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and Cooperation SDC



Albanian Media Institute
Instituti Shqiptar i Medias

REPORTING NEIGHBOURS IN BALKAN MEDIA

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IN BALKAN MEDIA

Publisher: Albanian Media Institute



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ISBN:

This publication has been produced with funding from Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The content of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and in no way can be taken to reflect the views of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) or the Swiss Government.



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Foreword



Media is all around us, we consume it daily. It influences our thinking and reflects what we think and how we feel. Therefore, if we want to learn more about each other, we must observe the media channels, what they report about us, about others, about our neighbours.

What do the Western Balkan countries say about each other in their media outlets? The studies presented in this publication give some answers. The findings are interesting: some confirm the obvious, some are encouraging,

and yet others are disturbing. For example, using derogatory names for a neighbouring population should ring alarm bells to all of us. On the other hand, I am pleased to note that fair and unbiased portrayal of other countries and nationalities are often present in most Western Balkan media.

This publication opens up a path for dialogue and better mutual understanding among media actors in the various Western Balkan countries. I see its main value in presenting facts and bringing different perspectives together. This is a promising base to further foster bridges between journalists, reporters and media experts. I hope that these bridges will extend to reach wider publics in the region, so that all of us will have a greater understanding and tolerance for the 'others'.

It is for this purpose that the Swiss Government supported the studies in this publication on "Reporting Neighbours in Balkan media". Switzerland stays engaged in promoting initiatives that bring peace, stability and cooperation among the Western Balkan countries. Looking at the experience of my own country, I am convinced that 'good neighbourhood' is not only key for peace and stability, but also for development and prosperity.

Christoph Graf
Swiss Ambassador in Albania

July 2015

ALBANIA:
between shadows of the past
and interest of the present

Rrapo Zguri
media expert, Tirana

Geopolitical context

From geopolitical context standpoint, the Balkan region where Albania is located represents an area where the strategic interests of the three most important global actors are intertwined in the region: the West, Russia, and Turkey. In the context of western influence, the two neighboring countries that are EU members, Italy and Greece, have a direct impact on the international relations of the region's countries. However, after the strong economic crisis it has been under in recent years, the role of Greece has weakened to some extent.

Among the region's countries, Albania's closest neighbors in terms of geographical proximity are Greece, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia. Following the so-called initiative "Balkan Schengen," the region's countries have applied the lifting of visas and free movement of their citizens, which helps, among others, in mutual familiarization. With regard to strategic alliances, Albania and Greece are NATO members, while Macedonia and Montenegro also intend to join the Atlantic Alliance.

With regard to EU integration, Albania received the status of candidate country during 2014. Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro have acquired this status as well, while Greece is an EU member since 1981.¹ Lagging farthest behind in integration in Euro-Atlantic structures is Kosovo, also because of the lack of full recognition by the UN.

Methodology

This study on reporting neighbors in Albania's media is mainly based on data from empirical research collected from the press, but there is also data coming from the online environment as well as from the main television stations. The empirical study conducted in the form of monitoring was focused on some of the country's best-known newspapers such as Panorama, Shekulli, Tema, Shqip and Gazeta Shqiptare. The monitoring also includes other newspapers when it comes to certain aspects of the themes addressed by this study. The target of the empirical research included news, articles, analyses, editorials, as well as other materials that, in terms of content, make up the reporting or commenting on the situation and relations with neighbors.

¹ http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/index_en.htm

Besides the monitoring, another employed method is that of case studies to move the empirical research and analysis to a concrete terrain of developments. The study analyzes separately the reporting in the media on each of Albania's neighboring countries, such as Serbia, Greece, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Montenegro, by picking the most typical case studies for each country. The typology of the selection of case studies relies on two criteria: first, those developments or events that have had the highest profile and have received the most extensive coverage; second, we selected the events that were the most approximate in time, in order to study the current situation of Albania media in terms of reporting neighbors.

International news Reporting in the media and Reporting the Balkans

The economic crisis that media in Albania is undergoing has had a considerable impact on the international reporting of these media outlets. Cuts in human resources first affected international news departments. At present, only some of the country's television stations, such as Top Channel, TV Klan and Vizion Plus, have correspondents in some European or regional capitals, such as Brussels, London, Belgrade, Pristina, Skopje, or Athens. Newspapers do not have correspondents for foreign news stationed in other countries. This has led to a situation whereby international news reporting in Albania's media, as well as most of the reporting in television stations, is done relying on the translation or adaptation of information obtained from Internet resources or other media.

Nevertheless, reporting on neighbors is more present compared to reporting on other regions or countries in the world. On the other hand, reporting on neighbors is more frequent at times of crises or problems in bilateral relations among the countries and rarer in calm periods of the development of these relations.

In general, media in Albania are correct when reporting different domestic developments in the neighboring countries, such as reporting on the crisis in Greece. However, when the reporting involves events related to conflicts or unresolved issues between the two countries, media discourse appear to show the stereotypes and prejudice for other peoples in the Balkans. In these cases, one also sees an expansion of nationalist rhetoric and an involvement of politics and extremist nationalist elements in media discourse.

It is a positive fact that Albania has no independent media outlets with a nationalistic orientation. This reflects also the poor support that nationalist-

based organizations have in the country. For instance, the only party in the country with a nationalistic profile, such as the AK (Red & Black Alliance) only managed to get about 1% of votes in the 2013 parliamentary elections, unlike other neighboring countries, where political forces with a nationalistic program have extensive support and a large number of representatives in the respective parliaments.

In reporting neighbors, the forms of discourse vary to include ethnic or racial discourse, territorial integrity discourse, religious discourse, anti-terrorist discourse, European discourse, etc.

Reporting on Serbia

During the last decade, we notice an increase in economic relations between Albania and Serbia. Thus, during the period January – August 2014, over a period of eight months, imports from Serbia reached approximately 108 million Euros.² However, in relations between the two countries, the issue of Kosovo and Serbia's non-recognition of new realities created in Kosovo represents a permanent stalemate. These relations saw notable aggravation especially following incidents in the soccer match Serbia – Albania on October 14, 2014, and following the statements by the Albanian Prime Minister during his visit to Belgrade in November 2014. Also, time after time, problems inherited from the remote or the more recent past in relations between the two countries and the two peoples are recycled.

A general assessment indicates that coverage on Serbia in Albania's media is limited to:

- Events or developments that are directly related to bilateral relations;
- Events or developments related to Kosovo;
- Events or developments related to strategic geopolitical interests that may affect Albania, or more broadly persons of Albanian nationality, such as for instance, reporting on Putin's visit to Belgrade, developments having to do with Serbia's membership in the EU, or its relations with NATO, etc.
- Events or developments that affect or are in the direct interest of Albanian citizens, such as was the case of the agreement for border crossing with ID cards for Albanian citizens who seek to visit Serbia, or customs agreements between the two countries, etc.

² <http://www.gazetatema.net/web/2014/10/21/shqiperia-108-milione-euro-importe-nga-serbia/>

- Reporting on important moments of domestic developments in Serbia, such as parliamentary elections, whereby attention focuses on tendencies of power moving from liberal forces toward nationalist-conservative ones and vice versa, which in a way related to the perspective of bilateral relations and Serbia's stance toward hot issues, such as the case of Kosovo.

Other domestic events or developments in Serbia, which fall beyond the above categories, are not reported in Albania's media. Thus, information about this northern neighbor remains partial and limits further familiarization with it.

In order to take a close look at how a country like Serbia, with very delicate relations with Albania, is reported in Albanian media, let us take a look at the following case study:

Case study: Reporting on the Serbia-Albania (October 14, 2014) soccer match and the visit of the Albanian Prime Minister to Belgrade (November 10, 2014)

A soccer match between Serbia and Albania, scheduled for October 14, 2014, in Belgrade, was interrupted because of turmoil caused at the moment when a drone with a flag featuring the ethnic Albania map appeared on the soccer pitch. The atmosphere charged with racist calls by fans from the very start of the match degenerated into hooligan violence on members of the Albanian soccer players, thus rendering the continuation of the match impossible. Meanwhile, another very high-profile event was the visit of the Albanian Prime Minister to Serbia on November 10, 2014, and the articulation by him of the request to Serbia to recognize the new state of Kosovo. These events were reported immediately in world media and naturally in those of Albania as well.

In order to analyze the way in which Albanian media covered these events, monitoring included the 5 leading newspapers in the country, namely Panorama, Shekulli, Tema, Shqip, and Gazeta Shqiptare, for a one-month period, October 15, 2014 until November 15, 2014. In this context, we monitored 150 editions of these daily newspapers, i.e. 30 editions of each of the newspapers.

A general overview of the monitored media outlets shows that they were open to both views / reporting carrying nationalist emotions and arguments and to voices of reason and rational judgment. Furthermore, besides reporting on developments that divide the two countries and peoples and cause conflict among them, there appear here and there reports on cultural events or joint agreements that unite the two countries and peoples.

Below are some of the main problems encountered in the coverage of monitored media outlets of the two above events:

- ***Reappearance in the media of nationalist-based prejudice and stereotypes as well as of negative portrayals of Serb ethnicity***, as is for example the reappearance of the image of “shqau.” This nickname with a negative connotation used to label Serbs in general, appears to have been used in 12 cases, mainly in pieces by analysts or persons known to be extremists. In 3 cases, another term with negative connotation was used, ‘cetnik.’ Two of the monitored media outlets also printed two articles, one by a historian and another by a linguist, which provide a historic and linguistic analysis of the term “shqa,” and namely in the articles “Albanians and shqa” and “Why they call us shiptarë and why we call them shqa.”

- ***Reappearance in the media of the discourse on ethnic territories and the use of ethnicity based figures or percentages as arguments***. Thus, the article by a person known for nationalist stances says, “With barbarisms, genocides and invasive wars, the Serbs, with the help of some pro-Serb countries of Europe, robbed Albania and the Albanians of 40,000 km² in fatherland territories.” On the other hand, the article of an analyst says, “On October 14, 7 million Albanians in the Balkans demonstrated their ideal toward the national flag and their national identity as Albanians.”

- ***Revival in media discourse of the dichotomy we/them, ours/theirs***. In many cases, this dichotomy comes from political discourse, among which stands out the statement by the Albanian Prime Minister that “Greater Albania is their nightmare, not our project,” reported by all media in the headlines of stories. In another article called “Nothing new from the Serbia front,” 11 of the 23 paragraphs that make up the analysis begin with ‘They,’ referring to the Serbs.

- ***Collective portrayal instead of group or individual portrayal***. Thus, when talking about the brutal behavior by Serb fans, it is usually said “Serbs” rather than “Serb fans.” This type of collective portrayal often appears from the very start of articles, for instance in headlines, “Serbs aren’t giving up on chauvinism,” “Serbs caught in historic past,” “Stallion like Albanians, killer like Serbs,” “Serbs have appeared heavenly while they are devilish,” “Serbs incapable of peace with neighbors,” “Serb hysteria continues,” “Serbs sought to make kurbans of us,” “Serbs can’t succeed to be different,” “Serbs should win fight with selves.” It is not difficult to see also the presence of hate speech in some of these headlines. In some analyses, there is also criticism of this collective portrayal. An analysis called, “Lubonja: Albanians and Serbs will get deserved slap from Europe,” reads, “I don’t want to think in any way that the whole of Serbia may be identified with the violence and hatred demonstrated by Serb fans in the stadium...”

- ***Appearance of racial discourse.*** Typical in this case are reports regarding a Facebook status by the niece of former PM Berisha who also addressed some criticism also toward Albanian soccer players. As a reaction to this status and to such criticism, an analyst brings to attention the ethnic background of the former PM's niece, "Her grandmother on the mother's side is a pure Serb from Belgrade," he says. Further on, he adds the fact that her father is of Bosnian origin, to reach the conclusion that "the Albanian society is freer than the Serb one because it agrees to be led by a multi-ethnic Serb-Albanian family and agrees to listen to evaluations by off-springs of the Albanian-Serb-Bosnian family, which has a lot of power still, and align themselves with Serbs." The same author, in another piece, talks about the 'bad-blooded,' 'mixed blood' or 'pure blood,' which are very much used terms in the context of racist ideologies. In pure racist rhetoric, in another un-authored piece in the same newspaper, called "super niece summoned by grandmother's blood, protects Serbs," speaking about the status of the former PM's niece on Facebook, the anonymous author concludes, "it appears that the roots of Serb blood on the grandmother's side have brought to the fore the worst side, that of racism and inferiority."

- ***Re-contextualization of discourse*** in various forms, such as taking global discourse and using it for local context needs or in the form of taking contexts of the past to use for purposes of the present. We note the taking of articles from different global media to use in the local context, quoting statements by world political leaders or globally known persons, etc. With the latter, there was also abuse by publishing statements of known soccer players, such as Ronaldo, Beckham, Ibrahimovic, which were taken directly from social media without any verification of the source. The monitored outlets also featured articles that resume topics or contexts of the past to use in the current context, as was the case of articles "Albanian saint that Serbs pray to," "Why they call us shiptar and we call them shqa," or the case of the publication of a caricature of neighbors taken from the Albanian press of 1913 for use in the current context, etc.

- ***Presence of biased and unbalanced reporting by journalists themselves.*** During the first two or three days after the drone incident, media reporting reflected the unreserved behavior of crowds and their emotions. The country's two largest newspapers, the day after the match, published headline stories such as "Historic: Eagle flies proud over Serbia," or "Ethnic Albania flies over Belgrade." Known analyst Mustafa Nano, in an analysis of how the Albanian media covered events during the Serbia-Albania soccer match, writes, "The day after the match, Tirana's newspapers, with some exceptions, were in a rampant state...They were like war leaflets that sought to spur, encourage, flatter or appear on the side of wild nationalist

emotions... This story of the press was more noticed in televisions, from the first minutes and hours that followed the interruption of the match. It wasn't easy to understand whether journalists were following the rampancy of fans or provoking it, or whether it was the political, intellectual, and sports elite that was producing this environment."

However, after the first two or three days, reporting by reporters becomes more neutral and more professional. In the case of the Prime Minister's visit, drawing lessons from problems in the reporting on the drone case, the monitored media were mostly correct in their stories reported by their staffs.

- ***Extreme politicization of coverage by the media.*** During the monitoring period, the media publishes almost every kind of statement made by political parties or politicians, including their statuses posted on Facebook. In this case, we see something typical not only for Albanian mass communication, with mediatized politics and politicized media using one another to gain terrain in public opinion, using even nationalistic discourse. As a result, most of the reporting or analysis about the Serbia-Albania soccer match were published under the 'politics' section and very little under the 'sports' section. In one national daily, the issues of October 15, 16, 17, and 18 October 2014, out of a total of 24 stories about the soccer match, 18 of them cover statements or stances by political parties or different politicians.

Reporting on Greece

At present, Albania has sustainable political and economic relations with its southern neighbor, Greece. However, relations between the two countries time after time lose their normal balance as a result of inherited issues or those created in recent years, which come to the fore depending on current developments or debates. The list of these issues, most notably includes: the maritime border issue, the problem of Albanian emigrants in Greece, the issue of Northern Epirus, the Orthodox Church, Greek minority in Albania, the Cham issue, the Law of War that is still kept in force by Greece, European integration, the issue of cemeteries for Greek soldiers in Albania, Kosovo recognition, population census and Greek pensions, etc.³

In spite of problems, during the past twenty years, relations with Greece have been a very important component of Albania's international relations. As results from a survey conducted by the Albanian Institute for

³ For more detail, see also: *Albania-Greece relations in the eyes of the Albanian public – perceptions 2014*, AIIS, Tirana, 2013, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/albanien/10897.pdf>, accessed on 24.03.2015

International Studies, an overwhelming number of 76 percent in Albania think that relations with Greece are of considerable importance.⁴ During the transition period, about 700,000 Albanians,⁵ or approximately one fifth of the population immigrated to Greece.

This explains to some extent also the fact that the reporting by Albania's media about Greece is more complete and more frequent than reporting about other countries of the Balkans. The public in Albania is sensitive not only to developments in bilateral relations between the two countries, but also toward domestic developments in Greece because they have an impact on the lives of about 700,000 Albanian emigrants there and, as a result, on the lives and preoccupations of their families and relatives in Albania. Therefore, the Albanian media features a broad variety of topics on domestic developments in Greece, such as issues of the economic crisis, parliamentary and local elections and the possibility of emigrants to participate in them, legal developments in the area of social insurance and pensions, developments regarding Greece pensions for minority members living in Albania, changes in customs regimes, problems with free movement, the situation of criminality in which Albanian citizens are not so rarely involved, etc.

With regard to problems between the two countries that see the most frequent reporting in Albanian media, the most sensitive problem is that of borders. From an analysis of the survey conducted by the Albanian Institute of International Studies, it results that, "...there are three 'Achilles' heels' in relations between Greece and Albania, according to Albanian citizens, and most of what will happen in bilateral relations will depend on progress achieved in addressing or recognizing them: first and foremost, the issue of borders in the very important maritime border agreement; second, the Cham issue, which is yet to be recognized as such by Greece, and last, the treatment of numerous Albanian emigrants living in the southern neighbor." According to the survey, 49 percent of respondents consider that of borders to be the most important issue, 29 percent consider the Cham issue the most important one, and 27 percent consider the issue of emigrants as such. The author of this research relied precisely on such data and perceptions in his decision to select as a case study exactly border issues between the two countries.

⁴ *Albania-Greece relations in the eyes of the Albanian public – perceptions 2013*, AIIS, Tirana, 2013, Link: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/albanien/10897.pdf>, accessed on 24.03.2015

⁵ Albanian Screen (2013), 32.5 % of Albanians live as emigrants: the majority of them in Greece. Online: http://news.albanianscreen.tv/pages/news_detail/56180/ENG.

Case study: Border problems: precisely, the issue of the maritime border between Albania and Greece and the Northern Epirus issue

Both the issue of the maritime border between Albania and Greece and the issue of Northern Epirus are handled by the media within the discourse on territorial integrity. The issue of Northern Epirus is almost one century old and is related to the declaration by the Greeks of the Autonomous Republic of Northern Epirus in 1914, two years after the proclamation of the Independence of Albania. In Greece, Northern Epirus refers to a part of territory located within the official territory of Albania, in the south of it. On the other hand, the issue of the maritime border refers to a later agreement of 2009 between the two governments, whereby a maritime area in the south of Albania is recognized as a part of Greece's territory. In 2010, the Constitutional Court of Albania annulled the agreement, but the problem remains in the agenda of relations between the two countries and, in certain moments, it is revived in the media.

The coverage of such issues by Albanian media outlets in different periods of 2014 features the following problems:

- ***Reappearance of the territorial integrity discourse or of territorial claims.*** This rhetoric appears in two fronts: on the one hand, Greece is accused of violating the territorial integrity of Albania both in the case of the maritime agreement and in the case of keeping alive the idea of Northern Epirus. On the other hand, there is talk of "autochthonous Albanians who inhabited Konica, Follorina, Ioannina, Igoumenitsa, Filates, and Paramithia" and Greece is accused of "occupying and keeping occupied Albanian territories" referring to Chameria. In the article headlined, "Maritime border with Greece; Gërveni testifies for one hour in the prosecutor's office," there is talk of an "agreement to hand over territory" and "violation of the territorial integrity of Albania," etc. Under the rhetoric of territorial claims toward Albania and efforts for the violation of its integrity, media also address the topic of Northern Epirus, in articles such as, "Anti-Albanian calls signed 'Northern Epirus 1914,'" "Paramilitary groups for the liberation of Northern Epirus?!" Other authors resume and bring back to attention the "Megali Idea" – Great Idea, which indicates claims for the creation of a Greater Greece and efforts for the Hellenization of the South of Albania. ("Ksenofon Krisafi: the Absurd of the Greek law on Albania). This is what the article says, "Under the pretext of showing interest for the Greek minority in Albania and the so-called 'Northern Epirus,' one notices a stable constant of the permanent goal for the hellenization of the South of Albania."

- ***Presence of discourse on ethnic background or ethnic makeup.*** In close connection to the above discourse in the media, there are also debates about the ethnic background of individuals or the ethnic makeup of certain

areas. The highest profile case in this context is that of Himarë, a coastal area in the south of Albania whereby alongside Albanian inhabitants, there is also a Greek-speaking community. For an illustration, we'll use the article "100th anniversary of the autonomy of Northern Epirus celebrated in Greece; Pirro Dhima also attends." There have been numerous comments about the story by readers and they summarize almost the entire spectrum of discourse on ethnic background in the debate on Himarë. The more serious comments on the article include statements, research or conclusions by linguists and historians and there is a real debate on contents (a rare occasion in comments in Albanian media online). In debating about the ethnic makeup of Himarë or the ethnic background of different Himarë individuals, one notices that arguments rely either on the thesis that "Himarë is Albanian" or the other thesis that "Himarë is Greek," thus manifesting the mentality of collective ethnic portrayal and evading the fact that ethnic background is an individual feature, not a collective one.

Comments also feature the reckless and discrediting use of the ethnic background of characters that are talked about and the mentioning as an argument of figures and percentages of ethnic makeup. To support the presented thesis, there is also a re-contextualization of scientific research or historic documents, such as for example, the research by linguist Rahmi Memushaj on the patrimony of Himarë, some historic documents of the Ottoman empire on Himarë, etc., which although created for a different context, are used to support the arguments of participants.

There are other cases of re-contextualization of texts; authors or different events are also encountered in other instances, such as in the story, "Xhufi: Unholy Serb-Greek alliance – a threat to peace in the Balkans," in the case of taking up the history of the law of war between Greece and Albania in the context of events in Belgrade, in the case of the publication of fragments of a story "Greek barbarisms in Albania," published in Albanian newspapers in 1917 as part of a comment, etc.

- Revival of the rhetoric of national treason, which often comes to the media through political discourse. A typical case is that of statements made by politicians regarding the signing by the Albanian government of the maritime agreement with Greece. Thus, the article, "Balla to Basha: You have three cases going, justice shall be done!" there is a statement by a majority MP about the head of the Albanian opposition who, at the time of the signing of the pact, was Foreign Minister, "Lulzim Basha ... should testify about national treason as Foreign Minister when he sold maritime space to another country." The discourse of national treason has also been used in other stories about sport players of Albanian origin who have competed or compete by changing their name or religion in Greece, etc.

- **Revival of stereotypes and prejudice in portraying Greeks.** In the monitored Albanian media, one encounters the reuse of the image of the Trojan Horse in different articles addressing problems with Greece. There is also a frequent presence of epithets such as “untrustworthy,” “enemy” in efforts to provide a collective portrayal of Greeks. Online comments also feature statements such as, “Greeks are known to be untrustworthy,” “A Greek is a Greek,” “it is a misfortune for us to have a neighbor like Greeks,” etc.⁶

Reporting on Macedonia

Relations with the eastern neighbor, Macedonia, have seen considerable stabilization over the past decade. The recognition of the state of Kosovo has played an important role in improving these relations. Nevertheless, from time to time, there are issues that cause turbulences in relations between the two countries. Among these, we may mention: interethnic clashes between Albanians in Macedonia and the Macedonian population, problems having to do with respecting the Ohrid Agreement that ended the armed interethnic conflict of 2001, issues of the Macedonian minority in Albania, etc.

The largest number of reports by Albanian media on Macedonia are those related to the Albanian population there, the stances of their political leaders or political forces, problems that Albanians deal with, etc. Information that relates specifically to the Macedonian population is scarce.

Case study: Interethnic clashes between Macedonians and Albanians of Macedonia and the debate over the identity and history of Macedonia

During the last two years, there have been a series of different protests organized in Macedonia, with interethnic overtones, both by the Albanian population of Macedonia and by the Macedonians. Among the most notable and the highest profile ones were the protests over the sentencing of the six Albanians by the Macedonian court charged with the killing of five Macedonian youths in the case known as “Monster.” Below are some of the main problems in the coverage of Albanian media of different protests with an interethnic background:

Presence of biased reporting. All Albanian media covered and reported for days in a row the conduct of these protests by Albanians during the summer of 2014 against the “Monster process.” In the majority of cases, reporting was generally balanced, but there was also a kind of support for the protests. A known portal uses for one of its reports on the events the

⁶ <http://www.gazetatema.net/web/2014/02/17/festohet-ne-greqi-100-vjetori-i-autonomise-se-vorio-epirit-merr-pjese-edhe-pirro-dhima/>

title, "Today – protest against injustice, ethnic and religious hatred." Written before the protest was held, the story, beside a statement of bias, appears to also engage in national mobilization.

Appearance of ethnic and religious discourse. In some news or other stories, one encounters the presence of ethnic as well as religious discourse in reporting on these protests. The monitoring indicates that this discourse is present in stories "Ethnic background in sentencing of Albanians," "There's more than religion and nationalism behind protests in Skopje," "Gruevski against Rama: protests are religious, not over Ohrid," "Macedonian director offends Allah," etc.

In the story, "Giant flag in Tetovo, Macedonians upset," there is a clear influence of consensual nationalism that becomes an almost "involuntary" part of reporting on an issue or event. Researchers consider this kind of nationalism "banal nationalism."

In some articles that are more like comments or opinions, the rhetoric of interethnic conflict appears in a more direct fashion, as is the case with the story "Macedonian inferiority clad in anti-Albanianism." "This hysteria of assaults on Albanians is in fact a compensation of the inferiority of Macedonians toward Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, so there's no point in expecting to see burned Greek, Bulgarian, or Serb flags in some stadium of Macedonia or elsewhere. Only the burned Albanian flags and bleeding Albanian children are presently feeding Macedonian inferiority and misery," the article maintains.

Reappearance of the debate over history and identity. Time after time, there appears the debate over the identity of Macedonians and the history of Macedonia and of Albanians in Macedonia. In the story "Albanians came to Skopje in the 20th century," the report deals with the republication in a Macedonian newspaper of a story from 1957 by a known Macedonian nationalist who had declared that Albanians are not autochthonous in Skopje and came here only in the beginning of the 20th century. The story is characterized by a sense of national hurt and the violation of the historic truth.

