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NEW MEDIA-NEW ALGERIAN ARAB SPRING?

ABSTRACT

The paper presents the events in Algeria that led to the fall of Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika, the long-term president of the country, in April 2019 and examines the role of the new media in this process. The analysis explains the reasons for the failure of the Arab Spring in this country in 2011. Critical discourse analysis of Algerian new media conducted by the author shows that despite a lack of active actions in 2011, youth movements appeared in Algeria and led the protests in 2019 not only on the Internet but also in the “offline” world. Currently, the discussion about political impact of new media focuses mainly on the question whether the power of protesting societies is sufficient to overthrow a government. According to the author of the paper, the above formulation of the problem reflects a single-dimensional approach thereto, which has been proven by the example of Algeria. New media have become an integral part of contemporary societies and their discourse started to serve as a platform for, mobilizing and participating and disseminating information. In Algeria, despite the fact that social media “have not yet reached maturity” (among others, because of illiteracy, mismanagement, a lack of freedom of speech or true democracy), they are gradually becoming political and start constituting public spaces for those excluded from the mainstream politics and media. The social media have caused a situation wherein the Algerian government has to meet growing demands of society for a greater degree of democracy, justice and freedom of the press and freedom of opinion. With their help, people learned the techniques of social mobilization, developed structures of social movement and civil society. The effects of this activity are gradually becoming noticeable not only in Algeria but throughout the Arab world.

Keywords: Internet, social media, Facebook, Algeria, protests, civil movement

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1. INTRODUCTION

Transformations in the Arab world, that began at the turn of 2010 and 2011, and which the Western media labeled as the Arab Spring, came as a huge surprise to everyone – not only to experts and analysts of this region of the world, but also to its citizens and its government. Although demographic problems, the revolt of the young generation, which gave rise to the social changes and the need for the democratization have already been noticed by some researchers in the region, nobody has predicted that the „Arab street” is able to make changes independently and in such a short time (Bayat, 2010).

In retrospect, three models of the phenomena resulting from the Arab protests can be distinguished. In the first model, containing most of the Arab countries, including Algeria, there was no change of power and the regimes were able to suppress uprisings by force but at the same time they made some concessions and met some of the demands of the demonstrators. In the second model (Libya, Syria and Yemen), initially peaceful social manifestations were met with brutal response of the authorities. Geopolitical significance of these countries contributed to the clash of various regional interests and world powers, eventually resulting in the outbreak of civil wars in these countries. The third model is represented by Tunisia and Egypt, where the result of the protests was a political transformation (full in Tunisia and a partial one in Egypt) (Dodge, 2012).

The events of the Arab Spring showed how important a role is played by the media (both new and traditional) in creation and interpretation of events. The debate on this problem is mainly taking place between advocates of technological determinism, who treat the Internet as a tool for democratization (Shirky, 2011, Howard & Hussein, 2013; Lynch, 2006, Pintak, 2010) and those who disregard the role of new technologies due to the durability of authoritarianism and for the fact that the employment of digital technologies gives regimes an edge over society (Morozov 2011, Daimond, 2010). In the light of the ongoing debate on the political impact of new media, the main goal of the paper is to try to answer the following question: What is the impact of new media in the context of authoritarian political and media systems, based on the example of Algeria.

The media in the Arab world, including Algeria, have been dependent on power and treated as private property of the rulers for a long time. Strict censorship of the mass media and systematic intimidation of those who expressed a different opinion caused a lack of political engagement on the part of the Arab societies. Proper redistribution of income and blocking information from outside the system was enough to ensure the survival of the neo-patrimonial regimes (Rinnawi, 2006). Media recipients were not given a chance to get information with such an interpretation of reality that would possibly differ from the one presented by governments. Moreover, an absence of the dissemination of common content for different societies prevented any mutual exchange of opinions and views. The consequence of such a policy was a lack of public sphere because the media acted as one-way information carriers – messages were transferred from the government to the public without any kind of feedback (Rabah, 2012-2013, pp. 47-62). The situation has changed since the Internet connection of the Arab world. This fact is extremely important because uprisings against power happen very rarely in neo-patrimonial systems. First of all, several conditions have to be met. The first condition is ineptness of ruling elites, and the second – constantly deteriorating economic conditions and a very high level of corruption. Moreover, the success of an uprising depends on the army and security services, who should stop protecting the regime

and the ruler. At the same time, regional and world powers should support the protesters and pressurize the regime not to use violence against its citizens. As all these factors rarely obtain in conjunction, Arab regimes endured with a sense of inner security. The emergence of new media has significantly changed this situation (Anbarani, 2013).

