic</td>
<td>4 (3.6)</td>
<td>14 (12.6)</td>
<td>28 (25.2)</td>
<td>19 (17.1)</td>
<td>15 (13.5)</td>
<td>31 (27.9)</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurir</td>
<td>25 (30.1)</td>
<td>5 (6.0)</td>
<td>22 (26.5)</td>
<td>10 (12.0)</td>
<td>2 (2.4)</td>
<td>19 (22.9)</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vreme</td>
<td>4 (12.9)</td>
<td>12 (38.7)</td>
<td>4 (12.9)</td>
<td>1 (3.2)</td>
<td>4 (12.9)</td>
<td>6 (19.4)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nin</td>
<td>1 (25.0)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>3 (75.0)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34 (14.8)</td>
<td>31 (13.5)</td>
<td>57 (24.9)</td>
<td>31 (13.5)</td>
<td>21 (9.2)</td>
<td>56 (24.5)</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In such a way we collected 200 articles from four papers. However, since we were interested in exposure of particular actors trying to place their viewpoints on political agenda, and given that in some articles more than one actor showed up, we mostly worked with another unit of analysis – actor-text – so that one article with
two actors expressing their views was counted as two actor-texts. In 200 articles we encountered 229 actor-texts. The number of actor-texts found in each paper and its distribution between six topics is displayed in Table 1.

Finding 1:

The most numerous appear to be the articles addressing issues of reproductive health and introducing or commenting on government social, family and health policies. The two issues are covered with equal frequency in all the analyzed papers. The least frequent are the articles on the cost of children’s bearing and upbringing. This issue is covered with a relatively moderate frequency in Blic and Vreme, but hardly noticed in Kurir. On the other hand, Kurir is bringing up the issue of fertility rates twice as many times as is the average for all papers we looked at, while the same topic is almost not at all addressed in Blic. Family violence is neglected by Vreme in the observed period. On the other hand, Vreme frames demographic issues in terms of diversified family structures and forms more frequently than other papers.

The two discourses displayed in the boxes 1 and 2 have unavoidably sensitized us to the relevant motives and themes to look for in the texts. However, we tried to obtain as much objectivity as possible by making a complete list of themes and motives we encountered in the selected articles as well as of the particular combinations in which these elements predominantly appeared, before classifying a text into one or another discourse. In other words, we tried to let the elements of the discourses emerge from the texts instead of imposing them from our scheme, at the start. This procedure enabled us to distinguish between four categories of texts: 1) the articles in which the issues relevant for reproductive behavior were addressed without a particular agenda; 2) the articles in which only few of the elements of one of the two discourses could be recognized; 3) the articles with full imagery and the rhetoric of one or of the both discourses and 4) the articles with clear agenda in respect to reproductive behavior, containing policy recommendation to which, at least in our opinion the both parties could subscribe, without betraying their convictions (see “Acceptable population policy” in Box 1). Distribution of articles among these four categories with the most recurring themes and motives is presented in Table 2.

---

19 Nin is not particularly relevant for the quantitative side of our analysis since we only found two articles containing 4 actor-texts in it.
Table 2: Distribution of articles in respect to the number and the kind of elements of the discourses under observation

- **No narrative**
  108 (47.2%)

- **Building up towards reproductive rights narrative**
  1. Free choice + economic cost consideration + family planning
     18
  2. High standard reproductive health + self-determination
     7
  3. Support to all family forms
     10
  4. Support to children, parenthood and working women
     11
  5. Against sexual violence against women
     5
     51 (22.3%)

- **Building up towards pro-natalist population policy narrative**
  1. Support to “proper” family form and to women as mothers
     13
  2. Appeals to give birth in the name of the nation and in “proper time”
     8
  3. Banning abortion + not giving birth is egoistic and indulgent
     6
  4. High standard reproductive health for the reasons of low fertility rate
     5
     32 (14.0%)

- **Common ground**
  1. Family violence
     12
  2. Promotion of fertility in neutral terms
     8
     20 (8.7%)

- **Full narrative**
  1. Representing reproductive rights claims
     5
  2. Representing pro-natalist population policy claims
     10
  3. Compare (contrast) the two narratives
     3
     18 (7.9%)

**Total**
229 (100%)

Finding 2:
Approximately a half (108) of the analyzed articles has neither particular agenda nor a combination of elements of either of the two discourses. They contain either information (*a new law was passed in the Parliament*) or statistical data (*fertility rates*).