In another article called "Encyclopedia of Macedonian (identity crazes)," the debate focuses on efforts by the government of Macedonia to "testify the identity roots of the Macedonian people," which, according to the author, are like a science fiction rebus that seek to prove that "today's Macedonians are Slavic, but also ancient Macedonians, who came in the seventh century but also were autochthonous."

Reporting on Kosovo

Besides geography, the common ethnic background of the majority of the population of both countries is also a common feature of Albania and Kosovo. After the proclamation of independence of Kosovo on February 17, 2008, both countries have built relations of maximal possible openness in the area of political, economic, cultural and other cooperation. Time after time, there also appear problems that have to do with customs systems or agreements, import-exports of goods between the two countries, economic priorities, etc.

Coverage by the media of Albania of developments in Kosovo is much broader and more complete than of other countries in the region. Thus, beside developments in bilateral state relations, the media features also many domestic political, cultural, economic, and other developments in Kosovo. Almost all media have a special section “Kosovo” with news, analyses or other information from the country. Meanwhile, there is a great exchange of information among the media outlets of Albania and those of Kosovo. Also, some of Albania’s main media outlets have entered the Kosovo market. For instance, Klan television has opened a branch of its own in Kosovo, called “Klan Kosova.”

Case study – Case of import of products form Kosovo

In the spring of 2014, media in Albania featured extensively the case of blocked imports of flour from Kosovo. A similar precedent had been the import of potatoes from the same country. Beside the debate of a legal and economic nature, the theme of Kosovo products or the so-called “Kosovo flour” showed the following problems in the media reports about it:

First, developments were conveyed using the ***language of rhetoric and conflict***;

Second, ***issues of economic relations extend to the level of interethnic relations***;

Third, coverage by the media generated or brought to the surface ***some prejudice that exists in the society of both countries***.

In different articles, the situation is conveyed by using terms such as “blockade,” “vicious commercial fight,” “battle for flour,” etc. Meanwhile, there are accusations of decisions made to fulfill the interests of certain oligarchs. In the story called “Kosovo: Kosovo flour refused, cause is monopoly,” it is noted that the events are “testimony to the fact how powerful the lobby controlling flour in Albania is and apparently finds it easier to create barriers and obstacles to Kosovo.”

In comments about another story, one finds conspiracy theories, according to which, this has to do with blocking the Serb flour “that comes to Albania disguised as Kosovo flour.” Apparently, nationalist elements are not missing even in reporting on a product like flour. Under such a perception, the media also generates articles that extend economic relations to the level of interethnic relations, as is the case with the article “Serbia is dominating the Albanian and Kosovo markets.” In other comments, the flour issue is linked with the “national interest.”

With regard to prejudice or stereotypes in the societies of both countries, they appear mainly in online comments. Thus, the story called “Import of Kosovo flour toward Albania blocked,” a commentator, conveying some kind of prejudice that exists in Albania toward Kosovo traders, writes, “There can be no meaner than Kosovo traders. All carry Albanian flags at home and in cars, but in trade, they are the greatest Mafioso in the Balkans.” As a diversion, another commentator writes, “The Albanian people should understand that Kosovars simply love Albania out of interest.”

Nevertheless, it should be said that in spite of these comments, reporting or analyses by media professionals in Albania are correct and part of professional reporting or analyses.

Reporting on Montenegro

Officially, cooperation with Montenegro “represents an excellent model of good neighborly relations, with very intensive political dialogue and increasingly intensive economic-commercial cooperation.”⁷ However, there are also problems that relate to issues such as the situation and problems with respective minorities or incidents with an ethnic background; the Kosovo issue appears in the stance of part of Montenegrin politics that is under Serb influence, although Montenegro was one of the first countries that recognized the state of Kosovo.

Coverage by the Albanian media in the case of Montenegro is rare and linked with three main contexts: 1. bilateral developments in different areas; 2. developments in an interethnic context, which include those related to respective minorities, and 3. cultural or touristic developments. The interest of Albanian media is periodically awakened in the case of electoral campaigns for the election of local or national government representatives, with an

⁷ Ministry of European Integration of Albania, link: <http://www.integrimi.gov.al/al/prioritete/kriteri-politik/ceshtjet-rajonale-dhe-detyrimet-nderkombetare>, accessed on 12.03.2015

emphasis especially on developments within Albanian political parties in Montenegro, candidates or their problems, etc.

Case study: Incidents with an ethnic background

Although very local and without massive participation, incidents with an ethnic background related to Albanians still appear in Montenegro. Two typical examples are: 1. incidents in the basketball match between Montenegro's Sutjeska team and Sigal of Pristina in the context of the Balkan league in February 2015, and 2. protests against the visit of the Foreign Minister and former Prime Minister of Kosovo Hashim Thaçi in January 2015.

Just like in the Serbia-Albania soccer match, during the basketball match between Sutjeska and Sigal there had been anti-Albanian racist chants in a choir and violence against Albanian basketball players of Kosovo, leading to the interruption of the match and the Kosovar team winning it on the table. Also, during protests against the visit of Hashim Thaçi, the same racist chants were repeated. Taking place only shortly after the incidents in Belgrade, both these events appeared to reflect the charged environment after the Serbia-Albania match, which awakened the rhetoric of hatred among Albanians on the one hand and among Serbs and Montenegrins on the other. Such events awaken, as post-effect, dormant debates about the situation of Albanians or open up discussions of different nature related to historic, religious, or ethnic contexts. Below are some of the problems in the coverage of Albanian media of the above events and developments in Montenegro:

Appearance of reflections of racist discourse. Although the media of Albania did not, in this case, generate such discourse, they still bring reflections that appear from the context of the above events or incidents. Thus reporting on these events saw news headlines such as: "Montenegrins chant: Kill Albanians," "Montenegrins: Kill, strangle Albanians," "Thaçi received with protests in Podgorica: Kill Albanians," etc. Meanwhile, reporting inside these stories is correct while the use of such headlines carries reflections of a racist discourse and some kind of language of collective portrayal. The adjective "Montenegrins" has a generalizing nature and avoids addressing the problem to a number of individuals among the Montenegrin society that may in no way represent the society as a whole. Furthermore, with such headlines, these stories appear to engage in the spirit created by previous stories, as for instance the story "Eliminate Albanians – this is the platform of neighbors," published in the Albanian press in December 2014.

Revival of nationalist exaltation in the media. The story "Response of 'Plisas' for Montenegrins is spectacular," maintains: "The group of fans 'Plisas' has displayed a national flag of giant dimensions in the Pristina-Sutjeska

match, in the context of the basketball Balkan League.” Talking about the return match in Pristina between Sutjeska and Sigal, what media choose to report does not have to do with sport developments but rather the display of national symbols, thus reflecting some kind of exaltation through the qualification as ‘spectacular’ of the battle of flags or other national symbols.

Reappearance of historical discourse. As in the media of other countries of the Balkans, Albanian media too sometimes shows a revival or reappearance of debates about history and bring to attention different events or authors to place them in the context of current developments. The story “Albanians caught hostage by Montenegrins in 1912” brings to attention a photograph of 1912 which presents a line of Albanians caught hostage by the Montenegrin army. The story has been published to convey the message that although at the start of the war, Albanian highlanders were allies with Montenegrins, later on, after learning about Serb-Montenegrin crimes in Kosovo regions; they began the war against Montenegrins.

The television story called “This is how Montenegrins deform Albanian history” opens up the debate over school textbooks in Montenegro, which, according to the story, distort the history of Albanians. The opening of such a debate is normal and constructive because it helps create a fair image of one another in textbooks, but the time chosen to open up this discussion – immediately after the Serbia-Albania match, leads to the conclusion that the debate is presented to engage in nationalist discourse, diverging from scientific discourse.

ANNEX: Reporting Kumanovo incident

At dawn on May 9, 2015, Macedonian police and military troops attacked an armed group of persons of Albanian nationality, self-declared as members of the National Liberation Army (NLA) who were sheltered in a neighbourhood of Kumanovo city, known as the “Neighbourhood of the Brave.” The happening was covered also by Albanian media as it was in regional as well as international outlets. This case study undertakes to analyze the way in which this event was covered and reported in Albania’s five main newspapers, namely: Panorama, Shekulli, Shqip, Gazeta Shqiptare and Tema, during the period May 10 – 15, 2015.

Because of the printing cycle, the event was only covered in the print media 24 hours after it had taken place, namely in the newspaper editions of May 10, 2015. The coverage of the happening was mainly done through reporting by newspaper staff and their collaborators in the field, through the publication of analyses and different commentaries by media analysts, as

well as through the reporting of statements or different stances of political subjects and international organizations and institutions.

Below is an overview of some of the features and specifics of the reporting of this happening in those media outlets of Albania that were monitored in the context of this case study.

Aspects of the reporting on and coverage of the happening

What stands out in reports on the first day in the five monitored newspapers is the lack of information from the field or confusion regarding the dimensions of the conflict, the number of victims and actors involved therein. One day after the event, the newspapers printed generalizing headlines such as “Police attacks Albanians in Kumanovo,” “Clashes between Albanians and Macedonian police,” “War in Macedonia...,” “Massacre in Kumanovo,” etc. As pertains to the number of victims, figures vary between 10 and 22. The incident is labelled through different terms, such as “clashes,” “operation,” “armed clash,” “tension,” “violence,” “war,” “massacre,” etc., thus demonstrating a lack of clear perception of what had actually happened. Sources of information are rare and one of the scarce official pieces of information is a statement by the Ministry of Interior of Macedonia, which talks about a police operation “against an armed terrorist group that had come from a neighbouring country,” without specifying which country. After the first day, also because of the clarification of the situation, reporting by the media becomes more coolheaded and equidistant. During the first day, the conflict reported in the media showed nuances of an interethnic conflict while it was no longer reported as such a conflict in the following days. One element that may have influenced this was an appeal by the Albanian government on Macedonian authorities to not turn the incident into an interethnic conflict. With regard to the armed group of Albanians, media in Albania did not use the qualifier “terrorist” that was encountered in Macedonia’s Macedonian-language media outlets. We mainly find terms such as “fighters,” “KLA fighters,” “armed cell,” “armed group,” etc. In covering the event, besides official or field information, media also uses resources and information from among the so-called KLA. Meanwhile, there are also outlets that are more direct and harsher in their reporting on this armed group. Thus, in a commentary “Nobody believed it,” it is said, “Speculations by Albanians about KLA forces must end. This is neither patriotic, nor national, nor historic, but just tragic.” The author further notes, “...it causes great damage to Kosovo and its history.” Another piece, “Kumanovo clash: all the question marks on police actions,” underscores, “Unlike in 2001, Albanians from Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania have not given any support to any armed group in Macedonia.”

The political or geopolitical aspect of the incident

Elements of political interpretation or politicization of the event are mainly found in the different commentaries but also in some news reports. One part of the commentaries view the event as “a political segregation,” as “a political-nationalistic-mafioso intrigue,” as “a war game,” as “a known scenario,” etc. The author of the opinion piece “Gruevski’s end” views the incident as an act of “the dictatorial power of Macedonian PM Nicola Gruevski,” “...who creates the image of scenarios that are approximate to those of Slobodan Milosevic’s policy.” Likewise, the other opinion piece “Nobody believed it,” the author considers what happened to be “a political adventure of Nicola Gruevski.” Further on, the author views the incident as “a perfect combination between the hallucinatory plans of Gruevski to save his post and the irresponsibility of some Albanians who, after being done with their dark deeds, put out a statement on behalf of the KLA in order to cover their story in patriotism.” A similar take is seen also in the pieces “Why Gruevski has decided to kill,” “Analysts: seems like a government-prepare scenario,” “Opposition doubts the official version on Kumanovo,” etc.

There are also comments that seek to extend the political focus further onto the geopolitical context, as is the case of the piece “Kumanovo’s second front,” which sees in these developments Russia’s efforts to create a Second Front, but this time against WWII former allies. Nuances of a geopolitical focus are also found in the opinion piece, “Macedonia – Palestine of the Balkans.”

Discourse on territorial integrity

As is often the case with major clashes in the Balkans, in the case of Kumanovo too media reports included the discourse on territorial integrity. To the author of the piece, “Kumanovo, not War-o-novo,” “...the integrity and stability of Macedonia as a state are in the best interests of everyone in our Balkan region.” Another analyst talks about “a re-establishment of this state on civic bases and not ethnic ones.”

In yet another extreme, the author of the piece “Macedonia, the walking dead,” stresses that “the courageous and permanent solution would be its (Macedonia’s) division, between Albania and Bulgaria, both of which are NATO members.” The author writes about “...a soft division of territories and a soft exchange of populations,” viewing it as a “long-term solution.”

The idea of Macedonia’s disintegration is also conveyed in the piece “Bulgarian historian: Macedonia will be disintegrated as Ukraine was.” The author is cited by two of the monitored media outlets while three other

outlets quote former U.S. Congressman Joseph Dioguardi who said in a statement about the Kumanovo incident that the solution for Macedonia is either respect for the rights of Albanians or disintegration of Macedonia.

Resurfacing of racial and nationalistic discourse

Although reports by the staffs of monitored media outlets are generally professional and within standards, we do find comments in these outlets by analysts who see the developments in Kumanovo through a nationalistic or racial focus. The author of the opinion piece "Macedonia measures against the shadow of Alexander the Great" explains the incident with "... the unquenched hatred toward the entire Albanian ethnicity in Macedonia that bursts out like the plague on one side of it or the other." "To anyone who knows the history and the unchangeableness of Slavic psychology toward Albanians, the cause is centuries-old and only repeats itself in cycles." The other comment "The madmen of Skopje should be stopped" contains the question, "Are Macedonians heirs of the Macedonia of Philip II and Alexander the Great?" The response continues, "Their features clearly speak of the Tartar-Mongolian origin and the entirely Slavic language without any trace of Illyrian-Thracian and Greek speaks better than any historian could." As may be seen, in such a case, media discourse deviates from comments on the event and resumes historical considerations in support of racial or nationalistic arguments. Nevertheless, such comments are very scarce, professionally weak and / or bear the authorship of individuals known for nationalistic stances or persons who are little known and with little impact on public opinion.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA:
The ethnic principle continues
to be dominant

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Introduction

The objective of the report is to establish in what way Bosnia-Herzegovina's media report on events in the region, i.e. in other Western Balkan countries (Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo), which are in some way relevant to relations between BiH and neighboring countries or which reflect directly or indirectly on Bosnia and Herzegovina. In an attempt to provide an overview of different patterns of coverage, we analyzed different types of events. These included so-called critical cases, which contain certain controversies on to which one could expect media to follow patterns that contain stereotypes and prejudice. For example, we analyzed patterns of media coverage on marking anniversaries of events related to the recent war, which risk being treated unprofessionally in the media. However, so as not to focus only on such critical cases, we selected other cases according to criteria of relevance not just for BiH, but also for other countries in the region that do not risk to be covered in a stereotypical or unprofessional manner by the media. For example, we selected cases related to the process of stabilization in the region or visits by officials to countries in the region.

We would like to point out that the analysis covers a limited number of current cases as well as a limited number of media outlets. Therefore, it cannot provide an overall insight into media patterns, nor may conclusions be generalized to refer to all media in the country, all cases of reporting on neighboring countries, or different periods. The survey, however, attempts to identify some indicative patterns of reporting of BiH media on events related to the mentioned countries and to analyze how much they adhere to professional norms and how much they rely on stereotypes and a sensationalistic approach.

The survey includes the most popular dailies from Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the most visited online media. The following print media outlets were selected: *Dnevni avaz*, the most read daily among the Bosniak population; *Glas Srpske*, one of the most popular print media published in the Republika Srpska; and *Dnevni list*, which is read in those parts of the country where Croats are the majority population. Considering the heterogeneous population structure in BiH, this type of media selection is inevitable for online media as well, and thus the following were chosen for analysis: *Klix.ba*, *Bljesak.info* and *Banjaluka.com*. When cases were selected,

more emphasis was placed on neighboring countries with which BiH has direct borders, because the focus of Bosnian and Herzegovinian media is greater on events related to these countries. Thus, we analyzed two cases each on Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro, while we analyzed one case each on Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo. The events were socially and politically contextualized in order to obtain a broader perception of media patterns.

Methodological framework

The survey is based on the qualitative method of content analysis, while quantitative analysis was limited to establishing the presence of the selected cases in the analyzed media, as indicators of frequency and handling of the topic. Qualitative analysis sought to identify different phenomena in reporting and provide a more comprehensive overview of the media patterns. Critical discourse analysis identified political, economic, social and ideological circumstances that largely affect journalistic style and the process of creating media content. Comparative analysis of media reports in different media on the same events established similarities and differences in the structure and interpretation of newspaper and online articles.

1. Serbia: cases that illustrate division of media community

1.1. Media on Vladimir Putin's visit to Serbia: strengthening friendships, occasion for nationalist euphoria or news that is not interpreted

The first case, although not directly related to Bosnia and Herzegovina, had a big echo in the BiH media, including numerous speculations on the very nature of the Russian president's visit. The klix.ba portal particularly gave attention to the event, publishing as many as seven articles on the day of the Russian president's visit, 16 October 2014, while bljesak.info featured three articles, and Banjaluka.com two. The analyzed print media also covered the visit in detail, which is not very surprising in light of the specific socio-political circumstances, including Russia's current geopolitical status in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, as well as the specific relations between Serbia and the Republika Srpska (as one of the two entities in BiH). Some statements by the Bosnian Serb political leadership emphasized Russia's support to the Republika Srpska; President of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik even stated ten days before the visit that Putin's coming to Belgrade means support to the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well

as a strong message to the Serb people, because Putin supports the Dayton Agreement, whereby he also supports the Republika Srpska.¹ The event was more than a purely protocol visit and was given particular significance through the special way in which it was organized. The visit was related to the 70th anniversary of liberation of Belgrade from Nazi occupation and it is indicative that the marking of the anniversary was moved four days ahead due to Putin's visit.

BiH portals covered the details of the event even before the event itself took place, pointing out for example posters put up in downtown Belgrade with Putin's picture and the messages "Let's greet our president" (klix.ba, 14 October 2014)² or reporting that thousands of policemen and soldiers will participate in the reception (Dnevni avaz, 15 October 2014).³ Comparative analysis of media reports clearly points to ethnic division in how the event was presented and in the focus that was given to different actors and statements by political officials.

Bljesak and Dnevni list, whose target group is mostly in areas with a majority Croat population, gave considerable attention to this case. The Bljesak portal, for example, provided live coverage of the visit and also published four articles with details from the ceremonies, as well as parts of Putin's interview given to the Serbian paper Politika. Reporting in these media, however, was fair, without going into much interpretation, although for example in one of the first articles related to the visit, published by the Bljesak portal, negative connotations of the event were mentioned, i.e. it is predicted that the West will not be benevolent toward Serbia over the Russian president's visit.⁴ It is also indicative to mention that an article on the visit and related reactions on Bljesak said that closing ceremonies on the 70th anniversary of liberation would be attended by a delegation of the Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters and Anti-Fascists of Croatia, as well as a hundred or so veterans from that country, while it does not mention anywhere in the article who from Bosnia and Herzegovina would attend the event,⁵ illustrating the specific national ethnic focus on certain events and actors.

¹ R.I., Dodik bi se rado sreo s Putinom i u Beogradu, 6 October 2014, <http://www.bljesak.info> (accessed 13 January 2015)

² Uoči Putinove posjete u Beogradu plakati s natpisom „Dočekajmo svog predsjednika“, 14 October 2014. <http://www.klix.ba> (accessed 13 January 2015); Klix reported on 27 September that Putin was coming to visit Belgrade, while two articles were published two days before the visit.

³ Putina u Beogradu čekaju hiljade policajaca i vojnika, 15 October 2014, Dnevni avaz, p. 12

⁴ M.A., Žuti karton zbog Rusije: Zapad neće biti blagonaklon prema Srbiji, 2 October 2014, <http://www.bljesak.info> (accessed 13 January 2015); Bljesak.info in its reports mostly relied on information from Serbian media, especially the Serbian Blic.

⁵ Z.S., Beograd spreman za vojnu paradu i dolazak Putina, 15 October 2014, <http://www.bljesak.info> (accessed 13 January 2015)

Glas Srpske, most of whose readership is from the Serb ethnic group, extensively and euphorically announced Putin's visit, emphasizing that the main goal of the visit is transformation of friendly relations between peoples, as well as political, economic, scientific and cultural cooperation.⁶ Glas Srpske through its reports on preparations for Putin's reception, as well as the details of the visit, presents the event as extremely important for the Serb people. Some examples of reporting show that this paper places emphasis on current issues in Serbia, such as the status of Kosovo. Thus, in an article published on 17 October 2014 in Glas Srpske, Putin's statement on Kosovo was quoted, in which he stressed that Moscow's stand on the Kosovo issue would not change.⁷ In the same article, considerable attention is also given to Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik and agreements on cooperation between Dodik and Putin on several projects. In contrast to Glas Srpske, the Banjaluka portal only carried the most basic news related to the visit, which is a little surprising considering that it targets the same audience.

Articles from Klix portal, which published the most articles, generally focused on protocol information carried from other media and agencies. Some of the articles focused on the activities and presence of politicians from the Republika Srpska during the welcoming ceremony in Serbia. Thus, for example, a short news item was published on the eve of the visit, saying that the office of the Republika Srpska president organized free transport for citizens from Republika Srpska interested in going to a military parade in Belgrade,⁸ while the headline of the first article published on the day of the visit said the military parade in Belgrade would be attended by RS President Milorad Dodik and Prime Minister of this entity Zeljka Cvijanović.⁹ However, in contrast to the above-mentioned outlet, Klix for example also published an article focusing on expressions of nationalism among citizens of Serbia in relation to the visit, where a somewhat sensationalistic stand is obvious in focusing on trivial expressions of nationalism in the streets of Belgrade¹⁰ and emphasis on nationalist euphoria in Serbia.

⁶ Srbija dočekuje Putina, 16 October 2014, Glas Srpske, p. 15

⁷ Marijana Miljić, Putin: Rusija će uvijek biti uz srpski narod, 17 October 2014, Glas Srpske, pp. 4-5

⁸ Dodik organizovao besplatan odlazak građana RS-a na vojnu paradu u Beograd, 15 October 2014, <http://www.klix.ba> (accessed 13 January 2015)

⁹ Vojna parada danas u Beogradu: Prisustvuju Dodik i Cvijanovićeva, 16 October 2014, <http://www.klix.ba> (accessed 13 January 2015); same pattern in article: Putin na vojnoj paradu u Beogradu: Živjela bratska Srbija, 16 October 2014, <http://www.klix.ba> (accessed 13 January 2015)

¹⁰ It stated that some media exaggerated in "bringing all sorts of things in relation with Putin's visit" and that they even reported that the rain would stop during Putin's visit. Source: Putin u Beogradu: Šale, nacionalizam i medijsko pretjerivanje, 16 October 2014, www.klix.ba (accessed 13 January 2015)

Dnevni avaz, whose target is the Bosniak people, particularly focused its reporting on negative interpretations and consequences of the visit. A Dnevni avaz article written one day before the event (and published on the day of the event) states that Belgrade is under siege, while focus is placed on the weakening of relations between Serbia and the European Union, specifically pointing out the words of Vladimir Goati, who says the visit to Serbia questions Serbia's status and emphasizes that it is not possible to "sit on two chairs".¹¹ Articles about what was going on at the military parade during the visit focus on the atmosphere among the gathered citizens, especially stressing nationalist slogans and gathering of radical groups.¹² In a similar manner, Avaz published the statements of two analysts from Brussels and London, Toby Vogel and Eric Gordy, emphasizing in the headline of the article an interpretation of the event as a "non-violent rerun of the Russian incursion into Ukraine," and relating this event with the totalitarian regime of Albanian president Enver Hoxha through the marginal fact that the parade happened to be organized on his birthday.¹³

1.2. Release of indicted war criminal: condemnation or support

The second case, temporary release of Vojislav Šešelj, who is indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague (ICTY) for persecution on political, religious and racial ground in Croatia, BiH and Vojvodina¹⁴, was also treated in entirely different ways in media accessed by the Bosniak and Croat population and media which is mostly read by the Serb population.

Dnevni list and Dnevni avaz, along with the announcement that Šešelj had been set free, insisted on statements and reactions by representatives of associations of victims and focused on the crimes for which he was indicted, while Glas Srpske focused on the details of Šešelj's reception in Serbia and Šešelj's statements, barely commenting on the indictment. Both Dnevni list and Dnevni avaz quoted statements by presidents of victims' associations, who resent Šešelj's release from The Hague, while an article in Glas Srpske ended with a sentence saying that no verdict has yet been passed for Šešelj.¹⁵

¹¹ Fahir Karalić, Opsadno stanje u Beogradu zbog Putina, 16 October 2014, Dnevni avaz, p. 9

¹² Parada sile Putinu u čast, 17 October 2014, Dnevni avaz, pp. 2-3

¹³ Sead Numanović, Ovo je nenasilna repriza ruskog upada u Ukrajinu, 17 October 2014, Dnevni avaz, p. 3

¹⁴ Šire: Šta sadrži optužnica protiv Vojislava Šešelja, 12 November 2014, <http://www.nezavisne.com> (accessed 15 January 2015)

¹⁵ A. Lončarić, Šešelj će izbjeci kaznu kao i krvolok Milošević, article published several days before Šešelj's release, 7 November 2014, Dnevni avaz, p. 10; Vanja Bjelica Čabrilo, Šešelj na slobodi, radikali u transu, 13 November 2014, Dnevni list, p. 4

The Bljesak and Klix portals covered the case in a similar way, carrying Šešelj's statements. Banjaluka.com, however, along with providing the information that Šešelj was released from The Hague, on the same day, 12 November 2014, carried an interview given by the ICTY indictee to the Radio-Television of Republika Srpska. The questions that Šešelj was asked mostly concerned his socializing with other ICTY prisoners and his plans related to the Serbian Radical Party, in what appears to be an attempt to reduce the article to a relaxed human story without mentioning the crimes he is accused of. Through statements saying that legal experts are on Šešelj's side, his innocence is implicitly prejudiced.¹⁶ Such selective reporting clearly shows the journalist/editor's stand. Results of the analysis thus confirm once again that dominant narratives about the common past are totally divided between two sides – in this case Bosniaks and Croats on one side and Serbs on the other, and that this is reflected in completely different media treatment of the case in media from Republika Srpska and those from the BiH Federation.