The majority of authoritarian regimes would remain in power by using several tactics. The most important one is forcing people to hide their true political preferences, lest they are potentially repressed, so the degree of social discontent remains unknown. Potential anti-regime activists cannot be sure who really questions the power. It makes it more difficult for them to win potential collaborators and, as a result, build an organization that would become a threat to the regime. Because of that, emergence of the Internet in Algeria and the opportunities it gave to its users was a turning point in contemporary history of this country. (Hafez, 2006).

In the absence of significant institutional opportunities for political participation the new media have gradually become a mechanism for mobilizing young people into online social movements that combine various ideological trends. The network created a third opposition who, by providing citizens with real information, fought the propaganda of the regime and united all those dissatisfied with the situation in the country. The Internet was a kind of public sphere that, to some extent, was free from government control and supervision (Fandy, 2007).

The critical discourse analysis of the Algerian new media conducted in the paper shows that the precondition for current protests in Algeria was the emergence of the online culture. This culture was established before the Arab Spring and strengthened until 2018 and, most importantly, offered Algerians an alternative discourse, contrary to the official narrative.

2. NEW MEDIA AND POLITICS

The relationship between the politics and media has always been strong. Communication technologies influence politics because at the same time they enable and limit various forms of communication and contestation. It is the media that is a powerful tool for creating social and political reality, especially under authoritarian systems. According to Jeffrey Goldfarb (based on the work of Hannah Arendt), in politics appearances are realities, and what is not there is politically irrelevant (Goldfarb 2006).

According to Manuel Castells, „the spark of indignation and hope that flashed in Tunisia and overthrew Mubarak’s regime in Egypt [...] also ignited the fire in other Arab countries” (Castells, 2013, p.100). In the whole Arab world, the process was similar: the first stage was the mobilization via the Internet, followed by the activity in the cyberspace, and finally the protests could take place in the “offline” reality. The way of interaction between individual regimes and demonstrating societies depended on internal and geopolitical conditions. The result of the protests and the role of new media was dependent on many elements. To name the most important ones: the type of political system in a given country and the degree of development of the country, (influencing the protesters’ demands), the country’s religious and tribal homogeneity, historical experience of individual countries. Another important element is also the level of Internet penetration and the development of cyber-activism before the Arab Spring (Sawicka, 2017). Taking all these factors into account, Algeria among other Arab states inherited the legacy of „the trauma of the past”. The protests in the country that took place in 2011 came to an abrupt end. Impossibility of mobilization in Algeria was the

result of the recent, unusually bloody, civil war (Górak-Sosnowska, 2011) (zdanie oznaczone kolorem zielonym jest niezrozumiałe). However, the end of street protests, did not mean the end of the development of the public sphere and civil society in Algeria. These two phenomena could have been strengthened over the next eight years by the new media the communication advantage of which gave voice to those participants of political communication who until now acted as passive observers of the discourse created by relevant political actors and mass media.

In Algeria, the public sphere could have been created thanks to the new media and the culture of participation created by it. This public sphere meets the conditions set out by its best-known theoretician, Jürgen Habermas (Habermas, 2007). New media provide the opportunity for a rational, equality-based discussion in which each of their users can take part. The social groups that have been marginalized so far in the debate can create their own discourse in the existing public sphere. This discourse can be alternative or opposite to the mainstream one created by the traditional media controlled by the government. (Dahlberg, 2001). This phenomenon is very important in the countries in which the possibility of citizens' discourse on topics common for them does not exist, and the mass media are completely subordinated to power. In addition, the new media are a great tool for political mobilization: they facilitate the unification of diverse social groups, significantly reduce the costs of project coordination, solve the problem of territorial dispersion of individuals and popularize the activities in the great scale (Barney, 2008).

According to Clay Shirky (2011), the political use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs and mobile phones has changed the traditional way of organizing social movements by providing them with more sources of knowledge (without media bias), reducing coordination costs and increasing the speed of information exchange.

