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**DRAFT LAW ON SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE-ECONOMIC
UNITS IN VIETNAM MEDIA**

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Abstract

Media in the world in general and in Vietnam in particular play an essential role in stabilization and development of society. Mass media carry out communicative, ideological, cultural and educational, advertising and reference functions. In addition, media and their audience create public opinion by attracting the attention of authorities to solving social problems and making important political decisions of different states. The author of the present paper studies the reflection of the draft law on special administrative and economic units of Van Don, North Van Phong and Phu Quoc (hereinafter – the “Draft law”) in the Internet media of Vietnam as well as the influence of public opinion on state machine. The author studies 42 articles published in the online newspaper vnexpress.net during one month from May 23, 2018 (the day when the draft law was last discussed before its adoption at the 5th plenary meeting of the 16th National Assembly of Vietnam) to June 23, 2018. The outcomes of content and quantitative analyses demonstrate that the draft law attracts the attention of not only deputies of the National Assembly and internal experts but also of the readers and foreign experts. Despite the fact that journalism in Vietnam faces various difficulties being both technical and legal, the journalism is involved in all major public events and acts on behalf of its audiences. The parliament has decided to postpone the adoption of this law on June 11, 2018 under the pressure from public opinion and objections of the people.

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Keywords: Administrative units, online media, public opinion, draft law, national assembly.



1. Introduction

Currently, the media innovation, the modern technologies emergence and the information transfer renewal have marked the beginning of a new era in the development of mankind being the era of the information society (Trofimova, 2009). Reader access to information is being simplified. According to the Ministry of Information and Communication, there are 868 press agencies in the country by October 2018 (Hoai, 2018a). The Appota survey findings have indicated the fact that the use of technical devices (smartphones) in Vietnam is quite high and covers more than 70% of the population (Appota, 2018). The improvements in the quality of life enable people to take care about not only health, education and entertainment but also about the actions of the National Assembly, whose decisions directly relate the interests of society. After the discussion of Draft Law on Special Administrative-economic Units of Van Don, North Van Phong and Phu Quoc, many specialists and thousands of users of social networks opposed a number of articles of this draft law. The administrative units of the province created by the National Assembly Special are certain administrative and economic ones. A definite socio-economic mechanism is used in these units. In fact, the draft law was first considered at the 4th session of the National Assembly. However, at that moment it did not attract the attention of public opinion. According to the plan, the day May 23rd, 2018 was the last when the draft law was discussed and it should have been passed on June 15, 2018. However, after the meeting on May 23rd, there the outbreaks of protest began both on the Internet and in many parts of Vietnam.

2. Problem Statement

Some parliamentary deputies, specialists and readers signaled a number of flaws in the draft law. First, the volume of investments was too large and amounted to about \$ 70 billion; while Vietnam's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018 was equal to \$240 billion (Nguyen, 2018a). Second, the period of renting real estate by foreigners is also rather long and is up to 99 years. Third, 130 economic and industrial sectors receive preferential tax treatment. Fourth, foreign laws will be applied in the process of resolving business disputes between the parties (in case one of them is a foreign enterprise). Fifth, the location of the three districts is considered to be easily vulnerable and has a particular geopolitical significance. Sixth, attracting foreign investment by means of creating special administrative and economic units is regarded obsolete and puts state sovereignty at risk.

The conclusion that journalism is closely related to life and has an impact on human society is rather important for the study. Journalists explain the essence of the problem to readers, analyze and compare different opinions on one issue, give full information about the state of the social services (Frolova, 2009). Therefore, materials placed in the media have a rather strong influence on human actions and feelings (Nguyen, 2018b). Thousands of social network users joined the movement against the draft law soon after the publication about the draft law was released into the media. The scope of the movement's members is diverse and ranges from ordinary people to democratic activists. The movements surprised Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc and he stated that in recent days the 99-year lease term for real estate has caused a terrible wave of protest (Thuy, 2018).

3. Research Questions

The paper considers the features of publications on the draft law to find answers to the following questions: How often are messages on this topic published? Are the comments of experts or residents mentioned in these posts along with the information about this event? Are the pros and cons concerning these publications clearly expressed? Is an objective view of a problem rather than a one-sided opinion that protects a particular interest group presented?

4. Purpose of the Study

The study examines the characteristics of publications on the draft law in Viet Nam's online media. The objective of the present scientific work is to examine the attention paid by the press to the policy of the state as well as to study the reaction of the audience through comments at the end of each article. Thus, we will determine the influence of the media and public opinion on the authorities in solving a specific problem.