2. Croatia: Presentation of events through an ethnic-based mirror once again

The analysis looked at two cases from Croatia, which are totally different in thematic terms. The first case is the commemoration of the anniversary of the fall of Vukovar on 18 November 2014, which again is not directly related to Bosnia and Herzegovina but is an important indicator of media interpretations that, as in the case of Vojislav Šešelj, are ethnically divided.

2.1. Anniversary of the fall of Vukovar: Fall or liberation

The anniversary of the fall of Vukovar and related crimes in which the two sides were involved, preceding the war in BiH, were handled in the selected print media similarly to Šešelj's return to Serbia. On one hand, dailies Dnevni avaz and Dnevni list covered in detail a commemorative rally in Vukovar, bringing statements by most of the officials in attendance. Avaz in a virtually identical way as Dnevni list carried the statements of Croatian officials.¹⁷ However, in contrast to Dnevni list, Dnevni avaz also brought details related to Serbia and thus reported that the rally was also attended by members of the non-governmental organization 'Women in Black' from Serbia, who are asking for files on the crimes that took place in Vukovar to be opened. In addition, Avaz once again in this case pointed out the actions of

¹⁶ Šešelj: Rasturio sam Tribunal, 12 November 2014, www.banajuka.com (accessed 15 January 2015)

¹⁷ U vukovarskoj Koloni sjećanja 80.000 ljudi, 19 November 2014, Dnevni avaz, p. 23

nationalist actors in Serbia, saying that the president of the Serbian Radical Party, Vojislav Šešelj, who had been released from The Hague Tribunal a few days before the anniversary and who had led paramilitary groups that took part in the fighting in Vukovar and elsewhere, congratulated Serb Chetniks on the day of liberation of Serb Vukovar.¹⁸

Klix and Bljesak followed a similar pattern as two dailies, Dnevni avaz and Dnevni list. Bljesak published the most extensive article in which it provided statistical data on human casualties, Vojislav Šešelj's role in the war in Croatia, and ICTY indictments and verdicts.¹⁹ Different patterns were observed in reporting in Glas Srpske, which published a short news item on this event at the bottom of the 17th page, demonstrating that the commemoration of the anniversary is not given particular attention. The manner of reporting differed completely from the other selected media and thus the focus of the mentioned article was not on the details of the gathering and the officials' statements; it reported instead that 23 years ago, units of the JNA (Yugoslav People's Army) had ended the fighting in Vukovar in which thousands of people died, and that veterans separated themselves from the Croatian state leadership and separately marked the anniversary dissatisfied with the way the Croatian state leadership was treating them.²⁰ The Banjaluka portal omitted this news and did not publish a single article about the anniversary of Vukovar's fall.

3. Tourist season in Croatia and Montenegro: generalized judgments and partial insight

The second case selected for analysis in the report regards media treatment of the summer tourist season in Croatia, one of the most popular vacation destinations for Bosnia-Herzegovina citizens. The reason why this case was selected is to establish whether media report such, seemingly ordinary, service information exclusively based on available data or are inclined to interpret even such events based on unverified and unreliable information, and also whether ethnic division is visible in some way even in reports of this kind.

This part of the analysis also includes reports on the tourist season in Montenegro, another much visited and popular tourist destination among

¹⁸ U vukovarskoj Koloni sjećanja 80.000 ljudi (text box: Šešeljeva provokacija), 19 November 2014, Dnevni avaz, p. 23

¹⁹ Z.D., Zločini u Vukovaru samo su djelomično istraženi i procesuirani, 18 November 2014. www.bljesak.info (accessed 17 January 2015)

²⁰ Dan sjećanja u dvije kolone, 19 November 2014, Glas Srpske, p. 16

citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The analysis encompassed 15 days of the tourist season (1-15 July 2014). It is important to point out that a large number of articles were published about the tourist season in this time period, but only some of them are mentioned in this analysis.

Bljesak.info, at the beginning of the tourist season, published statistical data on the decreased number of nights and tourists in the first five months of 2014, speculating that the tourist season in Croatia could be poor. Journalists' predictions are arbitrary and partly sensationalistic considering that statistical data from the first months of 2014 were used and that the judgment was made based on such data at the very beginning of the tourist season and without consulting experts. Mostar-based Dnevni list did not cover the tourist season in Croatia; it published only one feature²¹ about the season in Montenegro in the period selected for analysis. In the context of the tourist season, it devoted most attention to the tourist season in Neum (BiH).

The banjaluka.com portal did not cover issues related to the tourist season in the first half of July.

In this period, Dnevni avaz published the most articles and all of them focused on criticizing the prices of accommodation and services on the Croatian coast. For example, it is emphasized that most BiH citizens are choosing Turkey for their summer vacation and that Turkey is more appealing than the Croatian Adriatic due to prices of services and package tours (article on 5 July 2014), because for the money spent on the Croatian coast one can have a summer vacation in "Turkish or Egyptian hotels with an all-inclusive package" (8 July); it is claimed without citing relevant sources that a large number of BiH citizens will choose another destination next year 'such as Turkey' (7 July)²²; and it is emphasized in a reader's letter that Boračko Lake (BiH) matches the sea both in beauty and prices²³ and that Croatian hoteliers, due to changed habits of BiH citizens regarding summer vacation – are in panic.²⁴ Along with Turkey, hit summer destinations that are mentioned are Spain, Albania and Montenegro, solely due to favorable prices.²⁵ It should be mentioned that Dnevni avaz journalists only used data from tourist agencies, which certainly do not paint the whole picture if we consider that a large number of citizens stay in private accommodations. It was observed that different data were published in different media: while

²¹ Irma Maksumić, Bili smo na Svetom Stefanu i čuvenoj Vili Miločer, susreli brata Ljubiše Samardžića..., 5 July 2014, Dnevni list, pp. 26-27

²² M. Hodžić, Papreno skupi smještaj i hrana na Jadranu!, 7 July 2014, Dnevni avaz, pp. 8-9

²³ PORTAL-komentar dana, 5 July 2014, Dnevni avaz, p. 3

²⁴ M.H. and A. Nu, Hrvatski hotelijeri u panici, spuštaju cijene usred sezone, 8 July 2014, Dnevni avaz, p. 9

²⁵ A. Nu and M.H., Turska privlačnija od hrvatskog Jadrana, 5 July 2014, Dnevni avaz, p. 9

Dnevni avaz says on 15 July 2014 that Montenegro and Albania are more appealing than Croatia due to more affordable prices, the Klix.ba portal reported the same day that citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina mostly spend their summer vacation in Croatia and Montenegro.²⁶

It is evident that most of the analyzed media did not cover this topic in the selected period. While analyzing articles dealing with this topic, it is noticeable that Avaz reported on the tourist season in Croatia in a sensationalistic way, using partly illustrating sources, but without full data or significant expert analyses.

4. Montenegro: Sutorina as part of BiH or as part of RS

The second analyzed case related to Montenegro is a dispute between BiH and Montenegro over the Sutorina locality as an access point to the sea, which was a sovereign part of Bosnia and Herzegovina until 1948. The case was raised in late 2014 and is still open in early 2015. A large number of articles were published in the media that were selected for analysis and we are only analyzing some of them here, pointing out certain differences among the selected media.

The biggest number of articles was published on the Klix.ba portal, including statements by BiH politicians, historians and professors, as well as officials from Montenegro. It was also found that of all portals selected for analysis, the banjaluka.com portal dealt with this case least of all. While Federation-based portals, especially those targeting the Bosniak audience, covered the case in depth, providing all details, portals from the Republika Srpska, in their reporting, placed emphasis on statements by Serb politicians and officials (carrying other statements as well, but mostly emphasizing officials from the Republika Srpska in the headlines), and unlike media from the Federation, treated Sutorina as part of the Republika Srpska rather than of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The first article related to this case, which was published on the banjaluka.com portal, contained a very telling headline: "RS getting access to sea?",²⁷ while the last article published about the case also does not say that this is a part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but of the Republika Srpska.²⁸

²⁶ E.S.H., Turistička sezona u zamahu: Cijene namirnica u Albaniji, Crnoj Gori i Hrvatskoj kao i van sezone, 15 July 2014, klix.ba (accessed 16 January 2015). Klix did not provide convincing data for its allegation either. It stated that prices in Croatia are now adjusted to consumers and it gave the prices of some food items and services in Drvenik.

²⁷ RS dobija izlaz na more, 14 October 2014, <http://www.banjaluka.com> (accessed 16 January 2015)

²⁸ Mladi priželjkuju da Sutorina bude dio RS, 26 January 2015, <http://www.banjaluka.com> (accessed 26 January 2015)

The same online media outlet brings an interesting statement by Serb member of the BiH Presidency Nebojša Radmanović who denies allegations of a border dispute and claims the whole confusion surrounding Sutorina “was created by the Congress of Bosniak Intellectuals of USA and Canada” who addressed the BiH Presidency in a letter.²⁹

The analysis also established that print media covered the Sutorina case less than online media. Thus, the highest circulation daily from BiH – Dnevni avaz – published just one article on this topic in November 2014³⁰ and two articles in December 2014, while one article on this case was published in the same month in Dnevni list and Glas Srpske each.

5. Macedonia: a balanced reporting

As topics related to Macedonia do not have a particularly big presence in Bosnia-Herzegovina media, a somewhat older case related to inter-ethnic conflicts between Albanians and Macedonians was selected for analysis. Inter-ethnic conflicts erupted in early 2012 when Muslims protested because a mask ridiculing the holy Muslim book of Koran was worn in a carnival in a Macedonian village. Inter-ethnic conflicts between these two groups lingered during the following months as well, but the conflict escalated when the bodies of five murdered Macedonians were found in the vicinity of Skopje in April 2012. Reports started to appear in the media saying that Macedonia was on the verge of civil war, which alarmed the region. Although this case does in no way concern Bosnia and Herzegovina and its peoples, it was selected for analysis in order to establish in what way BiH media report on such delicate topics and whether their reports cover both sides of the story or take a cheering stand. The case is also interesting for analysis if we consider the often-negative attitude toward Albanians in the media targeting the Serb readership, as well as a pro-Albanian attitude in media targeting the Bosniak audience.

Relying on virtually identical sources, all selected print media from Bosnia and Herzegovina reported on this case in an almost identical way. Defamatory names were not used in the articles toward either of the ethnic groups in conflict and reactions by Macedonians after the murder of five people, which further raised tension among parties in the conflict, were

²⁹ Uskoro ugovor o granici: Ništa od izlaza na more, 6 January 2014, <http://www.banjaluka.com> (accessed 17 January 2015)

³⁰ A. Nu, Sutorina je 1936. izuzeta Trebinjskom i priključena Bokokotorskom srezu, 1 November 2014, Sedmica, Dnevni avaz, p. 7

carried.³¹ Online media covered these events in a similar way and thus this case may be considered an example of well-done journalistic work, with the use of multiple different sources, without arbitrary conclusions or unfounded and one-sided interpretations. Not much difference was found among media from BiH in the way they reported on the case, leading to the conclusion that media in Bosnia-Herzegovina do their job much better when the conflict is taking place beyond the territories of BiH, Serbia and Croatia and is not closely related to the national identities in BiH.

6. Kosovo: favoring viewpoints of citizens of Albanian or Serb ethnic origin

Media coverage of a January visit by Serb Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić to Kosovo was selected for several reasons. The visit provoked a lot of controversy in Bosnia and Herzegovina and divided the BiH public, to which Vučić's past, related to the nationalist Serbian Radical Party of ICTY-indicted Vojislav Šešelj, contributed the most. Along with the public, the media were divided too, which was particularly noticeable in differences in media reports between the two entities. The case is also interesting because of divided opinion in BiH on the status and independence of Kosovo. Therefore, Vučić's visit to the former Serbian province was an excellent opportunity to test the professionalism of media from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The analysis found that Vučić's visit was not particularly attractive for most media outlets in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which either omitted this news or only reported it briefly, mentioning Vučić's messages uttered in Kosovo. For example, *Dnevni list*, catering to citizens of Croat ethnic background, did not report this event.

Further, there is a noticeable difference in articles published in *Dnevni avaz* and those published in *Glas Srpske* and it is nearly impossible to find the same or similar information in these two media outlets. *Dnevni avaz* published a brief article focusing on reactions by the Albanian people to Vučić's visit, while *Glas Srpske* only reported the reactions of citizens of Serb ethnic background. *Dnevni avaz* reported that Albanians kicked Vučić's car and quoted Vučić's seemingly reconciliatory statement on how

³¹ *Glas Srpske* reported that most incidents took place after a policeman of Macedonian ethnic origin killed two Albanians in Gostivar and the incident divided the Macedonian public and provoked a number of incidents - *Ubijeno pet Makedonaca u blizini Skoplja*, 14-16 April 2012, pp. 16-17. *Dnevni list* reported that police called for appeasing tensions and appealed to media not to publish unverified information ("Postrojeni, a potom ubijeni: Pet ljudi hladnokrvno ubijeno pored umjetnog jezera", 14 April 2012, pp. 24-25)

he hopes “their feet did not hurt”, as well as his statement when asked by Albanian journalists when Serbia will recognize Kosovo, when the head of the Serbian Government answered: “That is just your wishful dream!”³² Glas Srpske mostly focused on the positive reactions and reception by Kosovo’s citizens of Serb ethnic origin from all parts of Kosovo who greeted him “with Serbian flags, scones and salt, and with the shouts: Vučić, Vučić,” as well as statements in which Vučić said the Serbian Government was with them and would always help them. Glas Srpske reported that the visit passed without incident, with a symbolic protest staged by the Initiative of Young Students and Intellectuals in Štrbac over Vučić’s visit and the protest participants calling upon Vučić to seek an apology on behalf of the state of Serbia for the way Kosovo has been treated thus far.³³ However, Glas Srpske does not give such reactions much significance because it states already in the next sentence that the president of Gnjilane municipality and vice-president of the Democratic Union of Kosovo, Ljutfi Haziri, characterized Vučić’s visit as religious and humanitarian.³⁴

Both papers carried Vučić’s statement that the biggest number of children in Serbia are born in Kosovo, but Avaz used the term “Serbian children”, while Glas Srpske said “children in Serbia”, which leaves room for ambiguous interpretations with regard to Kosovo’s status and independence.

Analyzing this case, we observe that visits by statesmen in the region are not treated as protocol topics. Instead, media attention and different media stands still reflect the ethnic division in public opinion and media in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

7. Albania: candidate status as Bosnia’s mirror “at Europe’s tail”

In June 2014, Albania was granted the status of a candidate country for European Union membership, leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina as the only country in the region without candidate status. Although it was reported in headlines that Albania received this status, most media actually focused on the status of Bosnia and Herzegovina in relation to the EU. A good example is an extensive article published on the klix portal, titled: “Good luck Albania, BiH remains last ‘black hole’ of Balkans and Europe.” The article actually focuses on the status of BiH, while Albania, other than in the headline and

³² Vučićev automobil udarali nogama, 15 January 2014, Dnevni avaz, p. 23

³³ Srbi, nemojte prodavati imanja na Kosovu, Glas Srpske, 15 January 2015, p. 15

³⁴ Srbi, nemojte prodavati imanja na Kosovu, text box Protest, Glas Srpske, 15 January 2015, p. 15

lead, is mentioned only once later on in the article. The article does not contain negative connotations, but it does not contain important information on Albania's road to the EU either, primarily focusing on statements by Adis Arapović, manager at the Center for Civil Initiatives, related to the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. An article published in Dnevni list had similar connotations, reporting that this is a historic day for Albania, but also for Bosnia and Herzegovina since it remains the only country in the region without candidate status. In Dnevni avaz, in an article headline "Albania overtook us too" and in a column which says: "Bosnia is now recognized as officially being at the very tail of Europe. Not just behind Albania but behind itself as well!"³⁵, we can observe certain negative connotations, prejudice and culturally racist elements in the attitude toward Albania, likely related to a perception of Albania as an underdeveloped region, in the historic light of the totalitarian regime of Enver Hoxha. Thus, Bosnia and Herzegovina's disastrous status is emphasized by comparing it to Albania and pointing out the latter's better status in the context of European integration.

In Glas Srpske and the online portal banjaluka.com, this story did not attract much attention, while the bljesak.info portal published a short article, providing details on Albania's European road and not mentioning Bosnia and Herzegovina.

8. Brief conclusion

We found from the analyzed cases that topics related to the wartime past or controversial topics that have to do with ethnic identities are still treated differently in media and that media continue to largely follow the discourse of the ethnic political elites. We can say the results suggest that conflicts in the region are actually not part of history only. In reporting on events in neighboring countries, it is evident that the ethnic principle continues to be dominant, particularly in cases involving strong ethnic identification – especially cases from Serbia and Croatia. However, in cases that are free of such connotations and controversies, shortcomings are also observed in presenting the Other – others receive superficial coverage for the purpose of positioning one's own group, country or ethnicity; prejudice is displayed toward the Other, coupled with a tendency for sensationalism and making generalized judgments. That media reporting in BiH is not always burdened with such patterns was shown in just one analyzed case, when media reported fairly and without one-sided interpretations. It appears, however,

³⁵ Erol Avdović, Tko to tamo pjeva, 25 June 2014, Dnevni avaz, p. 3

that fundamental professionalization of the media requires fundamental changes in the socio-political environment and ethnic identity politics.

ANNEX: Reporting Kumanovo incident

The clash between Macedonian police and the armed group in the town of Kumanovo, Macedonia, which began on May 9, 2015, was a prominent news topic for several days in the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On May 10 alone, klix published 11 articles on Kumanovo, Bljesak 7 articles, and Blin four articles.

The short news stories published in the analyzed media relied dominantly on reports of Macedonian media and official sources.³⁶ All media qualified the group of Albanians as terrorists but the focus of the statements of other actors and in some cases evaluations given by journalists varies.

Klix provided mostly information based on official sources, in a correct manner and without further analysis and arbitrary qualifications. News published by klix.ba on May 9, 2015, list facts from official reports – how the police action started, how a group of 70 terrorists was busted, with 27 members surrendering, and the rest of them being killed, three police officers killed and more than 20 police officers and civilians wounded. Reports published on klix on May 10 contained information that the plan of the terrorists was to destabilize the country by killing a large number of people.³⁷ Official sources dominated the reports, including statements of the Macedonian president, prime minister, as well as the Secretary General of NATO-a Jens Stoltenberg who called for a transparent investigation.

Some of the reports, especially those published by Bljesak and Dnevni list, pointed out the dangers of additional instabilities³⁸. For example, Bljesak published the statement of military analyst Aleksandar Radić who claimed that the conflict could spread in other parts of the Western Balkans and in areas of Serbia with a majority of Albanian citizens³⁹. Bljesak took the information

³⁶ Makedonska policija počela operaciju u Kumanovu, pucnjava odjekuje gradom, 09.5.2015., <http://www.klix.ba>; report is relying on the information from Ministry of internal affairs of Macedonia. (pristupljeno 22.5.2015.); see also article: Predao se dio terorističke grupe u Kumanovu, pucnjava okončana, 09.5.2015., <http://www.klix.ba> (pristupljeno 22.5.2015.)

³⁷ Makedonska policija uništila automobil-bombu, 10.05.2015., <http://www.klix.ba> (pristupljeno 22.5.2015.)

³⁸ U Kumanovu svladana posljednja grupa terorista, 09.5.2015., <http://www.bljesak.info> (pristupljeno 22.5.2015.)

³⁹ 'Sukobi u Makedoniji mogli bi prijeći i na zapadni Balkan, posebice Srbiju', 10.5.2015. <http://bljesak.info> (pristupljeno 22.5.2015.)

published by N1 that the responsibility for the attack was claimed by the National Liberation Army that stated it is ready to harm the entire Balkans.⁴⁰ Bljesak took in the tendentious statement by security expert Predrag Ćeranić who compares B-H and Macedonia considering them both polarized states, and also claims that the terrorist action in Kumanovo is a continuation of the functioning of the group “Islamic state” in the Balkan region.⁴¹ Dnevni list also published the statement of Predrag Ćerinić; an article published on May 10 stated that Macedonia is on the edge of war, but also a statement of Zoran Zaev, president of the Socialdemocratic Alliance of Macedonia, claiming that Albanians and Macedonians are united as never before.⁴² Dnevni list also published an article with a tendentious title “Will the clashes in Macedonia set the entire Balkan on fire” (*Hoće li sukobi u Makedoniji zapaliti cijeli Balkan*). The article involved official statements (by Macedonian Interior Minister Gordana Jankulovska, Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić, Albanian chief diplomat Ditmir Bushati and Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn who called for peace.⁴³ Glas Srpske also published the same information as other media, but also included a short interview with Skopje’s Faculty of Security professor Ivan Babanovski who stated that the conflict could extend through Sandžak in Serbia to Bosnia and Herzegovina, mentioning the recent attack on a police station in Zvornik and what he sees as a political obstruction of the work of security forces in B-H; the same source implies that the clash in Macedonia is part of the organized global terrorist network, giving strong statements about camps for training terrorists from Macedonia and the two million dollars given to terrorists for the disruptions in Kumanovo, but without referring to any sources for such information.⁴⁴

Dnevni avaz published the news on Kumanovo on the front page of its May 10 issue, with little basic information on the police action⁴⁵, as well as the statement of daily Danas journalist Branko Gorgevski who points out that the situation in Macedonia is alarming and that people are scared.⁴⁶ More information on the case was provided in next day’s issue, with a multitude of statements by officials and different actors.⁴⁷ Dnevni Avaz also included

⁴⁰ ONA: Spremni smo razvaliti cijeli Balkan, 10.5.2015., <http://www.bljesak.info> (pristupljeno 22.5.2015.)

⁴¹ Ćeranić: Napadi u Makedoniji i BiH su početak ‘Islamske države’ na Balkanu, 10.5.2015., <http://bljesak.info> (pristupljeno 22.5.2015.)

⁴² Makedonija na rubu rata, 10.5.2015., Dnevni list, p.2-3

⁴³ Hoće li sukobi u Makedoniji zapaliti cijeli Balkan., 11.5.2015., p.2-3

⁴⁴ Prijeti velika opasnost od širenja nemira, 11.5.2015., p.3

⁴⁵ Žestoki sukobi u Makedoniji, 10.5.2015., Dnevni avaz, p.8

⁴⁶ Situacija je alarmantna, ljudi su preplašeni!, 10.5.2015., Dnevni avaz, p.8

⁴⁷ Stravičan bilans: 22 mrtvih u Makedoniji!, 11.5.2015., Dnevni avaz, p.2-3

an exclusive statement by Kosovo Government advisor Azem Vlasi who emphasized the need for EU involvement since prosecutions of Albanians all over Serbia and clashes in the north of Kosovo where Serbs live could be expected.⁴⁸ In the commentary of the day, journalist Miralem Aščić states that the events in Macedonia can send a message for B-H, but unlike other sources, the journalist also mentions that the clashes are resulting from the long blockade of the European path of Macedonia.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Bojim se da će uslijediti progon Albanaca!, 10.5.2015., Dnevni avaz, p.3

⁴⁹ Spojene posude, 11.5., Dnevni avaz, p. 3

KOSOVO:
Between lack of coverage
and bias reporting

Shkamb Qavdarbasha and Krenar Gashi¹

Introduction

The current media scene represents a dramatic change from Kosovo of before the 1999 conflict. Highly populated, the relatively young media outlets needed new professionals, both as journalists and editors. This has had a great impact in terms of perspectives and journalistic skills applied to the profession in Kosovo. These new perspectives and abilities have greatly affected the range of opinion and coverage in all outlets in the country.

Considering that the dissolution wars of the former Yugoslavia still remain in the collective memories of most Western Balkan countries, media is both affected by and a potential contributor to the public's perception of neighbors. This particularly concerns three main areas: journalistic professionalism and the avoidance of bias, sensitivity towards conflict especially for highly diverse populations such as Kosovo, as well as the portrayal of neighboring countries. Therefore, media professionalism is very much a part of the view that they create of the neighbors, especially considering the previous animosities that exist with some of these neighbors. To understand the role that media plays in portraying neighbors, it is essential to understand the social and legal context in which such reporting takes place.

Kosovo's current media scene is considerably populated with a wide variety of broadcast, print and online outlets. As of 2013, Kosovo boasts 84 radio stations, 21 television stations and seven national newspapers.¹ These broadcast media numbers only include those outlets that broadcast through public frequencies and therefore need to be licensed by the Independent Media Commission (IMC). Kosovo also has 33 operators that broadcast only through cable providers.² Additionally, Kosovo has a number of local print outlets and several regular magazines. However, the body responsible for print media regulation, the Kosovo Print Media Council (KPC) has no public statistics about their numbers and therefore the total number of outlets cannot be obtained without a separate study.

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² Independent Media Commission, Directory of audio-visual media services licensed by the Independent Media Commission (2014).

The online media scene is also largely populated in Kosovo, with tens of unregulated online platforms currently in operation. Given that there is no official form of regulation currently overseeing online outlets, other than the requirement to register as legal entities mainly for taxation purposes, no official statistics exist for these outlets. Data is also unavailable for non-profit joint or individual blogging platforms. All major print media services also have their own online publications. This trend has been established as a way to counter the loss of print sales as a result of direct competition from online outlets. This tactic is similar to current global trends in print and online media as a form of competitiveness.

Among the broadcast media, four channels and two radio stations are run by Kosovo's public broadcaster, the Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK). Currently, RTK's main TV channel has the highest viewership, with another channel, RTK 2, broadcasting entirely in Serbian. RTK is an independent tax payer-financed institution, whose budget has been allocated by the Kosovo Assembly as part of the Budget of Kosovo since 2009. As of 2015, RTK is required by law to establish an independent financing method from the Kosovo Budget, but whether this will be achieved and the effects it will have on the editorial independence of the broadcaster remains to be seen.