Philips N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain (2013) offer an interesting six-step model of social mobilization in the Arab world in order to introduce political changes in which new media played a major role. The first stage would consist in creating an online culture of opposition. This process would take several years by spreading and strengthening the position of new media in both local communities and diasporas. The next phase, the preparatory one would involve teaching new media users to take full advantage of the opportunities the media offer and to create connections and networks between activists. The next stage would be the development of a common sense of injustice and articulation of common political goals. After reaching this stage, there is a voltage phase, which would usually commence with an incendiary incident. Such incident would not usually be reported by the state media, at the same time it would arouse citizens' anger and stimulate activities of the civil society group. The society would go out onto streets, and the protests would be coordinated by the social media. After that, the activities of social movements in the Internet would draw attention of international public opinion to the ongoing events. The turning point would occur once a regime would either suppress the protests by force or meet the protesters' demands. The last phase of this process is a kind of information war between losers and winners of the social change.

The Algerian protests in 2019 precisely fitted the above-mentioned model. Algerians have been waiting for their Arab Spring for eight years, proving that development of civil society and the public sphere in the Middle East did not end with the disappearance of the street protests in 2011.

3. ARAB SPRING IN ALGERIA

3.1. STAGE ONE: 2011-2014

With the area of 2 382 000 square kilometers, Algeria is the largest country on the African continent and the largest Arab country in the world. Its population is just over 40 million people, which makes Algeria a country of low population density but of great diversity at the same time. This is particularly reflected in the Algerian dialect, which is a mixture of Arabic, Berber, French and Spanish. There are still regions in the country where nobody speaks Arabic (for example, in the Kabylia region, there are Berber Kabyls who have their own language and customs, Berbers generally amount to 17% of Algerian society), which significantly hinders the possibility of building a coherent national identity (The World Factbook, 2018).

Algeria with great difficulty gained independence, thus eventually dissociating itself from France in 1962. According to the constitution, Algeria is a multi-party republic, headed by the president appointed for a 5-year term. Since 1999 until 2019 the president of Algeria was Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika. Until the 1980s, secular ideology dominated the socio-political life of the state, but the financial crisis which began in 1980 gave rise to the wave of social opposition. The entire decade of the 1980s was marked by the development of the Islamist movement. Islamist organizations have obtained relatively large margin of freedom, and the previously ruling Secular National Liberation Front adapted some of Sharia's solutions to the Civil Law (Niedziela, 2012: pp.33-34). At the end of the 1980s, the price per barrel of oil plummeted, and the state had to resign from excessive welfare payments. This led to the street protest in 1988. In 1989 a new constitution was ratified. It paved the way for the Islamists to form the Islamic Salvation Front political party. In 1991, this party won the parliamentary elections and obtained 47% of the votes. The elections have been annulled by the military forces, and the Islamic Salvation Front was outlawed. A civil war began in Algeria and lasted until 2002. About 200,000 people were killed, mass rapes were committed and mass executions of civilians were carried out (including women and children), and about 15,000 people were abducted. A new chapter in the contemporary history of Algeria began with the presidency of Bouteflika, whose main goals in internal politics were: national reconciliation, the solution to the Kabyle issue and stimulation of economic development (PWN Encyclopedia, n.d.). In 2006, in the name of national reconciliation, all criticism of the security forces was forbidden. The members of governmental armed groups who violated human rights in the 1990s were granted immunity. The electoral success of the fundamentalists gave the government the possibility of halting the liberalization of political life in the name of „fight against terror“. At the same time, increases in oil prices have strengthened the state budget so much that it could again launch extensive social programs. Over time, the corruption and nepotism revealed two biggest problems of modern Algeria. When oil prices dropped again, the material situation of the population deteriorated significantly. Most Algerians could not afford to buy apartments at market prices. Renting a flat costs a monthly salary, which is why multigenerational families live in small M3's. The state is ubiquitous. Algerians call this situation *hogra* – an overwhelming sense of injustice and persecution by the regime. (Urbanowicz, 2011).