The numbers of articles (actor-texts) sensitizing a reader to at least some of the elements of the two discourses are rather balanced, with somewhat more numerous articles with the elements of reproductive rights agenda (51 pro-reproductive vs. 32 pro-natalist). Among the articles containing some elements of the reproductive rights discourse the most numerous are the ones combining the
themes of free choice in respect to giving birth with an assessment of economic cost of such a decision (as opposed to pro-natalist arguments that economic cost is just an excuse for lazy and selfish women not to perform their duty to the survival of the nation) – Table 2: **Building up towards reproductive rights narrative** (1). The second numerous in this category of articles are the ones “defending” all family forms and support to children in the gender neutral terms of parenthood and with image of working women in the background. For example, in Kurir (26. 9. 2005) we read how they do it in France (hopefully we will learn something): “Family policy proposed by De Vilpen should provide families with better financial situation in order to facilitate their decisions to have children, to encourage women to quicker and easier return to their jobs and fathers to more frequently use parental leave....Benefit to the parents who decide to break their leave after a year instead of three years will rise from 512 to 750 EUROS”.

Among the articles exemplary exemplifying the pro-natalist population policy claims the most numerous are the ones in which a “proper” family form and an image of women as primarily mothers is supported – Table 2: **Building up towards pro-natalist population policy narrative** (1). For example in Kurir (23. 4. 2005) a journalist is appealing for a law which would grant all the advantages to the families with three and more children and state pension for unemployed mothers, while at the same time taxing bachelors and unmarried women over 30 (“usedelice”).

We found 20 articles with explicitly expressed concerns and even policy recommendations relevant and acceptable for both discourses, in accord with our understanding of the two (see Box 1, “Acceptable population policy”). The most numerous among them are the ones on the issues of family violence and fertility treatments for men and women wanting to have children.

In only 18 out of 229 articles (actor-texts) the actors presented their views regarding reproductive behavior in a coherent way and with the full imagery and rhetoric of one or both of the two discourses. Out of 18 articles with complete agendas, 10 are written in the language of pro-natalist discourse, and 6 out of these 10 express the standpoints of pro-natalist oriented NGOs and experts. In only 3 articles an explicit awareness of the clashing points of the two discourses is demonstrated. The examples of the articles with the full discourse will be analyzed later on in the text.

**Finding 3:**

We have not assumed at the start of the analysis that topics we used as a selection tool necessarily involved a particular agenda or a viewpoint. However, after classifying the articles (Table 3) we found that treatment of *fertility rates* in newspapers is predominantly framed in terms of pro-natalist discourse whereas *family structure* and *cost of children* are topics which most frequently indicate reproductive rights agenda. A case of *fertility rates* approached from a pro-natalist
perspective is found in Kurir (25. 4. 2005): "Serbia is the country which is fading away. Serbs are the people who is dying out. If something radically does not change, Serbs will be a minority in their own country in just 20 years, and in 50 on the verge of total disappearance." An illustration of family structure approached from a pro-reproductive rights perspective is taken from Blic (24.10.2003), quoting vice director of the Republic Statistical Institute: "Marriage is increasingly less popular among young people... This makes our population structure in respect to marriage similar to the European one. The reason for this is in education, lifestyle, women's emancipation... but also unemployment, and lack of accommodation... A higher percent of divorced people lives in cities than in the country, which reflects the differences in lifestyles and the attitudes towards the institution of marriage”.

Table 3: Distribution of discourses between the topics of articles (figures in brackets indicate percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fertility rates</th>
<th>Family structure</th>
<th>Reproductive health</th>
<th>Family violence</th>
<th>Cost of children</th>
<th>State policy</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reproductive rights</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>56 (24.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronatalist claims</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42 (18.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (1.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common ground</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20 (8.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No discourse</td>
<td>9 (3.9)</td>
<td>14 (6.1)</td>
<td>25 (11.0)</td>
<td>13 (5.7)</td>
<td>13 (5.7)</td>
<td>34 (14.9)</td>
<td>108 (47.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34 (14.9)</td>
<td>31 (13.5)</td>
<td>57 (24.9)</td>
<td>30 (13.1)</td>
<td>21 (9.2)</td>
<td>56 (24.5)</td>
<td>229 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Articles concerned with reproductive health issues are equally colored by the elements of both claims as are the articles presenting or commenting government measures in the field of social, family and health policy. The latter is due to either conflicting intentions of government policies themselves or ambiguous interpretation of these intentions by journalists. An example of approaching reproductive health issue from a pro-natalist stand, with open disregard for individuals’ reproductive rights, is found in Blic, where a medical doctor expresses his “expert” opinion: “We expect a lot from women, to study, and to work as men do, but we also expect them to give birth. This is difficult to combine ... so instead of postponing it, women should give birth when the God and the nature have determined”. Or, even more explicitly, in Kurir (24. 9. 2004), presenting the political discussion in relation to whether the artificial insemination should be financed by the state: “Other political parties are committed to the increasing the fertility rates in Serbia, but they hold that... the money the state would spend on the artificial
insemination of infertile couples could be better spent as a financial help to fertile couples to bear more children”. Pro-reproductive right proponents, on the other hand, approach the reproductive health issue mostly from the perspective of sexual education as in Blic (24. 22. 2003), where dr Mila Paunić, from the Committee for Health Education in the Republic Ministry of Education promotes the initiative to introduce sexual education into the 7th grade of primary schools: “It is possible that some still think that communication and education in the area of sexual education would induce young people to start a sexually active life early. However, this is an entirely misplaced opinion...[The workshops] will only help them build more responsible attitude towards their own sexual life”.

