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### **EDITORIAL NOTE**

In the recent decades, scholarly research on clientelism has flourished in Serbia and throughout the region of South East Europe. An important step in analyzing clientelism was the early research on clientelist networks in Serbia and Kosovo and Metohija under UNSCR 1244 (Cvejić 2016). This comprehensive study delineates clientelist networks and demonstrates how the strategies of politicians, businesspeople, and ordinary citizens converge in a dense network of national and local clientelist networks (Cvejić *et al.* 2016; Cvejić 2016; Stanojević, Babović, Gundogan 2017). Building upon another comprehensive database covering six countries and territories, Bliznakovski, Gjuzelov, and Popovijk provide a valuable overview of the clientelist machinery in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Metohija, under UNSCR 1244, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia (Bliznakovski, Gjuzelov, Popovijk 2017). They effectively demonstrate the ability of political parties to approach large segments of societies with clientelist offers, simultaneously demonstrating a certain level of openness of the citizens to clientelist exchanges. The conference “Political Clientelism in the Western Balkans”, which took place in 2020 and resulted in an edited volume (Bliznakovski 2021b), was another step in creating a shared understanding of this phenomenon and a network of researchers.

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Furthermore, clientelism has been analyzed in specific sectors and countries. In Serbia, these are studies on clientelism in security service companies (Pešić, Milošević 2021) and social welfare (Stefanović, Vuković 2023). Other studies point out the instrumental values of political parties and clientelist networks for young people regarding milestone life events, such as finding a job (Stanojević, Petrović 2022). Clientelism in social protection has also been analyzed in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Brković 2017) and Croatia (Stubbs, Zrinščak 2011). A study conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia points out the narratives of “victims and accomplices”, depicting the political elites’ ability to impose clientelist relations, while at the same time indicating the sense of powerlessness and victimization of ordinary citizens who legitimize the clientelist networks (Piacentini 2021). The role of clientelist networks has been analyzed as channels for public sector employment in Montenegro (Muk 2021; Marković 2021), as drivers of high levels of party membership (Čakar, Čular 2023), and as a mechanism of society capture (Cvetičanin, Bliznakovski, Krstić 2024) and business capture (Bartlett 2021). On a more theoretical level, Bliznakovski differentiates between electoral and relational clientelism or patronage (Bliznakovski 2021a), Sotiropoulos analyses clientelist as a form of state-society relationship (Sotiropoulos 2023), while other authors point out the role of clientelist networks in establishing a parallel normative system and capturing institutions (Vuković, Spaić 2022).

Building upon this rich background, this issue of *The Annals of the Faculty of Law in Belgrade* provides an overview of recent research in the field. The papers collected in this thematic issue were presented at the regional work-in-progress Workshop on Clientelism, Rule of Law and Democracy, organized by the University of Belgrade Faculty of Law and *The Annals of the Faculty of Law in Belgrade* in June 2024. The workshop brought together sociologists, political scientists, and legal experts from Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Croatia. Early versions of the articles were commented on and discussed by the authors and a group of experts, including Vujo Ilić, Luka Glušac, and Gazela Pudar Draško from the University of Belgrade Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory. Valuable insights were gained from Jelena Pešić, from the University of Belgrade Faculty of Philosophy, and Miodrag Jovanović and Goran Dajović, from the University of Belgrade Faculty of Law, as well as anonymous reviewers.

The issue opens with **Jovan Bliznakovski’s** article “Clientelist Linkages in the Western Balkans: Evidence from an Expert Survey (DALP II)”. The study leverages data from the 2023 expert survey conducted as part of the Democratic Accountability and Linkages Project II (DALP II) across six Western Balkan countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo

and Metohija under UNSCR 1244, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Bliznakovski analyzes party–voter linkages, encompassing both programmatic and nonprogrammatic strategies. The study reveals that political clientelism serves as a significant linkage strategy in the Western Balkans, often utilized in conjunction with other strategies at the party level. The degree of clientelist practices varies among political parties, with dominant parties – those holding power or having access to public resources – demonstrating the highest levels of engagement in such practices. This is characterized by a strong emphasis on enduring linkages between parties, brokers, and voters, the distribution of public resources, the use of negative inducements, and the targeting of various income groups. Building upon his earlier work (Bliznakovski 2021a) he argues that these practices align with the concept of relational clientelism, or patronage, which appears more dominant in the region compared to electoral clientelist mobilization. Moreover, clientelism in the Western Balkans extends beyond electoral strategies, functioning as a fundamental organizing principle of political parties.

**Nemanja Stankov's** article “Patterns of Authoritarian Recruitment in Clientelist Networks: A Comparative Study of Western Balkans” analyzes how brokers approach clients using a comprehensive database covering six countries and territories in the post-Yugoslav space. He presumes that the submissive tendencies of authoritarian citizens should facilitate voluntary compliance with brokers' demands, as the requests come from persons in positions of authority. His analysis points out that while clientelism is widespread across the region, the mechanisms of its implementation vary significantly. Clear evidence supporting the proposed direction of the relationship between authoritarianism and clientelist targeting was found only in Montenegro. Stankov analyzes in detail the relationship in specific country contexts, pointing out the need for further analysis and clarification of the factors contributing to the success of clientelist strategies.

**Anja Gvozdanić's** article “Youth Justification of Informality in the Post-Yugoslav Countries: Reflection of Political Socialization or Pragmatism?” analyzes which social factors contribute to the justification of informal practices among youths in the seven post-Yugoslav countries and territories. She demonstrates that the perception of the prevalence of informal social norms is particularly important, which suggests that informality among young people is perceived as a necessary adaptation to the inefficiencies and unresponsiveness of the formal institutions. Young people's engagement with informality can be understood as an adaptive strategy shaped by their socioeconomic environment, either as a personal approach or as a rationale for the informal strategies adopted by others. By testing various hypotheses

and predictors, the study identifies a consistent and robust predictor of the justification of informality across different countries: the perceived ubiquity of informal practices within society. This finding highlights that reliance on personal connections and informal methods to achieve objectives – such as securing employment or accessing public services – is often viewed as a practical response to the perception or reality that formal systems are inefficient, slow, or unresponsive.

The contribution from **Danilo Vuković and Marija Stefanović** deals with clientelist networks in the social protection system in Serbia. Using qualitative data collected through 27 social workers from 21 municipalities, they outline the structures, functioning, and impact of clientelist networks on the centers for social work (CSW). Their findings suggest that clientelist networks permeate CSWs and the line ministry, and capture these institutions. They have a prominent role in gaining public sector employment, as well as in the overall functioning of the institutions. In addition to administering social rights, CSWs also appear as mechanisms for vote buying (electoral clientelism) and provision of long-term services to the party, such as attending rallies, donating money, expanding the party network, etc. (relational clientelism). Furthermore, the authors demonstrate how clientelist networks capture institutions from within and operate in a parasitic manner, feeding off formal institutions without supporting their intended purposes.

All the articles in this thematic issue take an empirical approach to clientelism. They contribute to the ongoing debate in the social sciences and provide valuable data and analyses for further discussions. However, they also point out the need for further investigation into the motives and strategies of the participating actors, and the effects of both electoral and relational clientelism on the party system, public policies, and the rule of law.

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