At the beginning of the present decade, the socio-political situation in Algeria largely resembled that of neighboring Tunisia. They differed in the media's position, though. The regime had a monopoly on electronic media: radio (private stations can operate in Algeria since

1998, but there are not many of them) and TV (there are no private stations in Algeria). The dominant role of the state in the electronic sector results from a high level of illiteracy among adult Algerians (in 2008, adult illiteracy level was 22%, 14% in 2014 and 9,5% in 2018). Perhaps this was also the reason why the press enjoyed considerable freedom of speech. Newspapers often printed articles explicitly criticizing government policies and the political and social situation in the country (Romero, n.d).

Algeria gained Internet access in 1993. In 1998, the state's monopoly on Internet services ended and private suppliers appeared on the market, who – according to the law – were required to be of Algerian nationality. Broadband Internet access has been available in Algeria since 2003. The high cost of access to the network and the prices of personal computers made the Internet penetration rate in the country in 2010 amount only to 12.5%, and increase in 2011 to 14%, but in 2019 it was already 49.2% (Internet World Stats, 2019). In May 2008, the government introduced a law against cyberterrorism that would allow the regime to control the Internet in the country.

Before the events of the Arab Spring the Algerian blogosphere was neither very active nor developed. Similarly, social media were not used for political purposes because the Algerians were rather not interested in politics. Facebook was used mainly for social purposes. The most popular political blogs in Algeria before the Arab Spring were the *Algerie-politique*, a blog set up in 2007, run by an activist under the pseudonym El Mouhtarem; *Bilad Telmesan* blog and *Dahmani Blog*. Every day, the blogs were visited by thousands of Algerians who finally found the place where they could freely talk and comment on topics that the mainstream media did not have the courage to discuss (Romero, n.d).

For the first time the operations of cyber activists in Algeria were visible on a large scale in 2008 before the presidential election and after the amendment to the constitution that allowed Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika to stand, abolishing the restriction on the number of terms the president can be elected to office. The protests turned out to be ineffective, but the regime recognized the potential of cyber activists and tightened control of the Internet (Rayan, 2009).

When the protests in Tunisia took place, the official Algerian media reported the events very superficially. The main line of the regime was to remind Algerians of the events of the 90s and the times of the civil war. Meanwhile, enthusiastic comments about what is happening in Tunisia dominated the private press and the Internet (Kawakibi, 2011). Protests in Algeria have started in December 2010. Initially, they were related to the material situation of the Algerians. The lack of affordable housing and the increase in the price of sugar, oil and flour were the main causes of the protest. Demonstrations quickly turned into a few days of clashes with the police. The government quickly reduced VAT on food products and for the time being the protests were suspended. However, on January 22nd, hundreds of people on the streets of Algiers demanded the democratization of political life and the abolition of the state of emergency introduced in 1992 (Zdanowski, 2011). Thanks to large financial reserves the regime managed to control the situation. On April 15th 2011, in a televised speech, the president announced changes to the constitution and legislative reforms. He promised to modify the electoral law and to hold a fair presidential election in 2014.

The role of new media in the events of the turn of 2010 and 2011 in Algeria was inconceivable. Protesters organized via Facebook, but the actual number of demonstrators turned out to be usually less than the one declared online. In addition, during the protests, the regime

significantly reduced the quality of Internet transfer, and sometimes it was almost impossible to login to Facebook (Algeria – instrukcja obsługi [a manual], n.d.). However, despite low effectiveness of new media during the Arab Spring, their potential was noticed by Algerian activists. This was particularly evident before the presidential election in 2014, when the Barakat movement (arab. Enough) was established. The aim of the group was to democratize the country. The movement wanted to channel the rage of Algerians (caused mainly by the lack of work and corruption) along more political lines (Kottoor, 2016). Barakat sought to change the regime. Before the presidential elections in 2014, thanks to the new media among others, Barakat organized mass protests against Bouteflika's candidacy. Social media played an important role in the mobilization of the movement. Not only did they provide communication within the group, but also, primarily, informed about its achievements (Petré, 2014). According to one of the members of the movement: „In 2011, the protests were of a social nature, today they concern politics [...]. We protest for our dignity. The regime imposes on us a candidate who is physically unable to hold the office, who has not spoken publicly for 2 years and is supported by the political and financial mafia. We have no choice but to enter into conflict with a regime that despises people and squanders income from our oil „(Matarese, 2014). However, the most important task for the movement was the mobilization of Algerians, who were more concerned with small stabilization than with politics.