Notwithstanding their differences, there is an aspect of reproductive health which offers a common ground for the two parties – that is fertility treatment. We found quite a few articles calling for the state financed fertility treatment without any reference to negative fertility rate, on the occasion of amending the Health Insurance law.

One of the questions we set up to explore in this paper concerns the extent to which interested pressure groups get to place their agendas in the press. In particular, we were interested in the place policy-makers and politicians managed to secure in media coverage for government accounts or interpretations of their own policy initiatives. In this respect we distinguished 7 actors whose views and initiatives were presented in the papers we looked at (listed in the first column of Table 4)²⁰.

Table 4: Actors appearance by discourse category (figures in brackets display percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Contrast</th>
<th>Reproductive rights</th>
<th>Pronatalist claims</th>
<th>Common ground</th>
<th>No discourse</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>45 (19.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political parties</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6 (2.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State officials</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>49 (21.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23 (10.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 (3.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5 (2.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columnist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12 (5.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No actor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>82 (35.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3 (1.3)</td>
<td>56 (24.5)</td>
<td>42 (18.3)</td>
<td>20 (8.7)</td>
<td>108 (47.2)</td>
<td>229 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²⁰ These actors are at some length described above in the text.
Finding 4:

In slightly more than a third of analyzed articles neither of the listed actors appeared. This broadly coincided with articles not having particular agenda or recognizable combination of elements of any of the two discourses (73 articles without discourse out of 82 articles without actors). Experts and state officials are the actors who dominate articles in which neither of the two discourses under observation is noticeable. However, they also dominate the articles containing the elements of both reproductive rights and pronatalist population policy agenda, and are the most frequently appearing actors in the press in general (they make up to 64% of all the actors in the papers we looked at). Third most visible actor are NGOs (including both women’s groups and associations and agencies with pro-natalist agenda). Relatively small number of articles with journalists’ commentary on the issues related to reproductive behavior may be, to some extent, accounted for with the reference to the selection of two daily newspapers – with publishing policy heavily biased towards news reporting. But it also may be indicative of a lack of a practice of public policy debates, involving thorough investigation in media of policy implications. More interesting, however, is the reluctance of political parties’ to mobilize voters around explicitly expressed views towards either reproductive (human) rights or pro-natalist population policy agendas. In this respect our political parties differ from their counterparts in the West, for example in the USA.21 Contrary to a widespread impression that Serbian Orthodox Church is increasingly influencing public opinion, it only sporadically presents its views in the press media we analyzed.

Finding 5:

From the point of view of the topics of the articles, reproductive health is dominated by experts (they appear in 22 out of 45 articles on reproductive health). They approach the issue of reproductive health from the perspective of reproductive rights of women in twice as many articles (9) as they do from the point of view of pro-natalist agenda (4). For example in a commentary of photos allegedly showing a fetus in the moment of abortion, publicly displayed on the walls in Belgrade city center, a medical doctor says for Blic: "Banning abortion would only result in the increased incidence of illegal abortions. Real solution to the problem is in education on contraception and family planning". However, some other "experts“ think along different lines: "...The rest [married couples without children] do not want to have offspring because they prefer the high life style, or think they should have a flat

21 “…moral values, associated with social and religious issues such as homosexual marriages, right to carry guns and right to abortion, were of the outmost importance for the voters.....Voters who are against abortion, carry guns, are married, have children and live in small towns preferred Bush, (whereas).... large cities inhabitants ...(and) working women preferred Kerry“ (Kurir, 5.9.2004).
prior to giving birth to any children, or are career obsessed, or seek economic independence...Young women are increasingly characterized by complete egoism and rarely even think about giving birth to another life“ (B. Spasic M.A. 22, in Blic, 2005).