Although the Kosovo media scene has the features of a scene in a democratic society, multiple problems with media persist.³ Basic freedoms guaranteed by law are often challenged and the society – especially the media – has been struggling to make any democratic progress more sustainable.

Methodology

This paper represents an overview of how Kosovo's print and online media report on neighbors. The methods used to compile the paper were largely qualitative, with data collection done by using a mixed methodology whereas data analysis was done using interpretative methodology mainly through recursive abstraction. Focusing on the content and the discourse of two cases, the purpose of the methodology was to respond to the issue of to what extent and how media in Kosovo cover immediate neighboring countries as well as countries in the Balkans in general. Specific questions focused on the persistence of stereotypes in media in Kosovo, the level of professionalism in stories, frequency of reporting and approach to highly sensitive cases.

³ Ibid.

The mixed methodology used in data collection focused on two portions: gathering background general data regarding the media scene in Kosovo and specific data concerning the research question. Background data was gathered from reputed sources with works published in the media in Kosovo and was analyzed and reported here. This was done to provide a context for the second part of the analysis, namely the part focusing on the aforementioned research question. Additionally, background research was also done to substantiate the frequency of reporting claims.

Research question specific data has been gathered to provide information for a case study interpretative methodology. The case study approach was selected due to the indication that the overall frequency of coverage of neighbors was scarce and therefore identifying consistent patterns would be unfeasible. Data collection focused on print media outlets and their websites as well as online only media outlets. These outlets were chosen due to the consistency of reporting and feasibility of the identification of sources, posted times and data gathering. The specific outlets were selected for their perceived readership and prevalence. Two representative cases were chosen in order to conduct the analysis: the coverage of the neighbors in the context of the Albania and Serbia football match played in Belgrade in October 2014, and the protests in Macedonia in July 2014. These two cases were chosen because of the timeliness, the perceived high tension and the overall presence of reporting for both cases. Given the timing of the report, these two events represent the most likely cases, i.e. cases where the true nature of the reports on neighbors can be objectified for study purposes.

Specific story selection was done using a random selection process in order to avoid story selection bias by the researcher. All stories in the selected outlets within a +/- 5 day range of the date of occurrence of reported events were selected and assigned a numerical value. A random number generator was used to select seven stories from each news outlet for each of the cases. This approach also provided the secondary benefit of the selection of reporting that stemmed from the initial event but was not directly related to the initial event.

Interpretative analysis on the final pool of randomly selected stories was done using recursive abstraction. Due to the easily manageable pool of stories, the recursive abstraction only went through one iteration of summarization; therefore it has not been subject to the usual limitations of the methodology. However, some level of limitation exists, primarily due to the lack of empirical data and the use of a largely interpretative approach. To account for this, all claims are followed by a reference to the specific stories in which the claims were based for the convenience of the reader. Most stories only exist in the Albanian language.

Background

a. Legal Framework

Freedom of speech and media is envisioned through the Constitution of Kosovo as a guaranteed right. The only limitations to this freedom foreseen in the Constitution are in a provision aiming to limit hate speech and incitement of violence or hostility based on race, nationality, ethnicity or religion.⁴ This provision is also foreseen in numerous other countries with a long standing tradition of upholding free speech. Kosovo has also ratified the international treaties protecting these freedoms. The provisions are in line with the international process that led to Kosovo's Declaration of Independence in 2008 that envisaged Kosovo to be a state of all its citizens. Given the tumultuous past, the legislation contains very strict rules against any usage of hate speech, particularly towards national minorities.

Kosovo also has in power a shield law for the protection of journalists' sources. According to this law, journalists cannot be indicted for deciding to not publish the names of their sources, should doing so be requested by any party.⁵ Courts may order journalists to disclose their sources only if such information could be used for the protection of lives and only in those cases when it may not be obtained by other means. This sets the protection of journalists in Kosovo, at least in the eye of law, at a very high standard.

Insult and defamation was defined by the Criminal Code of Kosovo as a criminal offence until its review in late 2012. Under the new law, insult and defamation are strictly a civil issue, regulated by the Civil Law against Insult and Defamation. Legally, journalists may not be put under criminal investigation for alleged insult or defamation. This alleviates the potential pressure that could be placed on journalists by governmental agents with dangerous agendas.

Kosovo also has a law on access to public documents. The law established positions in each government department responsible for receiving requests for access to public documents by third parties, as well as the evaluation and disclosure of these documents. In its current state, the law only covers documents that are in hard format and that can be traced directly to a document. As a result, the law is not a pure freedom of information act and therefore is incomplete.

Media in Kosovo is currently regulated by two bodies. The first, the Independent Media Commission (IMC) is a state organization established by

⁴ See for example annual reports of the Freedom House (Nations in Transit and Freedom in the World) as well as annual reports published by Reporters Without Borders.

⁵ Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 40, Freedom of Expression, paragraph 1.

the Constitution of Kosovo and financed by the Budget of Kosovo. The IMC is governed by a Board of Directors that is selected from recommendations by different actors and elected by the Assembly of Kosovo. The IMC is responsible for granting licenses for terrestrial broadcast services and for establishing regulation, fees and other technical aspects. The Kosovo Press Council (KPC) is an independent non-governmental organization that self-regulates the print media sector in Kosovo. KPC's Board is comprised of voluntarily involved print media representatives. These representatives are tasked with reviewing complaints filed with the KPC against print media outlets in Kosovo. The KPC is financed by the contribution of each participating media outlet and despite the fact that it is not inclusive of all print media in Kosovo, it also deals with complaints placed against non-participating outlets. KPC's judgments are non-binding and it remains a responsibility of each outlet to act on KPC's judgments.

b. Conflict sensitivity of media in Kosovo

The population of Kosovo is comprised of six constitutionally recognized ethnic groups, two of which were previously involved in an inter-ethnic conflict.⁶ This leads to a potentially volatile situation, especially in terms of susceptibility to biased media coverage. It has been argued that during the March 2004 riots, which involved most of Kosovo, the media played a key role in fuelling the initial protests that led to mass unrest. As a result, with a considerable push from the international presence in Kosovo, authorities have adopted strict regulations when it comes to reporting on ethnic groups. The media have an increasingly more cautious stance when reporting on potentially volatile issues. This is reflected largely in perceptions of citizens in the country regarding the coverage of the media and the media's sensitivity toward conflict.

Ethnic Albanian and non-Serbian minority communities indicate that they do not feel incited by the reporting of most mainstream outlets. The Serbian community in the south of Kosovo currently indicates that they largely do not follow Albanian language media due to a language barrier. The Serbian community also indicates that they follow Serbia-based media and some local Serbian language outlets. Both the Albanian and Serbian communities have indicated that they feel offended to some extent by the reportage of each other's media outlets.⁷

⁶ Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo, (2013), Article 4, accessible at <http://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=8864>

⁷ The constitution of Kosovo recognizes six official ethnicities: Albanian, Serbian, Turkish, Bosnian, Goran and Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali ethnicities which are grouped together.

This information is crucial to understanding coverage of neighboring countries, considering that the past conflict and current inter-ethnic tensions in Kosovo play a significant role in the way that neighboring countries are covered in the media. Largely due to the international presence in Kosovo and due to lessons learned from the March 2004 riots, Kosovo mainstream media often tend to adopt a highly factual stance when covering neighbors. This factual stance, however, has its downside as will be discussed later in this paper.

Covering Neighbors – Common issues

In the past, media in the former Yugoslavia and the countries that emerged from it have played a large role in inflaming the conflict. The state broadcaster in Serbia, for instance, is largely seen to have been crucial in carrying on and boosting the policies of Slobodan Milosevic. This led to a skewed version of the events in Kosovo, which served as a catalyst for war. In fact, the Radio Television of Serbia was one of the bombing targets during the NATO campaign in Serbia due to its role in fuelling hostilities. Given the political context of Kosovo, the free media were developed during the years 2000 without any strong influence by political entities and other groups of interests, albeit leaning towards a political party eventually became a widespread syndrome for the print media. Kosovo media were widely criticized for their coverage of the March 2004 riots, which led to fueling both sides toward ethnic intolerance. As a result, it has become clear that in a region with cross-border animosities, media play a key role in either quelling or bolstering volatile public behavior by their depiction of neighbors. This is all the more true when it comes to the coverage of highly sensitive issues that concern neighboring countries.

This distinction becomes all the more crucial in Kosovo, given that the country's memory of the 1999 conflict is still embedded in public memory. Composed of six constitutionally recognized ethnic groups, the country's memories and interpretations of the conflict vary widely. For Albanians, the conflict is reminiscent of an ethnic cleansing campaign by the Serb state. As a result, certain stereotypes toward Serbia persist, such as the belief that there is only hate towards Albanians from the Serbian side. These stereotypes are coupled with Serbia's continuous involvement in Kosovo's territorial integrity in the north, parallel institutions and a perception that Serbia is gaining the upper hand in the negotiations between Pristina and Belgrade. As a result, there is a wide perception of the Serbian state as a direct threat toward the wellbeing of Kosovar Albanians and that reflection may be bolstered by media coverage.

On the other hand, Albania is widely perceived to be a natural ally. In the specific context of the case of the football match, Kosovo Albanians perceived Albania's team as being their own. Primarily, this is due to the fact that Kosovo's team is not allowed to participate in official football matches for UEFA due to lack of recognition. Secondly, a large part of the Albanian team is comprised of Kosovo Albanians who moved to the neighboring country to be able to follow their careers, therefore further binding public support toward the Albanian team. Finally, the fact that Kosovo is not able to play UEFA matches is also partially due to Serbia lobbying against it, further deepening the aforementioned image of Serbia. Both of these generally prevalent stereotypes affect the perception of news in the population and therefore the priorities of journalists.

Assessing the extent and importance that media place on reporting on neighboring countries and the type of coverage remains critical in deciding how to combat negative aspects of such a phenomenon. The question of persisting stereotypes is also important particularly when considering that the publication of stereotypes is an indicator of lack of professionalism.

To analyze the way in which Kosovo media cover their neighbors, we selected different cases. Primarily, the cases focused around times of increased regional tensions due to the general lack of coverage of neighboring countries in the Kosovo media. Media monitoring in Kosovo for the seven largest newspapers has concurrently shown that there is a lack of coverage on neighboring countries outside the scope of internal Kosovo events.⁸ Additionally, analyzing the coverage of neighboring countries during high tension periods also enables a more careful assessment of the quality of journalism involved. This is largely due to the fact that any biases or lapses in professionalism become more apparent when journalists have to cater to domestic publics.

In analyzing the coverage of Albania, the study has focused on the coverage and portrayal of the country during the period of the Albania – Serbia football match played in Belgrade. This match, which caused a string of controversy, was widely covered and issues were transposed outside of the area of football. The same case has been used to analyze the coverage of Serbia. It should be stated that coverage of Albania by the Kosovo media is not alike coverage of any neighboring countries. Since the vast majority of Kosovo Albanians identify themselves as part of the Albanian nation, there

⁸ The Forum for Security, "Media reporting on peace, conflict and security issues – how objective and conflict-sensitive is media coverage and reporting on these issues?," The Forum for Security : Kosovo 2014 accessible on <http://fiq-fci.org/repository/docs/MEDIA-REPORTING-ON-PEACE%202014.pdf>

is a multidimensional overlapping between the 'self' and the 'other' when reporting about Albania. The football match that we chose to examine is a peculiar most likely case that takes into account this phenomena as the Albanian national team consists of players who are originally from Kosovo. Furthermore, the fact that Kosovo cannot compete internationally with its football teams makes the vast majority of Kosovo Albanians see the Albanian team as their own. Macedonia's coverage is also lightly touched upon through the scope of the football match, with a slightly higher focus placed on the coverage of Macedonia during the issue of the protests that rocked that nation during 2013.

Reporting on Football

On 15 October 2014, Albania and Serbia played against each other in a qualifying match for the UEFA championship in Europe. This event marked the first football match between the two nations in a long time in each other's territory. Before the match, the Serbian Football Authority prohibited Albanian fans from attending the game, with few exceptions, in order to prevent violence in the stadium.⁹ During the event, Serbian fans shouted anti-Albanian slogans throughout the game. In the first part of the game, a drone carrying a flag portraying an ethnic map of Albanians in the region, flew over the stadium and was intercepted by one of the Serbian players. After one of the Albanian players rushed to take the flag a scuffle broke out and the game was abandoned.¹⁰

The following days, a global media frenzy occurred, especially considering the expectation of UEFA judgment over the match. This media frenzy also characterized the coverage in Kosovo, with multiple continuous and frequently updated stories on the issue, as well as a trend that set the tone for coverage of neighbors during this time.

While in the past coverage of neighboring countries was largely in the framework of implications for Kosovo, the scope in this case was not necessarily so. This seems to indicate that barring any high tension issues, there is little importance placed on the coverage of neighboring nations. This is no surprise, given that even coverage of minorities within Kosovo is scarce. One study based on a 45 day monitoring period saw only 249 stories on minorities in Kosovo, or 3% of the total articles published during the time

⁹ The Institute for Development Policy, Print media coverage of Minorities. INDEP: Prishtina (2014).

¹⁰ "Albania Fans Barred from Belgrade Football Match," Besar Likmeta, Godana Andric, Nektar Zogjani, Balkan Insight, 14 OCT 2014.

of the monitoring.¹¹ The same study also cites the lack of capacities for multi-language coverage as an issue that media face when covering non-national stories. As a result, the general lack of focus on coverage of neighbors might not be due to lack of media interest, but due to lack of resources.

This case indicated that the main characteristic of covering neighbors seems to be the presence of a controversial issue. This is not surprising, since the news cycle depends on controversial issues as a continuous story generation cycle, which the Albania-Serbia match fit perfectly. However, there was no homogeneous image projected throughout the coverage.

Analysis of the mainstream traditional print media and the most prominent online news agencies and websites indicated a slight bias toward portraying Albania's team as a victim in this case. This bias was mostly shown through the republication of sources of information that tended to conform to the story that Albania's players have been gravely assaulted during the match.¹² Additionally, there was a trend of republishing stories from international outlets that seemed to support this line of thinking. However, a few of the articles considered the drone and the motivations and potential perpetrators behind the drone.¹³ As a result, a conclusion can be made that the media were considerably more skewed toward portraying Albania in a positive light in this situation. This bias however was notable in the aggregate, given that the total pool of stories indicated the skew but not the content itself.

The same does not stand for the part of the coverage concerning Serbia. Whereas no inflammatory language was present, in aggregate, the stories were skewed toward representing Serbia's reaction as unsatisfactory.¹⁴ Surprisingly, from the random sample of stories concerning the match that were published in Kosovo's media, there was no visible presence of direct accusation for intentional abuse. Most stories treated the outcomes of the match as a failure of the police and individuals involved in controlling the situation, but not an orchestrated effort. This seems to indicate that the

¹¹ "Serbia v Albania abandoned after players and fans brawl on pitch," Nick Ames and Sasa Ibrulj, *The Guardian*, 14 OCT 2014 accessible at <http://www.theguardian.com/football/2014/oct/14/serbia-albania-euro-2016-flag-halted>

¹² The Institute for Development Policy, *Print media coverage of Minorities*. INDEP: Prishtina (2014).

¹³ For example see: "Ndeshja Serbi – Shqipëri përmes 47 fotografive," *Zeri*, 15 OCT 2014 accessible on <http://www.zeri.info/futboll/2522/ndeshja-serbi-shqiperi-permes-47-fotografive/>

¹⁴ One of the few only reflected the popular theories in Serbia regarding the drone. See: "Prapaskena serbe, 5 variantet për dronin e Beogradit," *Telegrafi*, 17 OCT 2014 accessible on <http://www.telegrafi.com/lajme/prapaskena-serbe-5-variantet-per-dronin-e-beogradit-foto-2-52342.html>

image that the media portrayed regarding Serbia's actions in the match was not one of overt malice but one of intentional negligence.

Another palpable facet of the coverage of Serbia in the Albania-Serbia match debacle also relied on reporting on the internal dialogue in Serbia concerning the match. Multiple outlets either directly translated stories of Serbian portals, both accusing and supporting the actions of participants, or covered by internal resources. For example, one of the stories covered the request of the Democratic Party of Serbia for the resignation of the Serb Minister of Internal Affairs.¹⁵

There was no observable agenda in the stories portrayed either individually or in aggregate. This seems to indicate that there is a tendency of Kosovo's media to try to convey the internal debate in Serbia to the Kosovo public without additional coloring. This, however, might be subject to shared cultural cues in Kosovo and the way that people attribute meaning to the stories that are conveyed. Nonetheless, no perceptible trend can be discerned and it largely remains general reporting.

When covering the two neighbors and their actions throughout this period, there was also a considerable presence of stories that reflected the perspectives of the EU member states, institutions and the U.S. regarding both countries.¹⁶ Out of the randomly selected stories on this case, there was a recurring presence of stories or parts of stories that discussed how the aforementioned countries reacted to the game and post-game actions of Serbia and Albania.¹⁷

Unsurprisingly, the stories which tended to depict Albania both as a victim and as a victor, generally tended to reflect positive opinions of third western parties on the issue. However, there was also a presence of views from the EU and US that were contrary towards Albania's conduct after the match that were published in Albanian and the reporting contained therein was largely free of bias. This seems to indicate that Kosovo media place a high importance in covering EU and US points of view and how they perceive the neighbors. As a result, it seems that media portrayal of the neighbors might be highly affected by how western media see both countries, and such a finding would not be surprising.

¹⁵ For example see: "Daçiç: Serbia meriton kritika për organizimin e ndeshjes," *Gazeta Express*, 16 OCT 2014 accessible on <http://www.gazetaexpress.com/lajme/dacic-serbia-meriton-kritika-per-organizimin-e-ndeshjes-51218/>

¹⁶ "Kërkohet dorëheqja e ministrit serb të Policisë," *Koha Ditore*, 15 OCT 2014 accessible on <http://koha.net/?id=22&l=29477>

¹⁷ For example see "BE i zhgënjyer për pengimin e ndeshjes-mirëpremt vizitën e Ramës në Beograd," *Koha Ditore*, 15 OCT 2014 accessible at <http://koha.net/?id=27&l=29438>

While some bias would be expected on the part of Kosovo's media given that they cater to a mainly Kosovo Albanian audience, overall reporting seemed to be careful to not outwardly breach journalism standards. This, however, is to be expected since media in Kosovo have adopted a considerably more careful stance since the events of March 2004. Additionally, with strong Constitutional and legal provisions against hate speech and inflammatory language, as well as the presence of an ever observant international community, media is highly unlikely to stray too far into negative depictions of neighbors. This is all the more important when considering that opposed to the other outlets in the region, media in Kosovo tend to show considerable restraint and be careful in reporting on contentious issues.

Additionally, all stories observed for the purpose of this study contained little to no background information on both the past of the conflicts and the drivers of the contentious issues that caused the scuffle. This lack of background information seems to be largely due to a perception of the editorial and journalistic staff that their audience already has a set knowledge of past events. However, it also plays the role of not furthering divisive and potentially inciting reporting and actions.

Nonetheless, sensationalism persisted in the reporting, mainly focused around sensational titles and standard content. Finally, there was a distinct difference between the quality of coverage of more traditional media versus online only portals, which showed a general lack of adherence to the requirement of three sources per article, overall low quality in the use of language, and lack of verification of information. For example, one of the most read online only news portals chose to completely forego any journalism standards in an article about a Serbian radical fan, using words such as "coward."¹⁸ Additionally, the story contained only one reference to something that can be identified as a source but no further substantiation.

Overall, prior, during and after the match, there was considerable media coverage of both Albania and Serbia in Kosovo's media. The main characteristics of coverage on Albania focused on portraying it as a victim in the case as well as generally controlled in the way it handled the situation. Coverage of the Serbian side did tend to favor stories that portrayed the country's reaction toward the match as inappropriate but stopped short of accusations of intentional transgression in the scope of well-established outlets. No obvious recurring stereotyping was present, with the exclusion on reporting of the presence of a well-known Serbian radical fan during the match. However, some online

¹⁸ See "Departamenti amerikan për ndeshjen Serbi-Shqipëri," Telegrafi, 16 OCT 2014 accessible on <http://www.telegrafi.com/sport/departamenti-amerikan-per-ndeshjen-serbi-shqiperi-5-0-57715.html>

only news portals continued with complete lack of professionalism, such as a story on a random poem about the game with derogative language towards the Serbs.¹⁹ However, the stories in the established outlets simply reported on both the presence of the radical without any coloring and maintained a level of professionalism. Overall, however, reporting on the region remains statistically scarce when no highly controversial stories are present. Conflict sensitivity of the media during the case was relatively acceptable, with deviations during the actual time of the match.

Reporting on unrests and protests

Macedonia and Kosovo have had a mixed relationship in the past. Primarily, Macedonia's almost one third Albanian population has always provided for closer trade and cultural ties. However, during 2001, Macedonia went through a period of internal conflict. An Albanian group called the National Liberation Army (NLA), comprised of Macedonian Albanians, led an insurgency campaign against the Macedonian state. There were also allegations of connections between NLA and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). The group's main demands were extended political rights for Albanians in Macedonia.²⁰ The insurgency resulted in the Ohrid Agreement, which foresaw the cessation of hostilities and the establishment of more extended political rights for the Albanian minority in Macedonia. Nonetheless, it also served to show the internal tensions between the different ethnic groups in Macedonia and also polarize the opinion of Kosovo Albanians regarding the Macedonian state.

Over ten years later, on 12 April 2012, Macedonia witnessed five murders outside the capital of the country, Skopje. Two years later, the Macedonian justice system indicted seven people, all of Albanian nationality and convicted six of them to life in prison for the murders under charges of terrorism. The verdict incited a terse blowback from the Albanian community in Macedonia, which felt that the process had been flawed and the verdict administered without proof. Several days of protests by the Albanian minority in Macedonia, some of which escalated to violence, followed the event and they were covered relatively extensively by the media in Kosovo.

The primary notable characteristic in the protests in Macedonia is the general lack of prevalence of the Macedonian ethnic perspective on the

¹⁹ "Terroristi Ivan Bogdanov qëndroi në burg të femrave, u frikësua nga shqiptarët," Telegrafi, 16 OCT 2014 accessible on <http://www.telegrafi.com/sport/terroristi-ivan-bogdanov-qendroi-ne-burg-te-femrave-u-frikesua-nga-shqiptaret-5-0-57757.html>

²⁰ "Poezia boshnjake, për ndeshjen e djeshme Shqipëri-Serbi," Telegrafi, 15 OCT 2014, accessible on <http://www.telegrafi.com/fun/poezia-boshnjake-per-ndeshjen-e-djeshme-shqiperi-serbi-10-9829.html>

protests overall. Of the random sample of the stories surveyed for this study, only a small number had any indication of Macedonian reaction towards the protests.²¹ This seems to indicate that without ramifications for Kosovo or the Albanian ethnicity in Macedonia, coverage of Macedonia in Kosovo media would remain generally low.

Also, when reporting on the protests in the neighboring country, no persistent stereotype was present in the media. Rare exceptions of charged language used in reporting did occur but were far from the norm.²² However, the reporting did focus partially on the seemingly larger dissatisfaction that fuelled the protests and the objections of the protesters against the Albanian political party in the governing coalition.²³ The reporting on the issue, however, was contained within direct quotes from the participants and organizers and no discussion of these ramifications were made outside quotations. Whether this focus was intentional or not is hard to substantiate.

The protests held against the verdict provided a simple path for journalistic lack of professionalism, should the journalist try to sensationalize the articles in order to cater to an Albanian audience. However, no indications of the media in Kosovo taking a particular side were noted. When explaining the reasons behind the protests, virtually all articles referred to the verdict on the six defendants without calling the verdict into question.²⁴ Additionally, Kosovo media did not discuss at length the issue of the closing speech of the prosecution whereby the prosecutor tried to depict the case as an ethnically and religiously motivated one. This was one of the most contentious issues during the protests and left ample room for polarization.²⁵

A continuous trend, however, is noted regarding views of western actors on the protests, similar to what was seen during the football match case analysis. This seems to be a recurring factor, indicating that media in Kosovo continue to see their neighborhood in a triangle between the West, Kosovo and the Western Balkans.²⁶

²¹ Kim, J., Macedonia: Country Background and Recent Conflict: United States Congressional Research Service (CRS). Washington, D.C. 2002

²² See for example coverage of the largest newspaper in Kosovo, Koha Ditore, for the study: "Përfundon e qetë protesta në Shkup," Koha Ditore, 14 APR 2014 accessible on <http://kohanet/?id=27&l=17522>

²³ For charged language coverage see: "Sot përsëri protesta në Shkup," Gazeta Express, 5 JUL 2014 accessible on <http://www.gazetaexpress.com/lajme/sot-perseri-protesta-ne-shkup-26743/>

²⁴ See: "Nesër shqiptarët sërish protesta në Maqedoni," Koha Ditore, 31 JUL 2014

²⁵ See "Nisin në Shkup protestat për rastin 'Monstra,'" Gazeta Express, 6 JUN 2014 accessible on <http://www.gazetaexpress.com/lajme/nisin-ne-shkup-protestat-per-rastin-monstra-19614/>

²⁶ Ibid.

Overall, there seems to be a lack of reporting on the southern neighbor of Kosovo in the absence of a contentious issue. Reporting on contentious issues also seems to apply when they have ramifications for Kosovo, Albania or the Albanian minority in Macedonia. Nonetheless, even in a charged and seemingly tense situation, such as the protests of July 2014 in Macedonia, no stereotypes or negative reporting were seemingly persistent. Few isolated cases of skewed reporting were present but were far from the norm. Overall, there is a distanced approach toward covering Macedonia and general professional journalism was present in the stories.