In 2014, the authority of Bouteflika – a veteran of independence war, head of diplomacy during the time of international importance of the country and finally the leader closing the bills of the bloody civil war – was still significant. But oil prices began to drop, and Bouteflika was more and more ailing. The opposition began to unite, and thanks to the new media it became more and more effective. For these reasons many observers claimed that the Arab Spring in Algeria could come at any time (Zoubir, 2016).

3.2. ALGERIAN ARAB SPRING 2019

3.2.1. POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The risk of political instability has been growing in Algeria since the beginning of 2019. On February 18th the incumbent president Bouteflika declared his candidacy for the fifth term and issued a decree where he announced the date of the presidential election for April 18th. 82-year-old Bouteflika has been the president of the country since 1999, but in recent years he has almost completely been absent from the political scene because of a stroke in 2013. At the beginning of 2019 Bouteflika's health was in precarious condition as he was not even able to announce his own candidacy.

Many Algerians believed that this offer is only a facade behind which there stood a political, military and business elite that wanted to maintain power. However, polls have suggested that many Algerians are likely to vote again for Bouteflika, fearing that his departure may lead to government instability and have negative consequences for the country (Porter, 2019).

Bouteflika had also received “green light” to win the elections from the administration and the army, who puts the country stability above potentially risky political changes. The president was also able to consolidate his position through a political and economic coalition, including the National Salvation Front (FLN) and the Rassemblement National Démocratique (RND), as well as key businessmen in the state who gained power during his term.

In addition, Bouteflika benefited from the achievements of his 20-year presidency, including return to peace, investments, modernization and development of infrastructure, building of housing and universities and providing access to gas and electricity across the country. At the same time, the opposition political parties in Algeria are too weak to threaten the position of the president. Moreover, the political and media landscape of Algeria procured a situation where new political figures or groups did not have enough influence. This status quo has been shaken by Algerians protesting in February 2019 (Oumansour, 2019).

The protests have created a new political situation, and thanks to the new media, Algerians became actors in the political system, which the authorities have to take into account for the first time in the contemporary history of Algeria.

The current protests have a different dimension than those from 2011 or those from the last Algerian presidential election. Several factors have contributed to this, to name the strongest ones: weak economic and social situation, high penetration of the Internet and the revolt of the young generation of Algerians (of which great part became adult since 2011) for whom Bouteflika is no longer a hero.

Despite the fact that the state invested money in modernizing the country's infrastructure and stimulating the economic growth, it failed to develop an economy that would improve the standard of living of citizens and ensure work for a large number of young, unemployed people.

In addition, ubiquitous corruption and clientelism created a sense of injustice among those who did not benefit from the wealth of the country. The series of austerity measures were taken after the oil price shock of 2014, accompanied by price inflation of basic goods, have worsened the social situation of the middle and working class. (Makek & Fiorentino, 2019). In addition to that, the candidacy of decrepit Bouteflika provoked anger and caused feeling of humiliation among Algerians; and after all dignity and pride are one of the most important values in the Arab world.

The very significant fact for the ongoing protest is also that the economic and social progress achieved over the past 20 years gave rise to an Algerian middle class that is politically mature, with their aspirations and social demands being much more ambitious than what the government has been offering to it so far.

The decisive factor seems to be demography. About 70 percent of the Algerian population (41 million inhabitants in total) is under 30 years old, and over 25 percent of the unemployed youth are of working age. Youth unemployment is aggravated by the country's excessive dependence on the hydrocarbon industry, dominated by state-owned enterprises. The younger generation of Algerians has a limited chance to achieve good living standard after graduating from universities. Their ability to find a job corresponding to their education and professional specialization is severely limited by weakened labor market dominated by the energy sector. Most younger Algerians are either chronically unemployed or have low-paid jobs, concentrated in the non-energy sector, without financial security and with little possibility of social mobility. The promise to raise the socio-economic level to be guaranteed by university education still remains unfulfilled in Algeria (Aziz, 2019).

According to Brahim Oumansour, a researcher at the Institute of International and Strategic Relations in Paris, the Internet allowed Algerian youth to see what is happening in other countries in the domain of culture, economy and politics. All this greatly strengthened anger, disappointment and frustration of young people who feel unable to achieve the standard of living of other countries (Arab News, 2019).