Table 5: Actors appearance by topic of article (figures in brackets indicate percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fertility rates</th>
<th>Family structure</th>
<th>Reproductive health</th>
<th>Family violence</th>
<th>Price of children</th>
<th>State policy</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(19.6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political parties</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State officials</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(21.4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10.0)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columnist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5.2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No actor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(35.8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34 (14.9)</td>
<td>31 (13.5)</td>
<td>57 (24.9)</td>
<td>31 (13.5)</td>
<td>20 (8.7)</td>
<td>56 (24.5)</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not surprisingly, presentations of governments policies in press media are dominated by the state officials, (they appear in 22 out of 49 articles devoted to government initiatives in respect to reproductive behavior, Table 5), interpreting the government intentions.23 These interpretations are in their turn framed with equal frequency in the language of both discourses under consideration (6 articles each). Here are few illustrations of a state official interpreting the government intentions as loaded with the pro-natalist agenda: On the occasion of passing The Law on Financial Support to Families with Children, a state official states that since first child is born because it is wanted, The Law does not propose a financial support [family grant] for it...Pro-natalist character of the law is underlined by the support to parents with two and more children (Kurir 29. 11. 2003). Similarly, on the occasion of the Insurance Law, another state official explains that given the negative

23 An assessment of the government policies introduced in the period under study in respect to their pro-reproductive rights vs. pro-natalist population policy implications remained far beyond the scope of this paper. We were only interested in what interpretations have been presented to readers of the newspapers we looked at.
fertility rate the government has decided to finance artificial insemination (Blic, 12. 6. 2003). The cases of state officials approaching the government policies from the perspective of reproductive rights – for example, equal support to all children – include Gordan Matkovic vouching for not separating family allowance granted to all children and family grant offered to only second and third child (Blic, 10. 4. 2003), as well as Vesna Piperski – Tucakov introducing the amendment to the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children according to which family grant would be offered to the first child too (Blic, 17. 12. 2004).

Although not the most frequently appearing in the press, NGOs’ initiatives show up equally under all six topics we considered. In terms of their agenda, NGOs promoting reproductive rights of women are more visible (11 articles out of 23 in which NGOs appear) than the ones promoting pro-natalist agenda (5 out of 23). Among the former in the papers we analyzed we encountered Antitrafficking Center, NGO for women’s rights, ACD /VOCA, and SOS telephone for the victims of the family violence. Among the latter "Opstanak“ is the most visible. An illustration of the way in which women’s groups present their views is taken from Kurir (2004) where an activist notices that the violence against children particularly occurs in families with more than four children, where parents, in her opinion, raise children for the sake of financial help, with caring for them coming in a second place. On the other hand the pro-natalist oriented NGOs place their agenda in the following way: President of the association against ‘white plague’ M. Mladenovic warns that for reproduction two children are needed, whereas Serbs need at least four in order to avoid the future of an extinct people.

In few articles in which the Church and the celebrities express their views in regard to the issue under consideration they are clearly pro-natalist oriented. In contrast, few journalists who take the effort to discuss the issues related to reproductive behavior take the pro-reproductive rights stance.

Finding 6:

Out of 121 articles (actor-texts) in which at least some of the elements of one of the two discourses were recognized in only 18 articles these discourses were fully developed containing several of their elements and an explicit standpoint. As we have already seen, 10 of such articles are written in the language of pro-natalist discourse, 5 in the language of pro-reproductive rights promotion and in just 3 articles these differing agendas were directly confronted. Fully developed pro-natalist perspective was presented by NGOs and experts, whereas fully developed pro-reproductive right agenda was presented primarily by experts and state officials (the only article with full pro-reproductive right discourse presented by an NGO was devoted to a discussion of family violence). Contrary to our expectation, 11 out of 18 such articles appeared in Kurir – 7 pro-natalist, 2 pro-reproductive rights and 2 with balanced presentation of both agendas. Only 4 of such articles appeared in
Vreme – all with the pro-reproductive rights rhetoric, and just one in Nin – with pro-natalist orientation. We are completing our analysis with the brief presentation of few of these articles.