Conclusions

With a young legislative system, Kosovo's current legal framework concerning the media is in adherence with internationally accepted standards of free speech and freedom of the media. There are several provisions that require the avoidance of hate speech or otherwise inciting language toward any particular group. This legislation is enforced by independent media bodies that regulate broadcast and print media as well as judicial bodies. This trend seems to be reflected in the reporting of neighboring countries and minority groups within the country although some biases are apparent.

Overall, there is lack of coverage on neighboring countries. This is a trend that also affects minority coverage in primarily Albanian language news outlets in the country. This indicates that barring any high tension issues that affect either of the above, there is no consistent pattern of reporting on neighbors in the region. Other studies within this field indicate that this is due largely to a lack of capacities within media to cover the region.

When present, reporting in Kosovo media on neighboring countries is centered on highly controversial issues. Stories that have a high relevance either to Kosovo or the Albanian populations of neighboring countries take precedence in Albanian language media outlets within Kosovo. This seems to be a primary bias within the reporting covered in this study. However, this bias can be attributed to the intention of the media to cater to their local audience preference, rather than a systemic issue with editorial policies.

Coverage of Albania in the Albania – Serbia match was characterized by a slight positive bias. This bias was reflected in the form of the publication of stories that supported the Albanian football team's actions and their lack of guilt in the outcome of the game. Within the stories, reporting remained largely professional, without the presence of language that would indicate editorial bias toward the country. However, there were cases of online only news portals with limited professionalism that did use slightly more positive

language when reporting on Albania. Additionally, no outward stereotypes towards Albania were present and coverage was uniform. However, the overall pool of stories randomly selected for this study did show a positive bias.

Coverage of Serbia in the same context was not outwardly negative. The pool of stories overall was eclectic in the scope of reporting being conveyed. There were no trends showing Serbia in a negative light, other than a coherence of indicating a failure of Serb police side in controlling the audience. Within the stories themselves, there was a distinction of coverage between established outlets and online portals selected for this study. Less trustworthy portals had isolated cases of charged language when reporting on certain specific aspects of the match, such as the presence of a known Serb radical football fan during the match. Nonetheless, established media maintained a professional tone when reporting on Serbia. No outward presence of reporting of stereotypes was present, although there was a focus on anti-Albanian chants during the match. Generally, the stories were distanced and tended to sway in the coverage of Albania in the issue rather than Serbia. This can be largely attributed to international presence in the country as well as extra care taken when reporting on high tension issues due to lessons learned from March 2004 by the Albanian media.

Coverage of the protests in Macedonia also remained largely positively skewed in aggregate toward displaying the dissatisfaction of the Albanian population in the country. Throughout the stories, no outward mention of the Macedonian ethnic group was present, and focus remained on the Albanian minority. In this sense, there was a clear distinction between the groups being covered. However, charged language was largely absent and inflammatory or non-conflict sensitive reporting did not seem to be prevalent, with the exception of isolated cases displayed by less trustworthy sources of reporting.

When reporting on neighbors, there was a distinct lack of background information concerning the histories of the neighboring countries and their relation to Kosovo or the Albanian population in Kosovo. This could be due to either a perception of shared background knowledge by the readers or to editorial boards' intention to not incite. The second is largely due to the fact that the largest point of dispute with neighbors remains the interpretation of historical information. This lack of background coverage therefore might be intentional in order to not drive stereotypes or potential conflicts and it is uncommon throughout the Balkans.

Finally, there was a consistent trend of the publication of stories of the impressions of western countries on the actions of neighboring countries concerning both cases studied in this report. Therefore, coverage of the

neighbors seems to also focus on the repercussions that these actions have on the international arena.

Overall, reporting on neighbors in Kosovo remains largely scarce. When reporting is present, it is centered on highly controversial issues, especially those that involve Albanian populations. While no outward stereotypes were present, with the exception of isolated cases in less trustworthy online only media outlets, overall there was a positive bias when covering Albania. Coverage of Serbia remained factual, which can be largely attributed to a high sensitivity toward ethnic conflict by the media due to international presence in the country and the events of March 2004. This also seems to apply to the coverage of Macedonia and the Macedonian ethnic group. Nonetheless, lack of coverage is disturbing since lack of information on neighbors and a concentrated effort of informing audiences in Kosovo might drive any perceived divisions deeper rather than ensuring common understanding.

Annex : Reporting Kumanovo incident

On May 9, 2015, Macedonian police force engaged in operations to counter an armed group in the town of Kumanovo. The fighting allegedly targeted individuals of Albanian ethnicity, most of whom were Kosovo citizens, thus prompting widespread coverage in Kosovo media. The coverage of Macedonia in Kosovo's media, leading up to the events in Kumanovo, widely focused on widespread protests in this neighboring country. The protests called for the resignation of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski after widespread allegations of political espionage by his government.

Coverage on Kumanovo was highly charged and has shown, once again, a range of problematic issues regarding media ethics and professionalism. As with other events, there was considerable difference between different outlets, with a distinct divide between coverage by traditional media and online outlets. Due to a very peculiar situation, with the stream of official information on what happened in Kumanovo being inexistent on the one hand, and public interest in knowing what was going on, on the other, the perfect condition for disinformation was created. This peculiarity opened the way to the publication of partial information that relied on single sources at best and on mere rumors in the worst case. Logically, online media, which rely on continuous publication of news, were prone to run hundreds of stories consisting of a few sentences, trying to bridge the gap created by the lack of official information. As a consequence, many of these reports were corrected, filled-in or entirely deleted in due course. This has left our

analysis somewhat short in terms of identifying the worst practices in the reporting on this event.

Most of the reporting was scarce in terms of sources that were used and how much sense they made. Primarily, professionalism of reports varied widely, with single-source or un-attributed stories widely prevailing in online portals.²⁷ This trend was widely persistent during the time of the fighting in Kumanovo, with extensively speculative stories being published in several outlets.²⁸

Both these trends were present mainly in online only portals, with the more traditional outlets showing a measure of restraint. This restraint, however, was limited, as the event continued for three full days during which very little was really known. Coverage was eclectic. However, there was an unmistakable siding of the Kosovo media with the Albanian community in Macedonia, as more reports emerged that the fighting targeted Albanian individuals. However, media focused on this report avoided making direct negative references toward ethnic Macedonians and used no direct editorial wording. Instead, there was widespread use of external analyst quotations.²⁹ The negative tone was in line with the already established critical tone toward the Macedonian government and Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski in particular, consolidated in the course of several weeks before the events, mainly because of reports on anti-government protests. This trend was persistent especially in the selection of stories and analytical pieces from international outlets concerning the crisis.³⁰ Additionally, another facet of the coverage was a continued focus on portraying an alleged triple divide between the Albanians and Macedonians in Macedonia, the Albanians in Macedonia and their elected officials as well as the lack of action by Kosovo and Albanian parties.³¹ There was a general reluctance of the media to cover

²⁷ See: "Protesta në Shkup, ndërkombëtarët të shqetësuar për dhunën," *Gazeta Ekspres*, 05 JUL 2014 accessible on <http://www.gazetaexpress.com/lajme/protesta-ne-shkup-nderkombetaret-te-shqetesuar-per-dhunen-26693/>

²⁸ See for example: *Telegrafi*, "UÇK u kthye në Kumanovë për t'i nxjerrë tre bashkëluftëtarë: Thonë se s'kanë ushtarë të vrarë e as të arrestuar!," 9 May 2015, last accessed on April 25, 2015 at: <http://www.telegrafi.com/lajme/uck-u-kthye-ne-kumanove-per-t-i-nxjerre-tre-bashkeluftetare-thone-se-s-kane-ushtare-te-vrare-e-as-te-arrestuar-79-7116.html>

²⁹ See for example: Zeri. "Ka krisma edhe në Haraqinë dhe Gushincë?" 10 May 2015, last accessed on 25 April 2015 at <http://zeri123.zeri.info/aktuale/32165/ka-krisma-edhe-ne-haraqine-dhe-gushince/>

³⁰ See: Zeri, "Sulmi në Kumanovë i pamoralshëm dhe i pashpirt," 12 May 2015, last accessed on 25 April 2015 at <http://zeri123.zeri.info/aktuale/32546/sulmi-ne-kumanove-i-pamoralshem-dhe-i-pashpirt/>

³¹ Zeri, "Maqedonia nuk mbijeton si shtet nëse i sulmon shqiptarët," 12 May 2015, last accessed on 25 April 2015 at <http://zeri123.zeri.info/aktuale/32552/maqedonia-nuk-mbijeton-si-shtet-nese-i-sulmon-shqiptaret/>

in-depth the fact that some of the fighters in the event were Kosovo citizens; this fact was reported but its meaning was hardly ever analyzed.

More traditional media, on the other hand, remained relatively professional and measured in the selection of stories, sources and avoidance of bias in coverage. While it was extremely prevalent initially, the heavy bias witnessed in non-professional outlets was reduced after the cessation of the activities. It is worth noting that negative coverage of the Macedonian side was focused on the current government and not targeted at the ethnic group, with opposition forces receiving better treatment.

An additional aspect of the coverage of the Kumanovo events remained the reporting on the reaction of Serbian officials, media and public. Several of the least professional outlets made repeated references to alleged Serbian propaganda, pointing toward inflammatory media coverage and public official remarks in Serbia during the Kumanovo crisis.³² This opened the path for stories hinting to different kinds of conspiracies that would explain the event.

Journalistic standards and editorial ethics were to a great extent jeopardized during the reporting. This indicates a lack of sustainability of media ethics in Kosovo; despite the overall good trend that was achieved in the last ten years, it can come to a point of collapse when it comes to reporting on incidents that could have an ethnic background. Online media were particularly careless during the reporting, publishing many stories that included the standard ‘patriots vs traitors’ discourse, although most of these stories were either toned down or entirely deleted from the web once official information started to flow in.

Overall, coverage of the crisis in Kumanovo in Kosovo media varied between the perceived level of professionalism of media covering the story. More traditional outlets maintained a distanced level of coverage, avoiding inflammatory language. These media also had reporters on the ground. Nonetheless, as with other issues, there is a distinct lack of professionalism in online news portals without oversight. Additionally, coverage was also subject to issues identified previously in this report.

³² Zeri, Ndërkombëtarët porosi të fortë dhe të ashpër edhe për Ali Ahmetin,” 12 May 2015, last accessed on 25 April at <http://zeri123.zeri.info/aktuale/32480/nderkombetaret-porositte-forte-dhe-te-ashper-edhe-per-ali-ahmetin-video/>

³³ Alban Muhaxheri, “Propaganda serbe: Pas Maqedonisë, shqiptarët do të sulmojnë Serbinë, Malin e Zi dhe Srpsken,” 12 May 2015, last accessed on 25 April 2015 at <http://zeri123.zeri.info/aktuale/32439/propaganda-serbe-pas-maqedonise-shqiptaret-do-te-sulmojne-serbine-malin-e-zi-dhe-srpsken/>

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MACEDONIA:
Few neighbours, one profession
and many truths

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Summary

Almost a decade and a half after the last armed conflict in the Balkans, which took place in Macedonia in 2001, not much has changed in the way media in Macedonia report on their neighbors. The reasons for this lie not only in the discourse of the political elites and opinion makers, most of which still produce the narrative of Macedonia being a country surrounded by enemies that want to change its name, identity, eradicate its language, church or take its territory. Good reasons for this can be also found in the regress of the quality of the media and journalism in Macedonia in general. Media in Macedonia today are less free than before, victims of clientelism, of ties between politics, business and media ownership, direct pressure from the Government and institutions, censorship, and other factors that hinder media freedoms not only in Macedonia, but throughout the region. In addition, we should note that the number of correspondents from neighboring countries has fallen rapidly in the past years; besides the state news agency MIA that still has correspondents in the neighboring countries, only few correspondents of mainstream Macedonian media have continued working in Greece and Serbia; there is no correspondent of a major media outlet covering Kosovo; and only one newspaper has a correspondent in Albania and Bulgaria. Albanian language media outlets have correspondents in Kosovo and Albania, but have no correspondents in Serbia, Bulgaria or Greece. Besides news agencies, content is often taken and translated from the media of the respective countries, often without giving credit to the authors. In many cases, especially when we speak about sensationalistic pieces, this content comes from dubious media outlets and is reproduced without checking the credibility of the content and information.

By observing the media in Macedonia and their reporting on neighboring countries and people, one can notice that they project four different “realities”. Two of those realities represent divisions in political terms – opposition and Government, where content regarding the neighbors is often “internalized” in the context of the internal political struggle between “patriots” and “traitors”. These divisions lately have become a bit more dominant than the traditional parallel ethnic media realities that the people of Macedonia have consumed so far. Most of the content is one-sided and does not include different perspectives, and is often opinionated and based on rumors and speculations rather than on facts. Perhaps one of the rare positive aspects is the fact that most of the media, regardless of language, refrain from open

hate speech, which has mainly moved to the Internet, in user-generated content, dubious websites, comments on video-sharing platforms and on social networks, but has been replaced by hidden inflammatory speech and more sophisticated tools for constructing a media reality.

In this context, in a dominant part of media outlets, we can still notice almost totally opposed and different views and frequency of coverage between Macedonian and Albanian language media on Serbia, Kosovo, Albania and the relations between Serbs and Albanians. Media in the Macedonian language report frequently on Serbia not only regarding politics. Major events, developments in economy, culture, entertainment, music, sports etc. in Serbia are still far more present in Macedonian language media than content on any other neighboring country, while media in the Albanian language focus predominantly on reporting on political aspects and relations between Albania, Kosovo and Serbia. On the other hand, every day life in Albania and Kosovo is not that interesting for media in the Macedonian language, which also focus on Albanian-Serb relations, but also on Kosovo and Albania in the context of internal stability of Macedonia, quite unlike media in the Albanian language, which traditionally report on a daily basis on many aspects of life in Albania and Kosovo.

When reporting on Greece, besides frequent coverage of internal political and economic issues, media in the Macedonian language are still preoccupied much more with the name dispute and relations with Greece and often contextualize the content within the internal political struggle, much more than media in the Albanian language, but their views come closer when reporting on Greece's treatment of national minorities. Bulgaria is also quite present in the Macedonian media, including internal developments, but especially regarding the dispute over the language and history, while Albanian language media dedicates much less space and is almost not interested at all in reporting on Bulgaria.

Besides these aspects, some of the most frequently covered issues and events in Macedonia's neighbors in all media in Macedonia, regardless of language, in the past several years have included the drone incident in the football match between Albania and Serbia, Rama-Vucic meetings, Greek elections and austerity measures, floods in Serbia (Croatia and Bosnia), Albania becoming a candidate country for the EU, the South stream gas pipeline and behavior of neighbors in this regard. Macedonian language media also covered reports on the alleged rise of Islamic radicalism in Kosovo and Albania, which for most of the Albanian language media is something blown out of its real proportions, mainly under instructions from Belgrade and Moscow.

Reporting on Albania

In general, if we exclude Albanian language media outlets, the media in Macedonia have covered Albania relatively modestly. Most of the coverage was devoted to several key events related directly to Albania, as well as regional events that included Macedonia's western neighbor. Content was mostly presented in the "world" sections of the news, in print and online publications, and rarely reached the front pages, except for outlets that publish in the Albanian language, where coverage of important events in Albania was more prominent, detailed and more frequent, on a daily basis. Mainstream media outlets (except for daily *Utrinski Vesnik*) in the Macedonian language do not have correspondents in Albania, while visits of journalists to Albania were mostly limited to visiting and reporting on the Macedonian minority in Pustec and Prespa area.

The mainstream media in Macedonia project two different realities about the western neighbor. A part of the media and prominent journalists in the Macedonian language, some of them with a longstanding history of using nationalistic rhetoric and hate speech, still portray Albania and Albanians predominantly as a potential threat to Macedonians, as a country and people that breed organized crime and Islamic radicals, as people that have territorial claims towards Macedonia and other neighboring countries. These are some of the most common theses of the media and some of the politicians, analysts and journalists of the right, most of them being part of the media community that supports the current government in Macedonia.

Most of the media outlets that are critical of the Government carry a more moderate discourse in this regard. Yet, coverage of Albania, except during some important events and occurrences, still remains modest and overburdened by stereotypes, and mainly based on agency news, despite Tirana's being only a couple of hundred kilometers away from Skopje. In this context, we could also say that the general level of information and knowledge of the Macedonian public as well as media content has progressed little, predominantly in media with more liberal and leftist views, but problems from the past regarding the quantity of the coverage in general as well as the quality of coverage in considerable part of the media outlets still remain.

Although the situation regarding stereotypes has improved slightly compared to the past, the negative stereotyping and portrayal of Albania and Albanians still continues. The general stereotype is that of presenting Albanians as "criminals", "illegal migrants;" lately, "Islamic radicalism" is also used as a label for all Albanians, and Albania as one of the countries where people are recruited for Islamic terrorist organizations.

Media coverage was more intensive in the case of the drone incident in the football match between Serbia and Albania, while media also focused on Albania receiving the status of a candidate – country for membership in the EU. Other topics that were covered more intensively were relations to Islamic radicalism (especially in the light of Albanians that fight as part of ISIL in Syria, or the terrorism attack on Charlie Hebdo).

Relations between the two countries were also reported on in light of relatively frequent meetings between senior officials from both countries, as well as in the context of minorities on both sides of the border; it should not be forgotten that officially, Albanians in Macedonia make up about 25% of the population¹, and there is also a Macedonian minority in Albania.

Case study ‘Greater Albania’ – whose dream or nightmare is it?

The topic of “Greater Albania” is one of the most exploited in the context of creating animosity between Albanians and Macedonians. Frequently, these theses and opinions are given in an internal political context in Macedonia, and combined with other internal political topics, whereby political parties of Albanians and Macedonians and their media supporters often use a nationalistic rhetoric in order to attract support and voters. *“Waving flags of Albania, speaking only in Albanian and hearing promises made to Albanians. There is almost no change from the usual form of campaigning in the so-called Albanian political bloc in Macedonia during these local elections. Nationalist rhetoric remains in the spotlight, so the statements of candidates Fatmir Dehari and Izzet Mexhiti DUI (given a month ago in the United States, but recently published in our media) naturally fit into the campaign. Both are convincing the expats that they must vote for Kicevo and that “Commander Dehari” must win there, so that the city would be united with “ethnic Albania”. Parties of Albanians neither condemned these excesses, nor distanced themselves from them. So far, there is no official reaction from the parties of the Macedonians. Foreign missions also remain silent”,* wrote daily *Nova Makedonija* during the campaign for local elections in 2013.²

Pro-government daily *Dnevnik*, which often publishes articles and opinions with negative criticism and stereotypes on Albania and Albanians, even wrote that the boycott of the Parliament by the Macedonian opposition,

¹ Republic of Macedonia – State Statistical Office, “Census of Population, Households and Dwellings 2002, Book XIII: Total population, households and dwellings, According to the territorial organization of The Republic of Macedonia, 2004, 2002”, State Statistical Office, Skopje, May 2005, pg.34, <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/knigaXIII.pdf>

² A.Samardziev/G.Trpkovski, “Everybody’s silent and watching while Great Albania enters the campaign”, *Nova Makedonija*, Skopje, 14.03.2013 <http://www.novamakedonija.com.mk/NewsDetal.asp?vest=31413851569&id=9&setIzdanie=22829>

for which it was attacked constantly by all pro-government media, is in fact an Albanian invention. *“The boycott of the Parliament from the Macedonian opposition is not a new invention in the Balkans, it has been used for many years in Albania. What is now being done by SDSM’s leader Zoran Zaev, is in fact a standard way of dealing with politics by Sali Berisha and Edi Rama, when their parties are in opposition”.*³

In addition, in pro-government media, these theses are often backed up by opinions of historians, political analysts from the region and other countries, that are often considered controversial, or with anti-Western sentiments. During the days when the incident with the drone in the football match between Serbia and Albania in Belgrade had the peak of interest, several pro-government media transmitted such opinions.

*“If greater Albania is a myth, then why are they destroying Macedonia? In September this year a relevant political force proclaimed Republic of Ilirida in the middle of Skopje. If Serbia would work on the joining of the Serbian people in the same way in which Albania works in joining Albanians, it would be bombed”, points out for Vecernje Novosti Cedomir Antic, a Serb historian. He considers that the behavior of the Albanian people’s elite in Tirana and Pristina shows great frustration. “They say that greater Albania is a myth, and then they call a national symbol the rug with this myth’s map and a picture of an Austrian agent. Politicians say untrue things in a very noble way”, adds Antic.*⁴ Regarding this statement, we should mention that the structures led by Nevzat Halili that proclaimed “Republic of Ilirida” are totally irrelevant and without any significant support in Macedonia, which was proven by the fact that the very act of proclamation happened in Skopje in front of not more than 20 supporters, and that this structure has not had any activity since the ‘proclamation.’

By the end of 2012, the US correspondent of the state news agency MIA, made an interview with Ted Galen Carpenter of the Cato Institute, which was transmitted by over 10 popular media outlets, including the PBS, 4 national TV stations and many newspapers and websites. In this interview, Carpenter comments on the controversial statements of Albania’s PM Berisha during the days of celebrating 100 years of Albania’s independence in 2012. *“The aim for Greater Albania is still alive in Southeast Europe, which is disturbing for all Albanian neighbors, including Macedonia, and that means that we will*

³ B.Arsovska/I.korovesovska, “Albanian lessons for boycotting the Parliament – Zoran Zaev learns from Sali Berisha and Edi Rama”, Dnevnik, Skopje, 18.11.2014, <http://dnevnik.mk/?ItemID=91D8D5550F9AAE4EB29EC4DE1FD0BA27>

⁴ “Cedomir Antic, Serb historian – If Great Albania is a myth, then why are they destroying Macedonia?”, Dnevnik, Skopje, 19.11.2014, <http://www.dnevnik.mk/DEFAULT.ASP?ItemID=A96A6EFCFB07CB45A472D20718A3B2B2>

*occasionally face tensions. I think this statement, in which Berisha stated several cities in neighboring countries as Albanian territory, is of course designed for domestic use. I am sure that the Albanian government does not take measures to implement these goals, but this way of opening this issue is very harmful," Carpenter considered.*⁵

Daily *Vecer*, on the other hand, transmits an interview of Serbian newspaper *Alo* with Anja Filimonova from the Institute for Slavic studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences and Arts, who says that the project of Greater Albania is being realized under the auspices of the West: *"We are speaking about criminalization of Serbian territory as part of the Greater Albania project. The West did not create this zone of crime, chaos and terror for nothing. They have lots of money and instruments, and only a strong state can confront this. And the West insists that the state has to be weak. Only a strong state will eliminate these dangers that Serbia is facing. This means that Greater Albania together with Kosovo is not something that hovers in the air, in 5 years it will become reality for Serbia. This is how total Albanization of the whole Balkans space will begin."*⁶

According to Albanian language media outlets, 'Greater Albania' is not Albanians' project, but a "nightmare of Serbs." This formulation that has been stated by Serbian PM Vucic and reformulated by Albanian PM Rama in the interview he gave for B92 during his visit in Belgrade last autumn, was transmitted by all mainstream media in the Albanian language in Macedonia, and has been repeated frequently by journalists in other articles that address this issue. *"Greater Albania continues to be a 'nightmare' for Serbia. According to Serb news agency "Beta", Serb President Tomislav Nikolic warned French Prime Minister Manuel Valls about the threat from the 'Greater Albania' project, adding that there is a growing provocation from Albanians in the region that could turn into a large problem, which even the European Union would not be able to resolve."*⁷

⁵ Cvetin Cilimanov for MIA "Carpenter: Berisha's statement is for domestic use, but the dream of Great Albania is still alive", TV Sitel, Skopje, 01.12.2012, <http://sitel.com.mk/karpenter-izjavata-na-berisha-e-za-domashna-upotreba-no-sonot-za-golema-albanija-e-zhiv>

⁶ Alo, "Serbia awaits a dark period in the next 25 years – the Great Albania project is coming true?!", *Vecer*, Skopje, 21.10.2014, <http://vecer.mk/balkan/proektot-golema-albanija-se-ostvaruva>

⁷ Koha (Beta), "Nikolic frightened by Great Albania complains to French prime minister", Koha, Skopje, 07.11.2014, <http://koha.mk/globi/32174-nikolic-frike-nga-shqiperia-e-madhe-ankohet-te-kryeministri-francez.html>

Reporting on Bulgaria

Information on Bulgaria has been present and published predominantly in the Macedonian language media, while media in the Albanian language covered Bulgaria in a far more modest way. Nevertheless, coverage of Bulgaria has rarely been given prominence and importance.

Exceptions are cases of reporting on bilateral issues and statements of Bulgarian politicians and officials when talking about relations with Macedonia, whereby media in the Macedonian language become almost unanimous in their criticism regarding Bulgarian policy towards Macedonia. This is the case especially regarding some permanent disputes between the two countries.

For example, there is the issue with the Macedonian language, which a lot of Bulgarian politicians publicly declare merely a dialect of Bulgarian. Also there is the issue of “joint history” – it is not a secret that from St. Cyril and Methodius (founders of Cyrillic alphabet), up to revolutionaries during the late XIX and early XX century like Goce Delcev, Jane Sandanski, Todor Aleksandrov, etc. – all these historic figures are considered by both Macedonians and Bulgarians as their “own”, and both sides blame the other for stealing history and national heroes. These articles become more frequent during days when these historic figures are celebrated in both countries. Celebrations of holidays and memorial days of famous historical figures have regularly been causes for different incidents (an incident happened last time during the homage of Bulgarian officials and citizens on the grave of Goce Delcev in Skopje, or during homage paid by Macedonians to the grave of Jane Sandanski in Bulgaria).