When the protests started on February 22nd, young Algerians not only called on the president to leave, but above all expressed their bitterness and anger because of a lack of opportunities for their own development.

3.2.2. THE PROTESTS

The first protest against the candidacy of Bouteflika for the fifth term began in Algeria in December 2018. Initially, the protest was confined only to the northern part of the country and was neglected by the state media. The first large demonstration took place on 16th February in the east of Algeria and ended with the removal of Bouteflika's picture from the town hall, as a sign of the president's absence in the public debate.

The first significant demonstration took place in Algiers on 22nd February and was organized via social media. Protesters marched, danced, and sang slogans, starting with „El-djazair, hurra wa dimukratiyya!” (Algeria, free and democratic!) or “Hadha elchaab la yourid, Bouteflika said!” (People do not want Bouteflika!). Similar protest took place in other Algerian cities (Aziz, 2019).

On March 1st, three million people came to the streets in Algeria, calling on the president to resign. The protests were peaceful, but their scale of influence grew systematically. For the first time in the modern history of Algeria, on the fifth day of the protest, the state and private media were allowed to provide information about the protesters. The Algerians could see how their compatriots manifest their dissatisfaction and anger with the current government on the most important squares in the country

In the course of time, more professional groups that have an impact on the state policy joined the protesters. More than one thousand Algerian judges said they would refuse to oversee the presidential elections scheduled for April if Bouteflika takes part in it. Also the chief of staff of the Armed Forces of Algeria, General Gaed Salah, signaled his support for the demonstrators. According to the state television, he declared that the army and nation had the same vision of the future. Finally, forced by daily protests and the loss of support of the army on 2nd April 2019, the president stepped down. However, this decision did not appease the protesters. Hundreds of thousands of Algerians protested for seven weeks in a row in Algiers, demanding the withdrawal of political apparatus from the public life and radical political changes by establishing institutions responsible for honest transformation. (TNV24, 2019).

Under the pressure of the protesters the government set the date of the presidential election for 4th July 2019. Unfortunately, the election could not be carried out. The Algerian Constitutional Council rejected both candidates who were to run for the presidential office and decided to cancel the scheduled date of election.

On the Independence Day of Algeria (5th July), thousands of Algerians went out into the streets again, protesting 20 weeks in a row. They demanded democratic leadership and at the same time celebrated the independence, hard-won from colonial France. The protesters hoped that thanks to such actions they will be able to get out of the current political impasse, where some of the opposition figures would not agree to maintain dialogue with representatives of the „old regime”. Attempts to talk are still ongoing, and the Algerians are continuing to protest (VOA, 2019).

3.2.3. THE ROLE OF THE NEW MEDIA DURING ALGERIAN PROTESTS

Protests that began in Algeria on 22nd February would not have reached such a massive scale were it not for social media. On 22nd February, the Algerians took the street in an organized way because they had previously received an anonymous message with detailed instructions through social media. The message contained the time and place of the meeting in particular cities, a request to bring instruments and whistles, not flags, so that it would be a joyful demonstration of exclusively peaceful character. It was also warned against entering into conflict with the security services. In this way, the young Algerians joined via Facebook messages and together went out to protest against the authorities, while bringing over those who had no direct access to new media (Reed, 2019).

However, the political impact of the new media in Algeria cannot be limited only to these anonymous „Facebook’s chains”. In recent years, the country has been regularly debating online the political situation, the authoritarian nature of the regime and on corruption scandals “exploding” close to the ruling clan.

People of all ages began to pass on more or less verified information about the crooked money of the Algerian political elite. Political discussion forums developed quickly, especially among young people who shaped the political discourse of Algerian cyberspace. This coincided with the popularization of access to the Internet using 3G technology, the emergence of social networks and the use of smartphones on a large scale (Bessadi, 2019).

Among all social networks in Algeria, the leading position belongs to Facebook. According to StatCounter Global Stats, from January 2018 till February 2019, 55.61% of the Internet population of Algeria were using Facebook, 33.21% YouTube, and 5.85% Twitter. In the same period, Facebook’s leadership is even more visible on smartphones, which have now become the most popular connection platform, where 65.79% of owners have used Facebook (see: Statscounter Global Stats).