5. Research Methods

The author uses content and quantitative analyses to study the publications posted on vnexpress.net from May 23rd to June 23rd, 2018. Content analysis is a formalized method for studying textual and graphical information. It involves quantifying the information under study and its statistical processing (Dmitry, 2005). The author uses a search engine located in the upper right corner of the site for collecting materials. This search system enables to find previous publications on the site (Duong, 2016) sorted by genre, date, keywords and headings. The key words of our research are "the draft law on a special zone", "special economic zone", "special administrative and economic unit", "draft law on special administrative and economic units". However, this search system does not always give the correct result. At the beginning and at the end of each article there are links to the recommended and corresponding materials that help address the shortcomings. In addition, the author refers to the search system google.com.vn, using the previously specified keywords.

Vnexpress.net was registered on February 26th, 2001 and was chosen by the author for his research for the following reasons. Firstly, this platform is the most readable online newspaper in Vietnam with the number of regular visitors of the resource equal to 37.5 million people (Dinh, 2017). Secondly, at the end of each article there is a heading "comments" enabling the author to determine the opinions of the audience. Thirdly, the speed of access to the site is high. Fourth, online media information is diverse (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2014), and includes other types of journalism, such as press, radio and television (Nguyen & Pham, 2014).

6. Findings

From May 23rd to June 23rd, 2018, vnexpress.net published 42 issues on the draft law. The articles were placed under various headings such as news, economics, law, and society. The materials were categorized into four groups: regular news, publications on the opinions of legislators and members of parliament, publications on the opinions of specialists, publications on public opinion (see table 1).

Table 01. Total number of publications on the draft law

	Amount	Percent (%)
Regular news	10	23.8
Publications on the opinions of legislators and members of parliament	9	21.4
Publications on the opinions of specialists	3	7.2
Publications on public opinion	20	47.6
Totally	42	100

The outcomes of studying 42 materials enabled to determine that articles about public opinion are predominant (20 articles, which is 47.6%). Owing to this resource, the Vietnamese are aware of the new state policy as well as of what is being discussed at the session of the National Assembly.

Vietnam has changed significantly since 1986 (Baker & Üngör, 2019). Despite the economic and political reforms that turned Vietnam from one of the poorest markets in the world into a middle-income market (Le & Tran, 2018) Vietnam is still a relatively poor country (Nguyen, Özçaglar-Toulouse, & Kjeldgaard, 2018). In recent years, foreign direct investment in Southeast Asia has increased rapidly with Vietnam having the highest growth rates in the region (Baker & Üngör, 2019). For decades, Vietnam's economy developed mainly due to resource exports and foreign direct investment. In this regard, leaders strive to build a special economic administrative unit by creating space for a new economic model (see table 2).

Table 02. Publications on the opinions of legislators and members of parliament

	Amount	Percent (%)
Were in favor	7	77.7
Did not oppose, urged the authorities to scrutinize	2	22.3
Totally	9	100

Legislators and the majority of deputies believe that a preferential financial treatment and legal status allow the special economic administrative unit to attract huge foreign investment flows thus creating an impetus for the development of the national economy. According to Nguyen Chi Dung, the Minister of Planning and Investments, if we are afraid of everything, we will not do anything. Indisputably, risks must be calculated in implementation but this does not mean that the project should be suspended (Hoai, 2018b). We would like to emphasize the fact that creation of special economic administrative units is the initiative of the Ministry of Planning and Investments. The speech of Nguyen Chi Zunk gets 238 comments "against". Despite the fact that the volume of investment of the three economic zones reaches 1.5 billion Vietnamese dong (which is about 1/3 of the GDP of Vietnam in 2018), the government must first withdraw some capital for constructing infrastructure. These capitals are considered the so-called bait capital in the "hunt" of foreign investors (Hoai, 2018b). If the National Assembly adopts the draft law, three special zones will be created (Nguyen, 2018d). These zones are as follows: one in the northern province of Quang Nin, one in the central province of Hanh Hoa, and one in the southern province of Kienzhang.

Two of the nine publications refer to the opinions of other deputies who did not support the draft law but appealed to the parliament for careful consideration. It is worth noting that only a few deputies out of approximately 500 ones feel free to express their opinions. They doubt that the preferential treatment in

the rental of real estate will benefit only the dealers of real estate due to the fact that entrepreneurs in high-tech domain do not need such a long period as they only need a fair investment environment and fine infrastructure (Hoai, 2018c).