In his text *Marriage and Betrothal*, published in Vreme (10. 2. 2005), Teofil Pančić expresses his position - in support to free will in entering marriage and deciding whether or how many children to have - by the means of ridiculing “the two groups of 'common doubters' [who] prefer to sneak around other people's genitals: 'nationally concerned' intellectuals and priests”. In opposition to “a special tax or, shall we say, a penal-correctional tribute to be paid only by those who persistently – that is, after they have ‘gone out of their youthful mirth of thirty years of age’ - stay out of the 'holy secret of marriage' or are married, but fail to provide justification for not procreating” (proposed by “Opstanak”) the author of the text concludes: “And I am still impertinent enough to solemnly proclaim that it will never even cross my mind to pay this fine to any specimen of conceited pseudo-messianic justice lovers for my, shall we say, lifestyle…Or else, we should introduce taxation on lifestyles with elements of bigotry, greasy beard, or the like...”.

In contrast to this approach, in NIN (21. 5. 2004), under the title *Nation under the Plum Tree?*, Peda Radosavljević chooses to address the issue of negative fertility rates by exclusively relying on the religious dogma and the spokesmen of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In the opening paragraph he quotes a teaching assistant at the Faculty of Theology, Dragomir Sando saying “Abortion is a murder, for Serbian Orthodox Church believers also a murder of God”. Further in the text, views of abortion from the standpoint of major religions of the world are given, along with the views of the aforementioned Orthodox priest and expert of the Council for the Protection of Health. The author himself soberly adds that the topic of abortion and ‘white plague’ is of a specific current interest for us Serbs because we have died a lot in wars, and have suffered numerous plagues, so that the well-known Tarabić prophecy that Serbs in the future would be numerous enough to settle “under one plum tree” might indeed come true.

Finally, an example of direct confrontation of the two agendas and their rhetoric is found in a text in Kurir (9. 2. 2004) published on the already mentioned occasion of photos showing a fetus severed in abortion. The author presents the standpoint of women’s groups – Anti-trafficking Center – that it is a woman’s both human and legal right to decide what she will do in the case of unwanted pregnancy: “We witness a flood of ‘political right’ in our country and beyond, supporting Church and the state in their intervening with the reproductive behavior”. But he also presents the opposing views of “Obraz” for whose spokesman “abortion is an infanticide since there is no difference between murdering a nine weeks old child and a nine years old child. It is even worse because children are helpless in their mothers’ wombs and could not protect
themselves....Given such a high abortion rate in Serbia, the law granting a woman the right to decide whether she is going to give birth or not cannot be good”. The author also consults an expert, a gynecologist who emphasize a compliance with the current law regulating the abortion and does not want to moralize.

**Conclusion**

If a person has not been involved with or particularly interested in the issues related to reproductive behavior, the presentation of reproductive rights and pro-natalist policy agendas in the newspapers would have been far from enough to sensitize them to these issues. It has simply not been frequent enough. Approximately a half (108) of the analyzed articles has neither particular agenda nor a combination of the elements of either of the two discourses. Among the articles containing at least few of the elements of one of the two discourses more numerous are the ones in which the elements of reproductive rights agenda could be recognized. However, these elements are unrelated to each other and dispersed throughout the articles with different topics. Even the most frequently recurring themes such as support to all family forms (as opposed to support to a “proper” form of heterosexual marriage with at least three children, which prevails in articles with pro-natalist population policy agenda) are not frequent enough to sensitize the public to this issue (10 articles in 4 years). If, on the other hand, a person has already embraced certain beliefs, and if s/he is lucky enough to read one or more of just 18 articles with fully developed discourses, published in this period in the selected newspapers, that might help him/her articulate his/her beliefs into a coherent standpoint. We found that 10 of these articles have a full imagery and the rhetoric of pro-natalist population policy vs. just 5 with the developed discourse of reproductive rights and freedoms.

In terms of major stakeholders, the most frequently appearing in the press are the representatives of various government agencies and experts (they make up to 64% of all the actors in the papers we looked at). Experts dominate the articles addressing reproductive health, whereas state officials dominate the presentations and interpretations of laws and government initiatives in the realm of reproductive behavior. NGOs appear in just 23 articles (11 pro-reproductive rights and 5 pro-natalist policy agenda), whereas political parties are almost not existent in the press in the context of reproductive behavior, in sharp dissonance with political practices in the West, where these issues represent the powerful symbols for distinguishing between the conservative and the liberal political ideology.
References

Blagojević, Marina (1997), „Roditeljstvo i fertilitet“, in Srbija devedesetih, Institut for sociological research, Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade.


“Kako se boriti protiv bele kuge” Pravoslavlje, No. 920

Konstantinović-Vilić, Slobodanka, Milosavljević, Mileva, Petrušić, Nevena (1999), Abortus: pravni, medicinski i etički pristup, Ženski istraživački centar za edukaciju i komunikaciju, Niš.


“Suština bele kuge je blud”, Pravoslavlje, No. 920