Peaceful protests of students, professors, lawyers and journalists are a turning point in the political activity of Algerian youth, who did not care about politics during the last decade. New media gave them a chance to realize their dreams of a new life without political censorship. The majority of young Algerians practically migrated from the country through social networks. Facebook has become their main source of information, happiness and plans for the future. The new „virtual cafés” of Algerian youth strongly adhering to the tradition of Arab culture on the one hand, have adapted to the requirements of modernity on the other. They are unlimited and provide more space for freedom of expression, even when the official and unofficial political discourse does not change (Bouزيد, 2019).

The youthful nature of the protests was particularly visible at the beginning of the demonstration. The dissatisfaction of the youth was clearly visible on the fifth day of the demonstration during the wave of protests led by the students. These protests were organized through social media. Students encouraged their colleagues to leave classes in order to gather at demonstrations in university campuses, educational institutions and public spaces across the country. Groups of students marched in the center of Algiers, while at the Ben Aknoun University in western Algiers, students hindered the traffic. They constructed a makeshift coffin covered with the Algeria flag with a photo of Bouteflika strategically placed at the top of the coffin. In a clip broadcast by Berber Television which quickly became viral on social media a young Algerian student eloquently describes the corruption, inertia and apathy of

the elite, reminding the viewers that the government is weak as compared to the overwhelming majority of young Algerians (Aziz, 2019).

The virtual space has helped „break the wall of fear” among the Algerians. Among groups mobilizing people online there is the Active Youth Collective, a network of activists founded in December 2018, which runs a Facebook page informing about the current situation in Algeria. Another group is Mouwatana (arab. Citizenship), a civil society movement that plays a significant role not only in the virtual world. The movement has taken an interesting initiative on the web. The group launched 22Fevrier2019.org, a website where users can present their policy proposals which are then discussed (Burke & Michaleson, 2019).

According to Dalia Ghan from the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, mobilization did not stop just at Facebook. She says: „They are not just anonymous Internet users. They are citizens who know that the only way to challenge the regime is to organize themselves” (Arab News, 2019).

Amateur materials from demonstrations against the government have been widely disseminated on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram. The Algerians know that their best weapon in the fight for Algeria’s democratic future is non-violent protests and social networks.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The Internet in Algeria is now a kind of public sphere almost free of government control and supervision. It is the place where the Algerians can feel as the community capable of creating a collective alternative discourse. Without new media, the people of Algeria would not have gained common awareness of the need for change, which gave them the courage to act in the offline sphere.

The communication advantage of the new media is that, on the one hand, they were able to overcome the existing limitations of both traditional media and restrictive norms of Arab culture, and on the other hand, the new media perfectly adapted to the realities of this culture. First of all, they were able to overcome the lack of confidence on the media, shaped over the years as a result of the total subordination of the media to the regime.

Trustworthy communication in the Arab world is the one consistent with the principles adopted in Islam and the communication through the new media seems to satisfy the principles. Moreover, the usage of “new media” language procured a situation where the entire society could be involved in the matters hitherto reserved for selected groups. The language of the old media and the language of politics was, until the appearance of the Internet, a formal Arabic language that was not used by all Algerians. The language of new media is the dialects spoken by the citizens of the country on a daily basis, and the information coded in dialects is considered reliable. In Algeria, thanks to the social media, an alternative public sphere could have been created. A place where every participant is free to speak and whose voice is equally important regardless of sex, age or wealth. This is a kind of novelty in the Arab culture, where sex, age and wealth play a significant role in the process of participation in social and political life.

New media have become an inseparable part of contemporary societies and their discourse, serving as a platform for mobilizing, participating and disseminating information. In Algeria, despite the fact that social media „have not yet reached maturity” (among others because of illiteracy, mismanagement, lack of freedom of speech or true democracy), they

are gradually becoming public spaces for those excluded from the mainstream politics and media. The social media have contributed to the occurrence of the situation in which the Algerian government has now to meet the growing demands of society for a greater degree of democracy, justice and freedom of the press and opinion.

Why may Algerians succeed now? Maybe because of the emergence of a politically and technologically savvy generation who has been able to leverage its resources into a coherent and coordinated action and to draw the conclusion as to what had happened in the Arab Spring in the first wave. Now, after eight years, they do not want to waste their chance.

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