The image projected lately of Bulgaria and Bulgarians has rarely been positive. Some examples of positive coverage can be given when media in Macedonia published content about anti government, student and social unrest and protests, mainly given in more liberal and left-oriented media outlets. However, a more significant portion of the content is the one that carries a negative stance towards Bulgaria and Bulgarians. There are from “stealers of history” and “deniers of language” up to harsher forms of hate speech, which are usually present not in the media content itself, but rather in comments below articles and other user-generated content (UGC) on video platforms such as You-tube or on social networks - such as “Tatars”. Bulgaria is often portrayed as a country with corrupt police and politicians, while Bulgarians are frequently presented as poor people, among the poorest in the EU (which they entered not because of their development or merits), and that most of them have left their homeland and represent cheap labor in

the richer EU countries. Macedonian language media also devote attention to the issue of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria, which is not recognized by the Bulgarian state, and the lack of basic human rights for this minority.

Case study: Macedonians seeking Bulgarian passport – economics or ethnic issue?

The topic that is perhaps most frequently reported on in the past several years, is the issue of many Macedonians seeking and obtaining a Bulgarian passport. While most acknowledge the economic dimension of the issue (access to EU labor market), many media promote the thesis that Bulgaria has used issuing of passports to Macedonians as a tool of assimilation and of artificial raising of the number of Bulgarians in Macedonia, which is supposed to give credibility to the claims of Bulgarian politicians and public opinion that Macedonians are in fact Bulgarians that have lost their sense of nationality due to Serb domination during Yugoslavia.

A good part of Macedonian media frequently uses statements by Bulgarian politicians and articles of the Bulgarian media to support their thesis that Bulgaria continues with its policy of animosity and has territorial and assimilation claims towards Macedonia and the Macedonians.

In March 2014, many Macedonian media outlets announced that Bulgaria is strengthening its criteria for issuing a Bulgarian passport, because of the misuse of the procedure that makes it easier for those claiming to have Bulgarian origin to obtain the document. The new procedure requires for applicants to provide a written document that their ancestor had Bulgarian origin. Daily *Dnevnik*, supporting its thesis by quoting a statement of a person that mediates for obtaining a Bulgarian passport, writes that the criteria have been strengthened selectively, and that Macedonians still remain privileged in that regard. *“This will not be applied for applicants from Macedonia. The leader of the Bulgarian party VMRO BND, Krasimir Karakachanov, talked about this with representatives of the Bulgarian government, and he was told orally that this condition will not be put on Macedonian citizens. Respectively, there won’t be any problems – explained Janakievski to us, adding that the whole problem appeared because of issuing Bulgarian citizenship to around 400 Albanians from Kosovo. Janakievski’s intermediate office is placed in a building in the center of Sofia, which belongs to Karakachanov’s party”*⁸.

Another rumor in this regard was that Macedonians who have a Bulgarian passport would have to serve in the Bulgarian army. Such is the article in one

8 Branko Gjorgjevski, “Sofia sharpens criteria selectively – Macedonians remain privileged for Bulgarian passports”, *Dnevnik*, Skopje, 16.03.2014, <http://dnevnik.mk/?ItemID=5DF67CCB54585748870E1943A82C7A54>

of the most popular, but very unprofessional and sensationalistic Macedonian websites, Kurir, which has this rumor in the title of the article, but no relevant source or document to support it in the text. *“The articles in the media that the owners of Bulgarian passports that do not live in Bulgaria will have to pay fines or serve military, brought distress to Macedonian citizens, which possess passports from the eastern neighbor. Intermediaries for obtaining Bulgarian passports say that these days they are flooded with calls from people who have already obtained their passport or their procedure is in progress, and are afraid that despite the amount that they paid to get the passport, they will now have additional duties.”*⁹ A piece with similar content, unsigned by an author, was aired also in the most-viewed newscast of the leading national TV station, the pro-government Sitel. The piece states that there is a hidden motive behind this provision that is to be introduced. *“However, behind all this charade of Bulgaria stands a purely lucrative hidden motive, the desire of the Bulgarian Ministry is to get money from the holders of passports, who in fact are not Bulgarians, by preparing to drive a law by which all those who live outside the borders of Bulgaria will either have to serve in the Army or to pay about 2000 leva fee or about a thousand euros plus tax. With this move the Bulgarian state will get some ‘grease’ from foreign holders of the Bulgarian passport!”*¹⁰

In May 2014, many media outlets also devoted space to the statement given by Co-President of OMO Ilinden, Stojko Stojkov to Macedonian national private broadcaster Radio Channel 77, who mentioned a startling amount of 100 million euros that Macedonian citizens have paid to get a Bulgarian passport. This figure, as he considers, is the product of corruption, bribery, which is paid not only to speed up the procedure, but also to get to the desired file, though it is not based on any facts or arguments. *“Although unofficially it is claimed that there are over 150 thousand Macedonians of Bulgarian citizenship documents, according to official data of the local Ministry of Justice, published in January of 2001 to December of last year, 51,391 citizens of Macedonia received a Bulgarian passport, and the trend after the abolition of visas (for the EU) is declining”*.¹¹

⁹ Kurir “PANIC: Macedonians with Bulgarian passport afraid from serving in the army”, Kurir, Skopje, 02.09.2014, <http://kurir.mk/makedonija/vesti/170425-PANIKA-Makedoncite-so-bugarski-pasos-se-plasat-od-sluzenje-vojska>

¹⁰ TV Sitel “Macedonians with Bulgarian passport will serve in the army ?!”, TV Sitel, Skopje, 28.08.2014, <http://www.sitel.com.mk/makedoncite-so-bugarski-pasosh-kje-sluzhat-vojska>

¹¹ Srecko Popovski, “For Bulgarian passport, Macedonians paid 100 million euros”, TV Alfa, Skopje, 28.05.2014, <http://www.alfa.mk/News.aspx?ID=77330#.VP0Qy47Lqx0>

Reporting on Greece

Greece is still the favorite 'enemy' of the media in the Macedonian language, although it can be said that the portrayal of Greece and Greeks has been more moderate in the past decade, especially in the more liberal media outlets. Greece is frequently covered, almost on a daily basis, by the media in Macedonia, and topics of interest are not mainly the usual disputes between the two neighbors. Still, the main cause for the general negative portrayal, of course, is the longstanding dispute between the two countries over the issue with the name of Macedonia, which also contains elements of history and identity.

In this context, Albanian language media devote less space to covering Greece than those in the Macedonian language, and publish far more moderate and less opinionated content, although examples of negative portrayal of Macedonia's southern neighbor are not rare, because of "own" ethnic reasons, not only on disputes that Albanians themselves have with Greeks, but also because Greeks are close allies to the Serbs, which are, on the other hand, Albanian media's favorite 'enemy'.

Greece was not very high on the agenda only regarding the name issue, but also because of the elections, and political changes in the country and Syriza winning the elections, which were portrayed in a positive context in almost all media outlets regardless of political or ethnic affiliation. The austerity measures and the way in which the Greek state and people deal with them, the issue with the South stream gas pipeline, were also some of the topics for which the media in Macedonia showed greater interest.

In the internal political context, pro-government media frequently accuse Greece of working with the "mercenaries" and "traitors" from the opposition and the civil society in order to change the name and identity of the country and Macedonians.

Case study: The name game, external dispute with internal use

Obviously, the dispute regarding the name of Macedonia has been internalized in the struggle between the political parties both in Macedonia and Greece. Media in Macedonia, regardless of their editorial policy, reported on this aspect and the discourse that was used by the political parties in Greece during the campaign for the last elections.

Pro-Government *TV Sitel* broadcast the statement of a representative of SYRIZA, supporting the discourse of pro-Macedonian government media - that there is no real difference between political options in Greece when it

comes to the name issue *“A name with a geographic determinant for all uses, not only between the two countries, is the position of SYRIZA on the name of Macedonia, which was repeated by Nadia Valavani, parliamentary candidate for the Coalition of the radical left. Using the vocabulary of the former government of Antonis Samaras, Valavani, in an interview for the portal “Iefimerida,” mentions “the rise of (alleged) irredentism in the neighboring country”, with which Greece “should calmly deal without nationalistic outbursts.”*¹²

On the other hand, *TV 24 Vesti*, which has a more neutral editorial policy, reported that SYRIZA has been attacking former governing parties about the dead-end in which they brought the negotiations in Macedonia. In this context came the statement by SYRIZA candidate Hadzisavas directed to Nea Demokratia’s MP Cavdaridis, which was reported in a piece aired in the newscast of this TV station. *“Instead of blaming SYRIZA, the MP should direct the fire to political leader Samaras, whose political adventurism led to the current impasse in which the issue of the name of Skopje is for the whole world to address FYROM with Macedonia, and unfortunately Greece is still today begging for acceptance of a composite name, which Samaras as foreign minister refused, says Hadzisavas.”*¹³

Independent weekly *Focus*, which has a very critical stance towards Macedonia’s current government, offered an analysis based on opinions of two former Macedonian diplomats, ambassador Nano Ruzin of the opposition and ambassador Risto Nikovski, one of the most prominent public supporters of the Government. While Ruzin thinks that changes will reflect positively in the bilateral relations because *“the left in Greece has always had a more positive attitude towards Macedonians”,* Nikovski thinks that *“in Greece, there is political consensus to negate the Macedonian state and people”,* and that *“although Tzipras had an affirmative stance towards Macedonians in the beginning, now he started playing the dance and changed it, so he negates the existence of Macedonians in Greece.”*¹⁴

But, the name issue becomes a real hot one when it is put in the context of the struggle between the ruling VMRO-DPMNE and opposition SDSM. Although both parties have pretty much the same official stance – a compromise (name with geographical determinant) verified on a referendum,

¹² Jasmina Tasevska, “Macedonia and the name dispute a main topic for attracting voters in Greece”, *TV Sitel*, Skopje, 22.01.2015, <http://www.sitel.com.mk/makedonija-i-sporot-so-imeto-glavna-tema-za-privlekuvanje-glasachi-vo-grcija-0>

¹³ *TV 24 Vesti*, “In Greece pre-lelection clashes over the name dispute”, *TV 24 Vesti*, 14.01.2015, <http://24vesti.mk/vo-grcija-predizborni-prepukuvanja-okolu-sporot-za-imeto>

¹⁴ Vlatko Stojanovski, “will the change of government in Greece influence on the name dispute”, *Fokus*, 01.01.2015, <http://fokus.mk/dali-promenata-na-vlasta-vo-grtsija-k-evlijae-vrz-sporot-za-imeto/>

that wouldn't touch upon the name of the nation or the language, the ruling party has been constantly accusing the opposition as "Greek mercenaries", that want to change the name of the country and the identity of Macedonians.

Very illustrative in this regard is the speech of the current prime-minister Gruevski given during the campaign for the Local Elections in 2013, in which he attacked his opponent at that time, former prime minister and leader of SDSM, Branko Crvenkovski: *"...When I just thought that at least a day will pass when we will speak amongst each-other only about projects, about what we have done and what we will do in the cities and in the villages, here comes the most famous Greek -- we will not mention him, and leave him alone to bother with himself -- yesterday, the man spoke. And now, even If you don't want to, one must comment that our most famous Greek caught himself in a lie. When he saw that the entire international community has publicly denied and told that there is no agreement on early elections, the Greek sat, he thought and he thought, and he decided to forget about the theme of early elections and he said: my dears, just forget what I have told you before, now you should know that we are doing this on purpose, because Gruevski is going to change the name in June. A new theory. Until yesterday it was another theory, it didn't pass, so, as of last night, there's a new theory. Imagine, he thought and he thought, and this is what he came up with. God save us. And how can a man not be happy in responding to this new lie, when the Greek Branko himself knows that Nikola Gruevski is not like him? Branko changed the name and he lied to us that the shameful reference 'the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' would last two months, three at most. And not two or three months, but twenty years have passed dear friends, and still, wherever we go in the world, this reference still lasts, and we are being embarrassed. Still, throughout the world, in every multilateral organization, and in many bilateral contacts, because of Greek Branko's mind, we are being called FYROM"¹⁵*

Reporting on Kosovo

Reporting on Kosovo generally resembles the way in which media in Macedonia have covered Albania. Albanian language media outlets devote far more space and give more importance to news from Kosovo and report about the newest state in the Balkans on a daily basis, while media in the Macedonian language have covered Kosovo modestly, and mainly from the perspective of incidents and troubles.

¹⁵ Speech of Prime-minister Gruevski during the campaign on Local Elections 2013, directed to ex-president and prime-minister of Macedonia and leader of opposition SDSM, Branko Crvenkovski, available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwMa9yM2yAo>

Most of the coverage was devoted to several key events related directly to this neighbor, mainly connected with negotiations with Serbia, internal security and political issues, bilateral meetings between politicians of the two countries, as well as regional events that have included Kosovo. Content was mostly presented in the “Region” “Balkan” and “world” sections of the traditional electronic, print and online outlets, and rarely reached front pages, except for outlets that publish in the Albanian language, where important events were given more prominence, and were reported in a much more detailed and more frequent manner.

There are no Macedonian language media outlets that have correspondents in Kosovo, while visits and direct reporting of Macedonian journalists from Kosovo are extremely rare. On the other hand, most of the mainstream media outlets that produce in the Albanian language have correspondents, or exchange pieces of content with media in Kosovo.

The mainstream media in Macedonia project two different realities about the newest country in the Balkans. As is the case with Albania, there are media and popular journalists in the Macedonian language that have a persistent negative attitude towards Albanians in general, that continue to portray Kosovo predominantly as a potential security threat for Macedonia and the region, as a country that is still far away from being a real state and is instead a nest of organized crime and Islamic radicals, and as a country that has territorial claims on Macedonia.

These theses have been repeated constantly, mostly by media, analysts and journalists that are part of the media specter that supports the current government in Macedonia. Media outlets that are more liberal, politically neutral or critical of the Government have a more moderate discourse in this regard, but articles and news in the context of Kosovo rarely present positive aspects or the every-day life of the people and the society there. The coverage in Macedonian language media remains far more modest than in Albanian language media, focused on troubling important events and occurrences, and mainly based on foreign/regional agency news, predominantly those published in Serbia.

Although the situation regarding stereotypes has not been as intensive as in the past, the negative stereotyping and portrayal of Kosovo and Kosovo Albanians in Macedonian language media continues. Common negative stereotypes, similarly like in the coverage of Albania, are those that present its Albanian population mainly as “criminals”, “illegal migrants”, “Islamic radicals”, “terrorists”. Kosovo as a country and its Albanian population are also put in the internal political context, and frequently presented as a threat to the security and stability of Macedonia and the region. In this direction, many media in Macedonia still perceive the conflict in 2001 as an

“aggression from Kosovo”. Besides that, media coverage in the past several years has mainly focused on relations between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs, and negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia. Other topics that were covered with more intensity are the issue of Islamic radicalism and Kosovars joining militant and terrorist organizations and forces in Iraq and Syria. These stories are often transmitted from foreign, predominantly Serbian media, and do not offer the perspective and views of people or sources from Kosovo.

Intensive coverage was also noticed during the dispute between Macedonia and Kosovo regarding customs and the import of certain types of food articles in 2013, which caused tension in bilateral relations, and blocking of the border on both sides. Of course, in this regard, pro-government media in Macedonian and Albanian offered quite different perspectives on the dispute, while critical media in both languages attacked governments of artificially creating this issue for the purpose of mobilizing voters with nationalistic views.

Coverage was also somewhat intensive in light of the relatively frequent meetings between politicians from both countries, as well as in the context of minorities – besides in the context of the Albanian community in Macedonia, Macedonian language media sometimes inform on the situation with the Goran minority in Kosovo, which are considered to be Macedonians by all ethnic Macedonian media outlets, politicians and opinion makers, and are portrayed as people that can not fully exercise their rights in Kosovo.

Case study: massive exodus from Kosovo is economy driven, or is Macedonia again under “Kosovar invasion”?

Intensive coverage was noticed in the last several months before the publication of this report on the massive exodus of Kosovars via Serbia and Hungary to Western Europe. In this context, most of the media have portrayed this issue as an exodus caused by economic reasons, disappointment and lack of clear perspective for the people of Kosovo, although in some media, prominence was also given to rumors that it is rather an orchestrated process by the Kosovo government to put pressure on Brussels regarding the status of Kosovo. By sending its reporter to Kosovo to report directly from the spot, daily *Utrinski vesnik* wrote perhaps the most comprehensive piece, covering most of the aspects and providing diversity of opinion regarding this issue.

“The citizens of Kosovo are exhausted by everyday political manipulation and lies, and are disturbed by the sowing of fear of new wars. But even in this human tragedy they cannot get away from the daily dose of speculation - that behind this “escape to victory” stand Kosovo authorities. Allegedly, the plan was to concentrate Albanians in Vojvodina, since after extreme measures

taken toward illegal migrants they would be returned from Germany, Austria, Hungary to their homeland, which according to documents is Serbia, which, on the other hand, does not recognize Kosovo as an independent state. And the exodus would be sending a serious message to Brussels and would improve the positions for the new round of negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina that started a week ago. "It is pure fiction of Serbian propaganda. Look at, let's say, the statements of Vojislav Seselj from the other day. After Serbs stiffened border controls, he said that what is being done is nonsense, that the borders should be intentionally made more permeable so that the moving could be free, in order to reduce the number of Albanians in Kosovo. I also hear thesis that the cause of migration is the growth of oncology diseases due to depleted uranium because of NATO bombing. But, if we really had a sense of what uranium means, we would be Germans, not Balkan," says a bit jokingly editor Sheif Mustafa." ¹⁶

A number of media have also published content based on speculations that Kosovars are buying property, flats and houses in Macedonia, without backing this thesis with sources, facts or other type of evidence, using these theses to frighten ethnic Macedonians with a new population "invasion" of Macedonia from Kosovo. This narrative has been constantly reproduced in the past, especially by media and opinion makers that support the current government and accuse former leadership of social-democrats of giving "150.000 citizenships for Kosovars" during their reign in the 90ties, a thesis that has never been backed up seriously and with evidence. These reports are usually unsigned by an author, and backed with statements from "anonymous" sources. *"The massive migration of Albanians from Kosovo is a cause for many Macedonian portals' claim that Kosovo citizens are massively buying property in Tetovo, Gostivar and in Skopje. In this regard, they are thinking of moving to Macedonia because of the bad economic and political situation in Kosovo. Several real estate agencies confirm that in the past several months there is an increased demand for flats. Those with a deeper pocket do not ask for the price, and buy property in attractive locations, while those that are poorer decide to go for the settlements on the outskirts of cities. Almost 80 percent of the newly built flats in Tetovo and Gostivar are bought by persons from Kosovo. They pay up to 700 euros per square meter. Besides flats, houses are being bought as well, but their price is much higher – said a company from Gostivar that builds flats in the Polog region"* ¹⁷

¹⁶ Naum Kotevski, "They led a war for a state, and now they are massively fleeing it", Utrinski Vesnik, Skopje, 19.02.2015, <http://www.utrinski.mk/?ItemID=1C0AB13B2DD5144883F5346A0A76FB7F>

¹⁷ TV Kanal 5, "citizens of Kosovo are massively buying flats in Skopje, Tetovo and Gostivar", Tv Kanal 5, Skopje, 11.02.2015, http://www.kanal5.com.mk/vesti_detail.asp?ID=61352

On the other hand, other, more professional media, give a different perspective regarding these speculations. *“The claim that Kosovars who leave their country are moving to Macedonia and buying property is an attempt to divert public attention from current events and issues, said political analyst Marcel Bilali, after information that Kosovars are buying properties in western Macedonia massively circulated in public opinion...Also real estate agents and citizens of Tetovo, Gostivar and Kumanovo that were contacted by Plusinfo claim that they don’t have clients from Kosovo who buy real estate, and there is neither a greater movement of foreigners noticed in trading facilities.*

- There are no foreigners, or if you want Kosovars, who buy properties in Gostivar, and there cannot be, because according to national legislation, a foreigner cannot buy real estate in the country. Also, we haven’t registered a citizen of Kosovo seeking an apartment or house to rent. If they would want to settle in Gostivar, Kosovars first would seek for offices to open their business, because many of them know crafts, and then they would buy houses or apartments. There is no such thing - says Agim Stafai, owner of real estate agency “Agimi” from Gostivar.”¹⁸

In Albanian language media, besides the perspective of economic reasons behind the massive flight of Albanians from Kosovo, there are also other ‘theses’. As usual, there are people that believe that behind this exodus is the traditional enemy of Albanians – Serbia. *“The distinguished historian from Kosovo Haki Bajrami believes that the mass flight of Albanians from Kosovo comes as a result of a sophisticated background. According to him, the genesis of this could be prepared, organized and sponsored by the ‘kitchens’ in Belgrade. “Serbia has always been interested in and committed to the emptying of Kosovo from Albanians as much as possible. This Academy and Academics have considered that Albanians could not resist poverty, thus measures to stop employment, education and advancement of Albanians stopped, and this, according to Serbian academics, would pave the way for the displacement of Albanians” – Bajrami stressed among others.”¹⁹*

Reporting on Serbia

Perhaps the most intensive coverage compared to all neighbors is provided on Serbia, which is somehow natural, considering the joint past as

¹⁸ R.I.Manevska, “Who is inventing that Kosovars are moving to western Macedonia?”, Plusinfo, Skopje, 12.02.2015, <http://plusinfo.mk/vest/14696/koj-izmisluva-deka-kosovci-se-doseluvaaat-vo-zapadna-makedonija>

¹⁹ F.Xharra, “Massive fleeing, a conspiracy plan or coincidence?”, Klan.mk, 12.02.2015, <http://www.klan.mk/opinion/shperngulja-masive-plan-konspirativ-apo-rastesi/>

part of one state in the XX century. Cultural, economic and political relations between the two countries remain close, although burdened by several open issues, including the church dispute between Serbian Orthodox Church and Macedonian Orthodox Church, or relations vis-à-vis Albanians.

Media in Macedonia, especially those that produce in the Macedonian language, cover intensively not only Serbia's internal politics, but also the economy, cultural news, lifestyle, music scene, sports etc. The coverage is predominantly neutral or positive, except in cases when it is reported on disputes between Macedonians and Serbs. Lots of content that is being aired on Macedonian TV stations comes from Serbia, for example talent or reality shows. In the online sphere, there is frequent re-publishing or translating of content from Serbian websites, often without publishing the real author, source or giving any credit whatsoever to the original producer of the content. In some of the print media that have an anti-Western editorial policy there is a frequent usage of Serbian experts, politicians and media as sources, especially vis-à-vis the Albanians, or regarding anti European and anti-NATO views.

On the other hand, there are also voices in the media that support Macedonian nationalistic politicians and have a more hard-line Macedonian nationalistic rhetoric and views on Serbia and Serbs. This was especially visible in the beginning of 2015, when several billboards were placed on the streets of Skopje, ordered by VMRO-Narodna Partija (led by former prime minister and former leader of the ruling VMRO-DPMNE, Ljubco Georgievski), that stated: "Stop Serb Assimilation of the Macedonian nation". A dominant part of Macedonian public opinion, regardless of political views, condemned this action as hate speech, although Georgievski's explanation was that his party by this action did not intend to offend the Serbs, but objects to the dominant presence of Serb – produced content in the media and artists on festivals and concerts that are being organized frequently throughout the country, which damages Macedonian culture and identity. Also, in this context, criticism of Serbia is noticed whenever there are examples of Serb institutions and organizations using the acronym 'FYROM', which has happened on several occasions in the past.

For the media in Albanian language, as in the past, Serbia and Serbs remain the biggest enemy of Albanians. The coverage is mainly focused on political aspects, Serbia-Kosovo talks, and the longstanding animosity between the Albanians and Serbs in general, although there are pieces that inform of other aspects of life in Serbia.

Depending on ethnic affiliation, media in Macedonia still offer two completely different perspectives on Serbia and the Serbs. For example, the Macedonian language media almost completely ignore information of

discovering mass graves and bodies of Kosovars killed during the armed conflict and the NATO intervention in 1998 – 1999, while media in the Albanian language tend to overemphasize information that present Serbs as criminals and murderers.

Events that were covered more intensively by media in Macedonia include the 2014 floods for which there were massive actions for humanitarian aid organized in Macedonia, relations of Serbia with the EU, NATO and Russia, talks and relations between Serbia and Kosovo, the issue of the South stream gas pipeline and Serbia's position regarding economic measures of the EU towards Russia. Considerable attention was devoted to the meeting between Albanian PM Rama and his Serbian counterpart Vucic, as well as the drone incident in the football match between the national teams of these countries.

Case study: The game of drones

The incident that happened during the qualifying football match between the national teams of Albania and Serbia again pointed out to two different media realities projected by the media in Albanian and Macedonian languages. While Albanian language media ignored the fact that the flight of the drone with the map of 'Great Albania' is an open provocation and in most of the cases refrained from condemning the act by focusing more on the beating of the Albanian football players and the entrance of the audience on the playing field, the Macedonian language media spoke far more about the drone and the flag, informed on the rumors that the drone has been commanded by the Albanian prime minister's brother Olsi Rama who was in the stadium and that he was arrested by Serbian police (which was later proven not to be true), at the same time ignoring the call of the arena audience to "kill and slay so that the Shiptars won't exist", as well as the entering of the audience on the field and beating of Albanian football players. Voices that expressed less biased opinions could be found in several more liberal and leftist media outlets.