In his speech devoted to the vulnerable position of the three zones, the former Deputy Minister of Defense, Colonel General Nguyen Van Dyok, stated that we need to develop the economy at any cost because the position of the three zones is very vulnerable (Tran & Trong, 2018). Wandon is separated from the Chinese island of Hainan by 240 km by water, Vanfong is located near the Spratly archipelago and Phu Quoc is near Cambodia, where the Chinese have already settled down. When developing this draft law, legislators and many deputies did not have the opportunity to read research on the security and defense of these zones, which are of strategic importance in protecting sovereignty and national security.

In Vietnam, the press is considered a propaganda body that serves the ideological goals of the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam (Russell & Heng, 2003). In all conscience, the journalism follows certain rules. When discussing the draft law many experts feel free to express their opinions in the media. They are perceived as heroes on the political front. There are three publications referring to the ideas expressed by such heroes (see table 3).

Table 03. Publications about the opinions of specialists

	Amount	Percent (%)
Were in favor	0	0
Did not oppose, urged the authorities to scrutinize	3	100
Totally	3	100

The property rental term has promoted the interest of many professionals. Today, no one can state that he will sell only one commodity for 90 years. Who will be responsible for the transfer of rental property if an entrepreneur declares bankruptcy in 20 years? (Minh, 2018). According to the economist, Pham Thi Lan, attracting investments through tax breaks and an increased term of renting real estate are considered obsolete. An interview with Phan Thi Lan was supported by 94 comments (Minh, 2018).

Mr. Hoang Van Kyong, the Deputy Director of the Hanoi National Economic University, stated that the residents are worried about the criteria of 99 years. According to Tran (2018), if legislators insist on this indicator, then they must add attached conditions that are not mentioned in the draft law. While his presentation at the conference “Special Zone – Institutions, Policy and Success”, Mr. Sebastian Eckardt, the chief economist of the World Bank (WB), warned about the risks associated with tax concessions in a special economic zone. He also stated that sometimes the benefits lead to their excessive use. In addition, it is most likely that there will be unfair competition between economic zones. This adversely affects the business environment and labor standards (Nguyen, 2018c).

Notwithstanding the fact that readers do not have the opportunity to express their views in the media (as experts or deputies do) they can participate in the creation of public opinion through comments, forums and social networks. In other words, it is social participation through the media. Social participation through the media involves the opportunity not only to inform people (informative function), but also to link them together (communicative), creating new communities (social and creative), providing platforms for the exchange of views to individual citizens (Fomicheva, 2012). By using this opportunity, readers influence

state policy in the way of expressing assessments, demands, expectations and highlighting mass issues as well. The media together with their audience can be the initiators in stating problems that need to be resolved (Fomicheva, 2012).

The day before the last discussion of the draft law in parliament (June 10th, when deputies were to vote for or against the law adoption) many Hanoi people gathered near the entrance to the Bolshoi Theater and thousands of people with banners and slogans went to the streets in the city of Bienhoa. Later in the day, thousands of people gathered outside the Binh Thuan Provincial People's Committee building. At present, there is no law of manifestation in Vietnam, thus, all of the above actions are considered illegal. As a result, hundreds of people were arrested.

It should not go unnoticed that only 20 out of 42 articles in media are devoted to public opinion on this draft law. Most of them talk about extremists and arrests of demonstrators without covering people's opinion on the draft law and on the creation of special economic administrative units. It is worth noting that informing about the areas of strategic importance or problems related to religion, defense, and the sovereignty of a country must comply with the instructions of the Communist Party and state policy (Do, Nguyen, & Do, 2015). Therefore, depending on the focus of journalists and those who lead them, functioning of a particular media channel may become one-way or two-way (Fomicheva, 2012).

7. Conclusion

Information and communication technologies in general (and the Internet in particular) are often considered a means of strengthening democracy and providing new opportunities for developing an equal civil society in which all members can make contributions (Surborg, 2008).

In addition to the state apparatus, journalism is also regarded as the Fourth Estate in many countries of the world (Ha, 2000). This power can create public opinion and influence the managerial class. However, will journalists dare to defend the rights of the poor, to criticize social injustice and the shortcomings of state policy (Ha, 2000)?

Thus, the outcomes of the study claim that vnexpress.net informed readers about the draft law by serving as a bridge between readers and the government. This internet resource publishes the views of not only legislators and deputies of the National Assembly but also economic experts. Consequently, the audience gets a multi-sided view of the specific problem in the country. It is worth noting that vnexpress.net and its subscribers have created a public opinion exerting sufficient influence on the legislators. As a result, I would like to emphasize that in consequence of the parliamentary session on June 11th, 423 out of 432 deputies agreed to postpone the adoption of the law (Vo & Hoai, 2018).

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