The leading national TV station, *TV Sitel*, while analyzing the event in an unsigned TV story, promotes a thesis that someone perhaps put Serbia and Albania deliberately in the same qualifying group, without knowing basic things such as the longstanding animosity between Albanians and Serbs. *"The incident of the qualifying duel Serbia - Albania is obviously more than just a football story because somebody is using it massively for political promotion. While Serbs have headaches about the decision of the Disciplinary Committee of UEFA, Albanians celebrate the event as a great victory for Greater Albania policy, testified by the celebration in Pristina, Tetovo, Struga, and the mass reception of the Albanian national team in Tirana...It is very dangerous that*

this event evokes nationalist passions within both ethnic groups, something confirmed by incidents in European cities such as Vienna and others. It is bad if provocations of fans are overcome by going to another, unwanted direction. One thing that should be known to everyone, but mostly people from UEFA, is that the intolerance between Albanians and Serbs will never stop, it will smolder as a latent danger and will explode in the first favorable moment, and the consequences can be far-reaching. This is why it is unclear how it was allowed that Serbia and Albania would be in the same qualifying group, deliberately or accidentally?!"²⁰

The question about who flew the drone was also treated intensively by media in the Macedonian language. Several websites published photos of Albanian football fans from Skopje, who allegedly 'took responsibility' for the incident. *"Macedonian Albanians from Skopje, members of the fan group "Smugglers", "took responsibility" for the provocation with the drone, which flew over Partizan's stadium with the flag of 'Greater Albania' during a football match between Serbia and Albania in Belgrade."*²¹

Some prominent ethnic-Macedonian columnists gave different perspectives on the event. Such is the case with the popular movie director Darko Mitrevski, who writes columns for daily Nova Makedonija. In a column written in the Skopje dialect of Macedonian, which was transmitted by other popular websites and received great attention on social networks, although his narration includes a negative stance toward Albanians (and also a bit about Serbs), he offers a different opinion about why and how the incident with the drone was staged, blaming not Albanians and Serbs, but 'someone else' for the incident, condemning both parties of being preys of a staged incident and condemning Macedonians that joined the chants for slaying Albanians.

Look here, I have nothing against Albanians. I also do not have anything for them. I publicly love Germans, Spaniards, Scandinavians and Americans. Up to here, I'm okay. Those that I don't like, I do not like secretly, inside me. At the end, nobody has to know what goes on my nerves intimately. But, it's a fact, Albanians were nowhere on both lists. I do not hate nor love them. It's all the same to me. Why? Well because they didn't try to change my opinion. And this feeling doesn't change when I see their football players all fired up for the flag of Greater Albania, which is something like a sacred relict for them ...But, as a fan

²⁰ TV Sitel, "football and politics, Albanian football players welcomed in Tirana as heroes?", TV Sitel, Skopje, 15.10.2014, <http://www.sitel.com.mk/fudbalot-i-politikata-albanskite-fudbaleri-dochekani-vo-tirana-kako-heroi>

²¹ MKD.mk, "Smugglers from Skopje have been bragging: we drove the drone with the flag of 'Great Albania'", Mkd.mk, 15.10.2014, <http://www.mkd.mk/sport/fudbal/shverceri-od-skopje-se-falele-nie-vo-belgrad-go-vozevme-dronot-so-znameto-na-golema>

of novels about Sherlock Holmes, I can not help it but ask myself the question "Who sewed the flag and put the sign?" Because it's a fact, and it is illogical to me, for Albancheros to send their flag from the roof of the Serbian church in the middle of Belgrade. Not because of other reasons, but because the Srpci would not let them to come even close to the church. And there is no chance for that drone to fly its flight until it arrives in front of RTS cameras (at least I know this, because that it is my craft). And there is no chance that the brother of an Albanian PM to lead that drone without someone finding the remote on him, and without him being stuck to Goli Otok for that....Maybe I'm stupid, but I somehow would say that those that let it fly are those that didn't want for the meeting (between the prime ministers – our remark) to happen. Who they are you find out for yourselves, I am too lazy to elaborate. And I'm equally lazy to see the Albancheros as they protest from Vardar to Ulcinj because it is very possible that the Svrbs have framed them with a trick to which they get fired up by default. Okay, friends, go ahead and get fired up when you are cattle! But, when I hear that my people in all this comic and cheap story joins in the chorus that chants "Kill, slay, so that the Siptar doesn't exist!", then, I have no other choice but to sign this text with two words: Darche the Shiptarche".²²

Albanian language media have taken an almost unanimous stance regarding the drone incident. The flight of the drone and the flag was met with triumphalism, considered to be a great victory for the Albanians everywhere in the region. While reporting on the incident, Albanian language media mostly focused on the audience and the beating of Albanian football players on the field, the hate speech that was produced by Serbian media in the days that followed the game, and finding arguments that would prove Albania as 'the righteous side' in the process over the game in UEFA. After UEFA's decision, prominent media in Albanian language accused UEFA of having double standards in decision making on similar incidents, and that it was biased when punishing Albanian football federation regarding the incident in Belgrade. *"The house of European football, UEFA, finally seems to have double standards in its decision making. Doubts rise again after the events of this Thursday in the Europa League duel between Roma and Feyenord. Dutch fans were outrageous before the match, causing great turmoil in the capital of Italy, causing extensive damage, police officers injured and central squares covered with blood, trash and many damages. And the immediate reaction of UEFA was that there would not be penalties for the Dutch team, since the riots had happened outside the stadium. Now if we make a parallel of all this with the events and decisions of the meeting Serbia-Albania, it can be easily*

²² D. Mitrevski for daily Nova Makeodnija "Darko the Shiptarche", re-published by www.off.net.mk, Skopje, 20.10.2014, <http://off.net.mk/lokalno/razno/shiptarcheto-darko>

*understood that UEFA does not maintain balance. On October 14, 2014 in Belgrade there were 30 thousand Serbian fans on the stadium, while Albanians were only about 70 people, part of the delegation of Albania. However, this did not prevent UEFA to fine the Albanian Football Federation 100,000 Euros and the 'red-blacks' to loose the game on the table, with the only fault found in a drone, which actually, like in the riots in Rome, came from outside the stadium, while the Albanian footballers were attacked precisely on the field by Serbian fans. It is a fact that Albania was punished unfairly, and now doubts arise that Albanians would probably find justice, only if they were Dutch"*²³

However, some journalists and opinion makers produced more moderate views in the Albanian language press. Nazim Rashidi, formerly a journalist of the BBC newsroom in the Albanian language, wrote a column in daily newspaper *Koha*, in which besides focusing on the hate speech of Serbian football fans and the media, he suggests that Albanians should view this event also with self-criticism. *"...But, in the total euphoria caused by this event, which had a global echo and caused media interest that was lesser only than interest on Ebola, we'll have to raise dilemmas about our behavior in the future as well. Many drones will now rise in many arenas; different messages will be given and sent through "modern" forms. But criticism should focus on self-criticism as well. This drone game should not turn into other unworthy "games", contrary of what we say that we are. Provocations will be directed to Albanians as well. So the next challenge is our behavior, in cases when drones will be put on Albanians."*²⁴

ANNEX: Reporting Kumanovo incident

The armed incident in Kumanovo of the 9th of May, in which 8 policemen and 10 armed extremists were killed and many more injured, has undoubtedly been a top subject not only in the media in Macedonia, but also in the region and internationally. Since Kumanovo happened, the media in the country and internationally have been analyzing the causes and the consequences of this situation - who might stand behind this attack that shook the stability not only of Macedonia, but has seriously threatened to destabilize the whole region, in which memories of war are very fresh? Is Macedonia at the verge of a new inter-ethnic conflict?

²³ F.Zylbehari, "UEFA's double standards!!!", TV Alsat M, Skopje, 21.02.2015, <http://alsat-m.tv/News/8004/standardet-e-dyanshme-te-uefa-se>

²⁴ N.Rashidi, "The drone game", *Koha*, Skopje, 17.10.2014, <http://koha.mk/kolumna/31662-loje-dronesh.html>

The media in the country have offered various answers, arguments and thesis on Kumanovo. As expected in almost any political dispute or dilemma in Macedonia, these thesis were also pretty much biased, depending on political or ethnic affiliation. For Kumanovo, there are at least 4 truths. Two of those are to be found in the public opinion discourse articulated in Macedonian language, while the two other 'truths' in Albanian language media and public discourse. But a new quality, rarely seen in this part of the world, has emerged in Macedonia – there is a growing group of citizens (and media), who are united regardless of their language, religious or other differences, whose opinion and pursuit for the truth differs from the usual '4 truths standard'.

Traditionally, within these 'truths', we have seen many lies, speculations, sensationalism, hate speech, especially in the Internet media and on social networks. Starting from information about alleged civilian casualties that were published at the beginning of the action of the police, speculations about the number of casualties on both sides, about the origin and the intention of this group, and ending up with big 'conspiracy theories' about the real background of the incident. And this was not only the case with many media in Macedonia, but also many media from the neighborhood, especially those in Serbian or Albanian language, who have failed the exam of professional journalism once again. Echoes of their sensationalistic reporting and of nationalist rhetoric of politicians and opinion-makers from the neighborhood on the situation in Kumanovo were very strong in Macedonia, and contributed very negatively in the whole situation, enhancing the uncertainty and fear among the citizens.

One of these 'truths' was heavily promoted by pro-government media in Macedonian language. According to this vision of the truth, regardless of heavy casualties on both sides, Kumanovo was portrayed as a successful action of the police to eliminate e group of terrorists that were planning attacks on strategic infrastructure, buildings of state institutions, shopping malls and other public places. The armed extremists were presented as very dangerous - experienced former-UCK fighters, who fought many wars, not only in the Balkans, but also in the Middle East supporting Islamic radicals' groups. According to most of pro-government media and analysts, the whole scenario was 'packed' by the West and implemented by Albanian extremists. Their intentions were known to international community and to Kosovo authorities, Macedonian authorities also had indications of what was being prepared and warned many foreign services and allies of what was about to happen, but nobody reacted. First aim is to assist in the creation of 'Greater Albania'. Also, the destabilization of Macedonia was portrayed as a part of other, bigger geo-strategic interests and games – the Russian "South stream"

gas pipeline which is supposedly going to pass through the country, the new 'cold war' between the West and Russia after the events in Ukraine, were just some of the causes that were mentioned in this regard. Western democracies were accused of trying to bring down by force and violence a government that was "elected legitimately" not more than a year ago, simply just because this government won't sell-out Macedonia's name (in the dispute with Greece) and because it nurtures good relations with Russia and other non-NATO countries. These thesis were frequently backed up with statements and content coming predominantly from Serbian and Russian media and politicians, or by other prominent Euro and NATO skeptics, including some European politicians that represent conservative and right-wing options. The activists and citizens which revived their protests against police brutality (after listening to the conversations of government officials connected to Martin Neshkovski's violent death four years ago that disclose serious wrongdoings and violations of the law in this case), were dubbed 'traitors' and portrayed as people that are weakening the capacities of the police, who instead of fighting in Kumanovo, is tied up protecting institutions from protesters. These labels were also put on the entire opposition. All this was flavored with the traditional hate-speech against Albanians, with prominent pro-government journalists even calling –up for playing a 'second half' of the 'match' against Albanians (with the conflict of 2001 considered to be the 'first half').

The critical media in Macedonian language predominantly portrayed the Kumanovo incident as a 'staged action' with an aim to defocus the attention of the nation from the wire-tapping scandal that is seriously shaking Macedonian government, whose rule, demystified through the conversations disclosed by the opposition, has brought the country into a serious political and security crisis and shattered Macedonia's democracy. The opposition media criticized the police action, which was considered to be ill-planned, resulting in many deaths of policemen, who seem to have been deliberately drawn into a trap. The absence of official statements during the incident day, and then statements of top government officials, including the President in the following days, that they knew about the extremists' group and their intentions caused additional outrage and was considered as another proof that the incident was staged, in order to result in casualties and again bring tensions to interethnic relations, especially now when Macedonians and Albanians seem to be united as never before – against the rule of Gruevski and his collaborators. Critical media and investigative journalists informed about meetings that people from the extremists' group had with people from Macedonia's secret police and the major political parties of Albanians that are in formal or informal coalition with Gruevski over the past months. In

addition, some media disclosed information about French PR expert engaged some months ago by the Government to offer his services in a portfolio called "Le Petite Guerre" (A Small War), which for critical media is another proof that the incident in Kumanovo was a part of a carefully planned scenario by the people in power. If Government knew about the group, its whereabouts and intentions, why wasn't the action planned better, why did it result with so many casualties, especially among the policemen? Why did secret police members meet with people from this group in the past months? Why the police didn't neutralize the group before entering the city and becoming a threat for many civilians? If they wanted to attack strategic infrastructure, institutions or shopping malls, why they did not choose Skopje? How did one of the arrested extremists manage to escape from 25 policemen some days after the bloodbath? Why did Minister Jankulovska lie to the public that the first policemen were killed in the evening, although credible information show that several of them were already killed in the very beginning of the action in the early morning hours? Many questions remain, to which the official story of the Government does not seem to provide answers. In addition, while speaking of other countries and their interests that might be involved in the Kumanovo incident, Russia's sudden interest in Macedonia, after long years of silence, is also considered by critical media as a part of greater international geo-strategic game, however, for critical media it is more likely that Russia's effort and involvement is with the intention to move the attention of the international public and politics away from Ukraine, rather than having to do something with the "South Stream" gas pipeline, that would pass through Turkey, one of most important countries in the NATO.

Media in Albanian language have taken an almost unanimous stance when it comes to considering the Kumanovo incident as staged by Gruevski's government. The inspirers of this action are seen in Belgrade and Moscow, whose desire is to present Albanians as a destabilizing factor in the Balkans, and as allies of Muslim extremists, which might change the attitude of the West towards Albanians. However, media that are under control of the Albanians in power did exclude their patrons from the responsibility and supported the thesis that ethnic-Albanians in office were not aware of the plans of their partner in Government, while critical media considered that Albanian politicians in power were aware of the 'plan' and participated in it, bringing the extremists into a trap that would serve their partner in Government to defocus the attention from the current crisis, and boost up interethnic tensions, which is a favorable environment for both partners in power, having in mind that their discourse has always been dominated by nationalism, and has always produced support from citizens that have been

mobilized in this way for many times in the past. Media in Albanian language also point out to differences of the way in which the state institutions operate whenever Albanians are in question. Would there be such a large scale action by the police in an urban civilian area if the inhabitants were predominantly Macedonian? Why were there state officials (including now ex-Minister of Interior Jankulovska and head of secret police Mijalkov) and media attention only for killed ethnic-Macedonian policemen and their funerals, while the funeral of the ethnic-Albanian policeman who was killed in the action did not receive the same degree of respect or media attention? Also, Albanian-language media have brought forward allegations of disproportionate use of force and heavy weaponry that has destroyed many houses, intimidated and risked the lives of thousands of citizens of Kumanovo. Accusations on inhuman treatment and torturing of arrested members of the extremists group were also very prominent. In addition, many media published unconfirmed information that some of the extremists were killed after they were arrested by the Macedonian police forces.

As one would assume, regardless of the stances for or against the Government, still, many media did not go out of the expected ethnocentric narrative. Macedonians and Albanians now have new martyrs and heroes. They are dead, while funerals, flags, patriotic speeches and statues and monuments that will inevitably be built will be used again to bring more hate and anger among neighbors in the Balkans. But, whatever the truth might be, and whoever wanted and planned for Kumanovo to happen in order to destabilize Macedonia on ethnic grounds, obviously this scenario, quite differently from the past, has failed this time. Thanks to the real heroes, the citizens of Macedonia. Starting with citizens of Kumanovo, who, regardless of their ethnic belonging, showed great solidarity and did not become a prey to the nationalistic discourse or emotions. And this new virus has been spreading lately rapidly among many citizens in the country, who are fed up with their political elites and their media servants that constantly bring misfortune to their people and manipulate with their feelings. The last rally of the opposition, the most visited in the history of the country, where tens of thousands of people gathered regardless of their ethnic belonging, where you could see Albanian, Macedonian and Serbian flags tied together, is a symbolic and practical evidence of this 'new' Macedonia. Despite of the major challenge that Kumanovo has revived once again in Macedonia, it seems that its people are united more than ever against the generators of the evil, which they see in a small circle of politicians currently ruling in Macedonia.

MONTENEGRO:
When neighbors are treated as
“the rest of the world”

Daniela Brkic
media expert, Podgorica

“Gentlemen, what should we do with these portals where many nations are attacked with “all weapons available” – Serbs the most? God forbid this hatred was present during the shameful decade of 90s of the 20th century – a new era! No man would be left alive in Montenegro and Yugoslavia! This is shameful and unprecedented – and for normal people unacceptable!”¹ (User’s comment on web portal article on a tabloid’s insults to Albanians)

“All this bullshit is the product of people and organizations who want to distance the ex-Yu republics from each other as much as possible”² (User’s comment on web portal article on a tabloid’s insults to Croatian President)

National and international issues in Montenegro

Since the conflicts during the 1990s and the breakup of joint states in the Western Balkans, Montenegro has pursued the politics of a multiethnic and multi-religious state. It has recognized Kosovo independence from Serbia, and kept good relations with neighboring countries, with some open questions such as the state border with Croatia, but without conflicting positions. Montenegro has enjoyed this image also in the international community. In its last Progress Report on Montenegro, the European Commission states, “Montenegro continues to play an active role in regional cooperation and maintains good relations with the neighboring enlargement countries and EU Member States. (...) Regional cooperation and good neighborly relations form an essential part of Montenegro’s process of moving towards the EU”.³

¹ Reader’s comment posted on article „MSS: „Šiptarska svinjarija“ obilježila prethodni period, Analitika najdosljednije navodila izvore”, Portal Analitika, 26.12.2014, See <http://portalanalitika.me/clanak/171409/mss-siptarska-svinjarija-obiljezila-prethodni-period-analitika-najdosljednije-navodila-izvore>, (accessed on January 16th 2015) /Gospodo, a što će mo sa ovim....portalima-đe se bije iz “svijeh oružija”-po mnogim nacijama-a najviše po Srbima? Ne daj bože da je ovoliko bilo mržnje 90.sramnih crnogorskih godina-pasanoga XX vijeka-nove ere! Niđe čeljadeta nebi ostalo na prostorima Crne Gore i Jugoslavije! Sramno i neponovljivo-za normalne ljude nevatljivo! (27. 12. 2014 - 11:00)/

² Reader’s comment posted on article „Short-lived apology – Informer hit Grabar Kitarovic again”, Vijesti portal, 25.1.2015, See <http://www.vijesti.me/svijet/izvinjenje-kratkog-daha-informer-opet-po-grabar-kitarovic-815547> (accessed on January 16th 2015) / Sve ove bljuvotine su proizvod ljudi i organizacija koji zele da se republike ex YU sto vise udalje jedna od druge./

³ European Commission, Montenegro Progress Report, October 2014. See http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20141008-montenegro-progress-report_en.pdf (accessed on 6 February 2015.)

However, reality sometimes proves different. The official visit of Kosovo Foreign Minister Hashim Thaci on January 16th 2015 provoked street demonstrations,⁴ incidents in the football match between Albania and Serbia in Belgrade on October 14th 2015 triggered reactions in Montenegro in the form of brawls between students, stoning of the Albanian Embassy in Podgorica, hate speech in one daily tabloid and insults in users' comments in online media.

Montenegrin society, according to the 2011 Census, consists on 29% of Serbs, 9% of Bosniaks, 5% of Albanians, 3% of Muslims and 1% of Croats. The "national" question still poses a problem, because the status of minority groups is not precisely defined. The Constitution of Montenegro defines the rights of minority people, but it doesn't say who they are. An open question remains whether Serbs who account for almost one third of population can be treated as minority? Pro-Serb political parties in Montenegro claim that they cannot.

To understand this situation, it is necessary to say that there are strong divisions in the Montenegrin society reaching back to the independence referendum in 2006, dividing the population into supporters of sovereignty and those who opted for the State union with Serbia. The current political environment more or less mirrors the same national division, where the ruling majority is opposed mainly by pro-Serbian parties. Nationalistic statements are easily flared up since there are several open political debates on important issues of national identity, such as national symbols, treatment of the Montenegrin versus Serbian languages in schools and the status of Montenegrin vs. Serbian Orthodox church.

Media in Montenegro

Twenty TV stations (6 with national coverage), five daily papers, around 40 radio stations and several weeklies do not correspond either to the Montenegrin population of somewhat over 600 thousand people or the economic strength of the country. Dailies' circulation is in decline in recent years as is the marketing revenue of TV stations, leaving thus majority of media in financial troubles. Television is still the most influential media, with significant development of online media in recent years.

For the past several years, the highest audience share is held by three TV stations: privately-owned, news-focused TV Vijesti, PBS TVCG and TV PINK M,

⁴ "Hundreds demonstrate in Montenegro against first visit by Kosovo foreign minister", Fox news, 16th January 2015. See <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/01/16/hundreds-demonstrate-in-montenegro-against-first-visit-by-kosovo-foreign/> (accessed on February 6th)

which is a part of a Serbian media network. The entrance to the Montenegrin market of Serbia based TV Prva provided additional competition to the market.

When it comes to print media, two major dailies, Vijesti and Dan have been unrivaled leaders for more than a decade. There is no precise data on the number of copies sold, but the highest circulation is assigned to Dan. According to the research of Ipsos strategic marketing agency⁵, the most influential Montenegrin daily is Vijesti, which enjoys the confidence of 45% of public. It is followed by Dan with 20% of confidence, Pobjeda with 10% and Dnevne novine with 5%. Two daily papers from Serbia – Blic and tabloid Informer have Montenegrin editions.

The online media market started developing intensively since 2009. Currently, the most visited news portals are Café del Montenegro (www.cdm.me), the website of daily Vijesti (www.vijesti.me) and Analitika (www.portalanalitika.me). According to information obtained from management of these two portals, the average number of daily visits amounts to 50,000 in the case of CDM and 110,000 in the case of Vijesti. The newest online edition that is rapidly gaining audience is the portal of the public broadcasting service, Radio-Television of Montenegro (www.rtcg.me), which was launched in January 2013.

The editorial approach and the level of professional journalistic standards vary significantly from one media to another. But besides economic pressures, the highly politicized and divided media environment remains a fertile ground for biased journalism, something that has also been noted in Montenegro's EU accession Progress Reports. Sensationalistic and sometimes offensive reporting against the hostile rhetoric of state officials addressed toward the media deteriorated the general professional image of Montenegrin media, which was noted also in the 2014 report of Freedom house⁶ which put Montenegro four positions lower in comparison to the previous year (78. Out of 197.)

Media in Montenegro are generally characterized by polarization in those who use the attribute "independent" and who take a critical approach to the government and those who stand for media close to the Government of Milo Djukanovic. In recent years, there is a strong public confrontation between the first (Vijesti, Dan and Monitor) and the rest of local media. Despite that, Montenegrin media have generally respected basic professional standards, with occasional deviations in Vijesti and Dan's reporting. Breaches of good practice became more frequent with new editorial concept of the opposing party - then state owned Pobjeda, headed by Srdjan Kusovac who later became Government's Chief Information officer. The situation culminated with the entrance to the market of Serbian tabloid Informer.

⁵ Ipsos.me

⁶ See <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2014#.VOG7ei4YGh4>

Neighbors' place in the media

Reports from neighboring countries are treated in daily press as world news belonging to related paper sections, except in the case of Serbia. Ties between the two countries, which left the state union only 8 years ago, are still strong. One of the most important dailies Dan, has a special section dedicated to current news from Serbia. Besides, in recent years, Montenegro's media market has seen the entrance of several media from Serbia. One of them is another daily Blic, and tabloid daily Informer.

The TV market follows a similar pattern. In central news shows, neighbors are treated as "the rest of the world" when it comes to their current affairs. Exceptions include a regional news program in TV Pink M, and a regional talk show in TV Vijesti.

The main web news portals have subsections devoted to regional news in the section of world news.

Neighbors in (low) numbers

To illustrate the main trends in reporting news from neighboring countries, an analysis of coverage in 5 dailies was conducted during the first week of December 2014. The analysis showed that the total number of articles covering news from outside Montenegro was 333, out of which almost half of them (161) referred to Balkan countries. The following list gives the number of articles related to individual countries:

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of articles</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Serbia	109	68%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	22	14%
Croatia	12	7%
Kosovo	7	4%
Macedonia	5	3%
Turkey	4	2%
Slovenia	1	1%
Greece	1	1%
Albania	0	0%

Table 1 Countries covered in articles in Montenegrin dailies from 1-7th December 2014.

As may be seen, Serbia occupies the important place in coverage of daily news from the region in the Montenegrin media, with BiH and Croatia, in distant second and third place. The rest of the region is only rarely mentioned in the press.

The Serbian political scene is present in Montenegrin media through branches of Serbian media outlets and through the second largest daily Dan, regarded as “pro Serbian” media, which supported the state union of Montenegro and Serbia, and which kept the same editorial policy after Montenegro regained its independence. Their reporting was criticized by self-regulation bodies from the start⁷ for being biased and similar patterns can be found in their reporting on the countries of the region. Thus, Kosovo is treated as Serbia; most of the articles referring to Bosnia and Herzegovina focus on Republika Srpska, or the treatment of Serbs in BiH. On the other hand, the most influential daily Vijesti, had only 9 articles referring to the region in the selected week.

Although the numbers might seem considerably big in reporting regional issues, the efforts invested in informing the public on neighboring countries current affairs are very small. Taking into consideration the size of the Montenegrin media market and consequently, the financial power of these media outlets, they do not maintain correspondents’ networks. For the major part, the only role of media in Montenegro is simply the selection of information offered by news agencies or regional media. Almost half of the analyzed articles in daily press are signed by agencies or other media outlets. As the analysis shows, even those articles that are signed by journalists’ initials have other media’s reports as their source.

Articled signed by news agency/other media	48%
Article signed by journalist	42%
Article is not signed	11%

Table 2 Authors of articles

Other media as source of information	53%
Clearly stated source of information	38%
No source of information	9%

Table 3 Sources of information in articles signed by journalists

⁷ www.medijskisavjet.me

In the selection of regional topics, Montenegrin dailies differ considerably. Analysis showed that out of 161 articles, 70 percent of them were published in one daily only, while the rest was covered by two or more dailies.

Internal politics	32%
Crimes and accidents	15%
Diplomatic visits/meetings	12%
Official bilateral dialogue	9%
International authorities' comments on the region	7%
Economy	7%
"Real life" topics	6%
"Kosovo" issue	6%
War crimes	4%
Minorities issues	2%

Table 4 Topics

When talking about the region, five Montenegrin dailies mostly talked about relations in the political scenes of the countries that the articles referred to. Most of these articles were published in daily Dan and especially the local branch of Serbian daily Blic. These reports, however, do not have significant influence on the Montenegrin public since the circulation of this daily is less than 1000 copies.

When it comes to other countries from the region, political news were confined to impartial short news on elections, or major government decisions.

The second highest place belongs to reports on crimes, arrests and incidents, which follow the common editorial policy of Montenegrin media, turning to sensationalism in their battle for financial survival. Those stories generally do not bring the public closer to their neighbors, but simply feed their curiosity and wish to be shocked or moved.

The third most common topics are reports from official visit of regional leaders to one another's countries or diplomatic meetings. Those reports bear the messages of a joint European future, good neighborly relations and mutual respect, but almost the same in number are reports containing publicly stated messages of one official or other, which are often provoking or conflict-mongering. Those topics include open questions of Kosovo status between Serbia and Kosovo's authorities, the Croatian influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina or differing attitudes between Turkey and Greece over international issues. Those reports tend to raise tensions, additionally

highlighting the confrontational weight of the reported statements. The following photo presenting Serbian Minister of labor and Croatian Prime minister illustrates the statement of the Serbian official saying that the Croatian Prime minister would miss a historical chance if he didn't go to the Belgrade summit.



Picture 1 Article illustration. "Milanović propušta istorijsku priliku", Dan, 1.12.2014.

Economy is treated only through macroeconomic data and potential regional projects driven by "third" parties. Everyday topics are becoming interesting for the media only when they are part of larger catastrophes such as floods and power outages. For the whole monitored week, only one quote of a "common citizen" was quoted.

Although, for the most part, reports that neutral toward topics covered (68%) and negative toward them (27%) outnumber positive ones (5%), when cross-referenced with individual countries, Kosovo was only represented through disputes with Serbia and the treatment of their citizens for links with terrorism, and Bosnia through war and other crimes and national disputes of its constituting peoples.

When lack of information is not the worst scenario

The question of whether we have left national hatred behind is easily opened with sporadic incidents that fuel media columns. Following the incident in the football match between Serbia and Albania in Belgrade

on October 15, provoked by a drone aircraft carrying the flag of “Greater Albania” showing Albanian territorial aspirations, the Montenegrin edition of daily tabloid *Informer* published open racist comments about Albanians. In the front page of the Montenegrin edition of the daily newspaper called Albanians “Shiptari”- a derogatory and offensive term. The same issue also reported on a fight among pupils in a Montenegrin-Albanian high school in the capital Podgorica that was connected to the football match.

The editor-in-chief of the Montenegrin editions of the Belgrade-based paper, Novak Uskokovic, was criminally charged by prosecution for violating the reputation of minority people.⁸ Charges against the newspaper were filed by Albanian leaders in Montenegro.

After condemnation of its reporting style from the Montenegrin public, *Informer* issued an apology, claiming that it never intended to offend “citizens of Albanian origin who have lived for centuries in Montenegro”. But politicians representing ethnic Albanians - who make up about five per cent of the country’s population - said the newspaper had crossed a red line.

The distribution of different published content of this tabloid has been banned by courts several times in the last six months, due to the vulgar articles that brutally attacked one of the civic activists in Montenegro, showing pornographic images which allegedly represent the lady activist.

The paper, however, did not stop this practice. On January 17th, the tabloid published pornographic content on the front page of both Serbian and Montenegrin edition, asserting the images showed Croatia’s president-elect, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic. The paper’s editor in chief, Dragan Vucicevic, subsequently said “an error” had been made and apologized.

The Serbian Ministry of Culture and Information has condemned a tabloid for publishing this content and announced they would press minor charges against the *Informer* newspaper’s “responsible person.” However, the ministry showed more faith in public. “The fact that *Informer* admitted to making a mistake should represent a turning point, after which the entire public scene will finally see an end to the publishing of such media content,” the statement said.⁹

⁸ “The defendant [Uskokovic] is charged with publicly exposing minority people who live in Montenegro to mockery when in October 2014, as a responsible person, he approved disparaging headlines in two newspaper issues,” the prosecution said in a statement. Montenegro: Tabloid indicted for hate speech, *Media Freedom*, 2,12,2014. See <http://mediafreedom.usahidi.com/reports/view/594> (accessed on February 6th 2015)

⁹ Tabloid attributes pornographic material to Croat president, *B92*, 19.01.2015, http://www.b92.net/eng/news/crimes.php?yyyy=2015&mm=01&dd=19&nav_id=92909 (accessed on February 4th 2015)

Montenegro, however, turned to more severe measures. The previous offences of this paper drew condemnations by senior state officials, EU authorities¹⁰ and civic activists. Judging by the readers' comments on main web news portals – the public has done the same. One of those comments states: “when someone comments on content published by Informer’s, then he is not better than Informer. All this bullshit is the product of people and organizations who want to distance the ex-Yu republics from each other as much as possible”.¹¹

The case of Informer has provoked some more serious actions. Opposition parties in the Montenegrin Parliament filed the draft amendments to the Law on media, requesting libel to be criminalized again, claiming that the Montenegrin society was not ready for decriminalization of media offences, nor has it installed efficient mechanisms for media content regulation.

Besides Informer, which presents a blatant exception among the print media, other media breaches of professional standards in reporting on other nationalities are rare. Local NGO Human Rights Action in its latest report on Monitoring of journalistic self-regulatory bodies¹², however, noted a number of examples of violations of the Principle no. 5 of the Montenegrin Code of Journalists¹³ where media stated nationality of a person suspected of a crime, i.e. highlighting this fact in the news title without any professional reason. Such indications intentionally or unintentionally suggest to the public that someone’s nationality is of importance for alleged wrongdoing by that person, which is in complete contradiction with the Code and it may only contribute to the deepening of stereotypes and incitement of hatred.

Another potential problem in efforts of reconciliation of past conflicts in the region arose with the development of online media. This still poorly regulated sphere¹⁴ opened a new niche for foul language and even hate

¹⁰ “The European Union will accept no deviation from European Union standards on freedom of expression and media on the part of countries aspiring to join the EU. However, the freedom of media can also be threatened by the disrespect of professional and ethical standards.” Press release, DEUMNE, 19 June 2014. <http://www.delmne.ec.europa.eu/code/navigate.php?Id=2683> (accessed on February 6th 2015)

¹¹ slusalac 25.1.2015 05:16: Kada neko komentariše sta je objavio informrer”,onda je taj list u najmanju ruku isti.Sve ove bljuvotine su proizvod ljudi i organizacija koji zele da se republike ex YU sto vise udalje jedna od druge. <http://www.vijesti.me/svijet/izvinjenje-kratkog-daha-informer-opet-po-grabar-kitarovic-815547>

¹² One’s race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation and family status will be mentioned by a journalist only if that is necessary for the information. Principle No. 5, Code of Montenegrin Journalists

¹³ MONITORING OF JOURNALISTIC SELF-REGULATORY BODIES IN MONTENEGRO, HRA, September 2014, See <http://www.hracion.org/wp-content/uploads/Monitoring-of-Journalistic-Self-Regulatory-Body-4-report.pdf> (accessed on February 2nd 2015)

¹⁴ Media Law does not contain special provisions on online media, nor the Code of Montenegrin journalists. One of the unresolved issues is that of responsibility of online media for user generated content (UGC).

speech. Although the rise of professional standards in traditional media is keeping hate speech at bay when it comes to primary content of online media, the situation is somewhat different when it comes to blogs of journalists, editorial comments or citizens' news-related blogs, and it drastically degrades when it comes to user generated content (UGC). The reports on journalists' ethical code breaches produced by the Media Self-Regulation Council from the period of April 2012 to September 2014¹⁵ identified abusive speech in UGC on news portals as one of the major problems in media ethics. Such comments are written anonymously and, for the most part, are being deleted by web-site administrators, when observed, but with certain delays. The majority of comments that contain abusive language, insults and hate speech refer to deep interethnic division in Montenegro between Serbs and Montenegrins and homophobic statements toward the gay community, but other nationalities are not exempted. In its latest report¹⁶ on monitoring of media compliance with the Code of Montenegrin journalists, HRA noted 7 such cases in the period from March to September 2014. For example, the article saying that Croats have planted flowers in the colors of their national flag in Jasenovac, Memorial site build in the place of former World War II concentration camp established by the authorities of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) had a comment saying "Yeaah, it's OK when Croats do it... the most genocidal nation in the Balkans ... Hitler's stable boys and servants..."¹⁷

Why is this happening if the majority of us are not satisfied?

What numbers show, the public feels. Interviews with civic sector, representatives of minorities without exception confirm that the Montenegrin public is not sufficiently, nor adequately informed with developments in neighboring countries.

Dritan Abazovic, Member of Parliament, and member of the Albanian minority in Montenegro, believes¹⁸ that people in Montenegro can be informed on neighbors only if they invest personal efforts in following regional TV stations programs or web news portals, since the local media do not have any systematic approach in informing the public on regional trends. Occasional articles or TV news are all they can get, says Abazovic. He believes

¹⁵ <http://medijskisavjet.me>

¹⁶ MONITORING OF JOURNALISTIC SELF-REGULATORY BODIES IN MONTENEGRO, Ibid

¹⁷ /"Moze mozeeee kad je u Rvatskom izdanju... Najgenocidnija nacija na balkanu..., Hitlerovi konjusari i sluge..."/, CdM, 4.jun, "U Jasenovcu posadili cvijeće u bojama šahovnice u obliku ustaškog simbola")

¹⁸ Interview with Dritan Abazovic, Member of the Parliament, Podgorica, 27 January 2015.

that the reason why media are not focusing on topics of reconciliation of ex Yugoslavian countries is that reconciliation is not in line with certain media's interest that are pushing for national discord. "The media have been talking for days about the incident in the football match between Serbia and Albania. And if you asked me to recall an opposite, positive example in media, I could hardly think of any," says Abazovic. He believes that nationalistic hatred has not been eradicated from the media rhetoric. Instead, it has been kept in check, and leashed out in controlled dosages, according to political needs of power centers that are trying to keep current relations on the field of nationalistic battle trenches, and that goes for all countries in the region.

Tea Gorjanc Prelevic, managing director of NGO Human Rights Action, which has been monitoring media compliance with the Code of Montenegrin Journalists for several years, agrees¹⁹ that Montenegrin media do not report enough on regional topics, and that the public lacks more comparative accounts of Montenegro to neighboring countries. The media have generally contributed to reconciliation in the region and as a good example, Gorjanc Prelevic mentions the case of reporting on the initiative for the establishment of the Regional Commission for War Crimes (REKOM). However, individual examples of forced sensationalism in media and their irrational approach to this subject are causing damage to positive efforts of mainstream media. Such sporadic examples, such as the one of tabloid *Informer*, force us to believe that nationalistic hatred is patiently waiting to burst out at the smallest spark, waking the nationalism and making dark passions overrule reason. This is especially evident in web portals and users' comments that can be found there.

Halil Dukovic, Member of the Parliament from the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists, and representative of urban municipality Tuzi with major Albanian population, agrees²⁰ that the Montenegrin public is only partially informed on current affairs in neighboring countries, and most often in a sensationalistic manner with media focus on negative social phenomena. Dukovic concludes that such media cannot significantly contribute to reconciliation. As an argument why this is the case, Dukovic states the example of media reporting on the incidents in the football match between Serbia and Albania, where media picked sides, and identified the culprits according to their inclinations. He also believes that we haven't managed to eradicate nationalistic hate speech from media, because there are still media outlets whose aim is to raise the ratings and circulation numbers by smearing a person, catering thus to audience's curiosity. All this is possible,

¹⁹ Interview Tea Gorjanc Prelevic, Podgorica, 27 January 2015

²⁰ Interview with Halil Dukovic, Member of the Parliament, Podgorica, 28 January 2015.

says Dukovic, because regulatory and self-regulatory bodies are still not fulfilling their intended purpose.

The *Secretary of the Media Self-Regulation Council* (MSS) Ranko Vujovic, who is monitoring the work of local media for several years, on the other hand, believes²¹ that regional topics are not sufficiently covered by Montenegrin media. As a reason for this situation he brings forward the fact that domestic media outlets have a limited number of reporters and the high cost of reporting from outside Montenegro. That is why almost none of the active media outlets have regional correspondents and instead they leave this kind of information for the public to hear through programs on regional TV stations, present in the Montenegrin media market through cable distribution networks.

Abazovic also believes that Montenegrin minorities are not getting enough media attention, and when they do, those reports usually have negative connotations. Affirmation of the coexistence of the life of Montenegrin people and a realistic approach to problems of national minorities is modestly present in the media, says Abazovic, - the problem which he assigns to insufficient efforts that the media make and the unattractiveness of the topics in current media practices and scope of their interests.

On the other hand, Vujovic, states that topics of interest for national minorities in Montenegro are sufficiently present in the media. He point out that the state is additionally financing minority media through the work of the Fund for the Protection and Realization of Minority Rights to which it assigns 0,15% of the state budget²². Vujovic also says that in most Montenegrin media outlets there are no stereotypes in reporting on minority members.

Dukovic, who comes from Tuzi, a subdivision of Podgorica municipality with major Albanian population, however, disagrees. He says that mainstream media do create stereotypes in reporting which come from poor knowledge of cultural, social and economic differences. Those stereotypes are mainly negative ones – representing minorities as part of the population who live in difficult position in underdeveloped areas, but without expressing the concern or wish to open the question of their faster development.

Another reason for dissatisfaction is, as Dukovic states, the selection of topics related to the life of minorities in Montenegro. Media are inclined, he adds, to give too much attention to political positioning of minority parties

²¹ Interview with Ranko Vujovic, Secretary of Media Self-Regulation Council, Podgorica, 27 January 2015.

²² The Law on Rights and Freedoms of Minorities, Official Gazette of the Republic of Montenegro no 31/6, 2006), Article 36 and 36a

and their relations with governing structures, which only illustrates how Montenegrin media are politically predetermined.

Gorjanc Prelevic however adds that the minorities themselves are not active enough in attracting media attention, but, nevertheless, the public interest in addressing these topics is not recognized by media either.

Conclusion

For the past decade, media have generally contributed to the reconciliation of nationalistic conflicts in the region. The opening of the media market to regional TV stations, availability of online news sources, but also the general rise of professional standards have laid a strong foundation for improvement. Although mainstream media have moved forward from the warmongering rhetoric of the 1990s in reporting on regional relations, efforts invested in bringing them closer, as a next logical step, have not been invested sufficiently. The most positive contents in mainstream print media are those coming from European or world leaders supporting the efforts of all of our countries to join the European Union and share their common values. Where media fail to make a bridge between nations is on the man-to-man level. 80 percent of all articles are reports from staged events or pseudo-events, press releases or official statement. And when not reporting on “real” events, then media are more inclined to manipulate with material, picking through content and aligning it with their editorial policies.

Occasional deviations from the main positive trend with outbursts of nationalistic insults in certain media open the more serious question why hatred is so easily drawn to the surface? Have we given our maximum by sustaining ourselves from negative outbursts and by keeping quiet? Is there a real lack of interest from our audiences?

The internet has rejected this. The number of posted comments shows that public interest exists, but it also proved that it needs to be properly fed. On the one hand, poor traditional media reports are being supplemented by audiences themselves, but on the other hand the openness of information and anonymity on the Internet have also given space to malicious and hatred instigating voices. If we add to this context not fully functional media regulation and self-regulation, it is more likely that this push-and-pull situation between traditional media and online community will be solved by mechanisms driven by both market conditions and audience response. Fortunately, the audience in Montenegro, susceptible to media provocations toward nationalism, is also ready to punish the same “errors” made by media themselves. If the same fortune continues to serve us, the same force in the

audience, fed up with sensationalism, will demand more quality reporting, and thus change editorial objectives in their efforts to reach higher ratings and circulations.

ANNEX: Reporting Kumanovo incident

The Kumanovo events of May 8 occupied the cover pages of all Montenegrin daily papers, web portals and central TV news headlines. Reports in mainstream media predominantly kept to regional media reports (Macedonian and Kosovar), as well as the reports released from Serbian media such as Tanjug, Radio Television of Serbia (RTS), and B92, which is a common practice of Montenegrin media when reporting on events abroad. The reports were generally unbiased, factual and properly sourced, except for the tabloids that tried to blow the events out of proportion with a dosage of dangerous war-mongering headlines. In the follow-up of the Kumanovo attack, the media picture started to diversify through different comments, editorials and interviews as well as user-generated comments in web portals. Despite the efforts of mainstream media to tag the events as unacceptable disregardful of any political interest, users' comments in web media showed that events like this unmistakably trigger the existing divisions ready to be flared up with the smallest incident.

Until the very attack on May 9, media reports presented only compilations of regional media reports, wishfully aligned to parallel Montenegrin social circumstances. For example, daily Dan, known for its support to the local political opposition, represented the protest in Skopje as the "Macedonian spring", and "the citizens' protest in Skopje as the announcement of hot May". Only once, however, had the protest appeared in the cover pages of daily papers in the period prior to May 9.

The attack on May 9 was placed among the main news in all Montenegrin media. Central TV news placed it in headlines and all daily papers the following day had it on their cover pages. The coverage of the event was, however, factual but sterile. Compiled reports from regional media were lacking both context and deeper understanding of the situation. Even when it comes to facts, the media showed little effort to provide the best possible information. Thus, in the morning of May 10, reading through daily papers, readers in Montenegro were faced with a jumble of facts. Differences of information ranged from the number of casualties (Dan, 10.5.2015, p. 16 "Three policemen killed, terrorists surrendered", Pobjeda, 10.5.2015, p. 8 "Five policemen victims of terrorist attack in Kumanovo"), to the wording – "terrorists" vs. "armed group" and selection of sources. All reports strongly relied on Macedonian

media, with respect to minimum professional standards on sourcing. Other sources varied from Kosovo officials, to Serbian statesmen and U.S. diplomats. When it comes to the local touch to media coverage, only few media tried to shed more light on the unfortunate events. Thus, daily Pobjeda published an interview with a Serbian analyst saying that there is no reason to fear that Kumanovo events may affect Montenegro, and daily Vijesti gave an editorial blog titled “Macedonia did not deserve this”, criticizing both domestic and international politics that has led to the Kumanovo event. This paper has generally taken a “human” aspect in reporting on the attack, representing it primarily as a tragedy.

On the other hand, tabloids such as “Informer” bombed the public with biased, arbitrary reporting with a sole aim of being sensational and shocking the public. The cover pages read as follows: “War directed by America”, 11.5.2015, “Strictly confidential: Albanian infernal plan: After Macedonia, they’ll make chaos in Serbia, Republika Srpska and Montenegro”, 12.5.2015.

The topic remained in the headlines in the following days as well. Montenegrin media tried to explain the motives behind the attack. Mostly through interviews with political analysts from the region and local Albanian politicians the media discussed the threat of “Greater Albania”, the idea they pinpointed as the motive for the attack. The media offered arguments explaining the political situation in Macedonia, their relations with Albania and ethnic relations, the standpoints of foreign actors, but more than sympathizing with victims of such circumstances in their Balkan neighbor’s backyard, the Montenegrin public rather expressed their own misgivings and fears. The reports on Kumanovo events from May 9 and 10 for example, in the Vijesti news portal, generated a record of hundreds of users comments. This was not only an indicator of strong interest within the public for the events described in those reports, but also an illustration of our intertwined reality. Users’ discussions opened topics such as NATO integration and their role in the region, position of Kosovo, Albanian minority in Montenegro and constantly the burning question of Montenegro’s relations with Serbia that is still polarizing Montenegrin society.

SERBIA:
Tabloids and comments sections
spread stereotypes and hate
speech like in war times

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Instead of an introduction

This analysis of stereotypes and hate speech about neighbors in Serbian media has a special meaning for me. It is being done exactly two decades after the beginning of a similar research project, under the name “Balkan Neighbors”, in which I participated with great pleasure as an analyst from Serbia together with colleagues from six other Balkan states (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Romania and Turkey). For more than five years in the second half of the 1990s, we were monitoring several national dailies and weeklies using mostly the method of qualitative content analysis. We tried to find out and present in our analyses – published in English at that time by the project coordinator Access from Sofia – the images of Balkan nations and national minorities that the print media of each of these seven countries used to create and spread. By documenting and exposing to criticism the worst stereotypes and examples of hate speech, we hoped we could contribute to the much needed improvement of professional journalistic standards in the Balkans. In the midst of a decade of post-Yugoslav wars, we also hoped that our effort could result in the general improvement of inter-ethnic and inter-state relations in our region.

Twenty years later, it is perfectly clear – and equally depressing – that little of these ambitious expectations has been realized in the meantime. Wars stopped, for sure, but were not replaced with full-fledged cooperation. Nationalism has regained strength in peaceful times, not only because of failed post-communist transitions and the current economic crisis. High levels of distrust, ethnic intolerance and hatred have resurfaced throughout the region, and their main instrument has not changed – it is the media that, in many respects, seem worse than they used to be two decades ago. But, although media have remained the main tool for the dissemination of stereotypes and hate speech, as in war times, many things have changed in the ways media function. The whole context in which they operate today in the Balkans seems to be quite different, too.

My intention in this paper is to explore these novelties in the case of Serbia, and to show the main new trends in the representation of Serbia's neighbors in Serbian media, using the most important examples from 2014 and 2015.

New political context

We should start with the description of the most obvious changes that Serbia and its media scene have gone through during the last twenty years. The finding, however, has the form of a paradox: although Serbia is not waging wars now and although most of its media are private, they are not independent and they use too many stereotypes and too much hate speech in presenting neighboring nations. Why this is so is the question this paper will try to answer in the following pages.

Back in the 1990s, Serbia was almost constantly in a state of war. In the first part of that decade it was engaged in military conflicts with Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and towards its end the conflict with Kosovar Albanians led Serbia to war with NATO. For its role in post-Yugoslav wars Serbia was repeatedly punished by UN and EU sanctions, as one of the world's "outcasts". Rebuilding relations with its neighbors took many years and this process of reconciliation is far from being finished, although a good part of the road has been passed, and many positive results have been achieved. The region has received valuable help in this endeavor from the world's leading powers and from international organizations.

EU integration of the Balkan states was of special significance in this context. It offered a common framework for internal legal, political and economic reforms as the first goal that could be shared by literally all states in the region. It also imposed the duty of regional cooperation, and the region is supposed now to slowly begin to look like a small, "Balkan EU in the making". Because of many non-standard EU demands it had to comply with in exchange for progress in EU integration, it's been all but easy for Serbia to advance along this path. But, it made it, despite problems, resistance and hesitation. The two biggest obstacles on the way to EU membership and reconciliation with neighbors were processing the indicted for war crimes in the previous decade, and the current normalization of relations with Kosovo whose unilateral secession from 2008 Serbia does not want to recognize. For its readiness to cooperate in these issues and to offer sensitive and considerable concessions, Serbia was rewarded with the right to begin accession negotiations with the EU in January 2014.

The Europeanization of the country did not go hand in hand with the eradication of stereotypes and hate speech towards neighbors, however. They have survived and even strengthened lately despite a complete political domination of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and its leader Aleksandar Vucic, whose official program is to get Serbia to the EU and to reconcile with neighbors. Current high levels of nationalism in the media might seem particularly strange if one knows that Prime Minister Vucic and Serbia's

President Tomislav Nikolic left an extremely chauvinist Serbian Radical Party in 2008, opting for a pro-European approach. Equally important is the fact that since the latest Parliamentary elections in 2012 nationalistic parties have not been represented in the Serbian Assembly: literally all MPs are officially pro-European. Last but not least, the incumbent Government, led by former nationalists, did much more in normalizing relations with Kosovo than its predecessors, most notably with the so-called Brussels agreement from April 2013.

So, if the government and the parliament of Serbia are officially against nationalism, and if the government at the same time has unprecedented influence on media, how come nationalism is so dominant in the media? In order to clarify this, we need to go back to the 1990s once again, to compare then and now and to identify the main differences. Twenty years ago, Serbia had a completely divided media scene, with one half consisting of the state-owned media that were completely controlled by Slobodan Milosevic's regime, and with the other half of media outlets, mostly private ones, being able to remain independent from the regime. The division corresponded to the division of then Serbian society: the "first Serbia" supported Milosevic and relied on "his" media, while the "second Serbia" opposed Milosevic until it finally triumphed against him in 2000 and it consisted of people who used to read, listen to, watch and also support independent media. The division resulted in completely opposite ways of reporting: state media used hate speech and stereotypes when they presented the neighbors and independent media didn't.

Nothing of this kind exists now: most media are in private hands and many of them are the main source of nationalism, although they are under various forms of indirect control of the government whose practical actions include many attempts of reconciliation with neighbors (Kosovo, Bosnia, Croatia...). Several explanations were offered for this seemingly strange and paradoxical situation. Some people argue that the pro-European stance of the Serbian Government, but also of the Serbian society as a whole, is just a façade behind which mighty nationalism from the past has survived and is flourishing again, although often in disguised forms. Others believe that nationalism in the media is the "weapon of last resort" of the Government, which always stays "on hold" and can be conveniently activated when the power holders deem it useful for their interests. The third explanation might be that the level of nationalism in Serbian society is so high, and most likely even strengthened lately by the current economic crisis, that it operates on its own, without any command structure or guidance.

I believe the combination of all three explanations is at work in Serbia now. As far as the Government is concerned, it is interested, first and foremost,

in as complete control over media as it can get, with the aim of silencing all possible competing political alternatives. With brutal and uncompromising attacks on the opposition in the media in previous months, it has practically achieved this main goal: the opposition in Serbia is on the verge of extinction, and with no voice in public. From this perspective, allowing for nationalism to coexist in media in parallel with the official pro-European policies of the Government serves a double purpose. On the one hand, it offers the illusion of pluralism, albeit within a very limited and controlled sphere. On the other hand, nationalism might come in handy and the Government can embrace it wholeheartedly in times of crisis, as the indicator of the Government's (or better - the leader's) patriotism. The first priority is, however, to keep the complete and unchallenged domination of the leader in public, through those media that can be controlled, which will in turn allow the leader to choose the most appropriate strategy. Sometimes it will be a concession to Kosovar Albanians, or the charm offensive during the visit to Sarajevo, and in other occasions it will be an old-fashioned nationalist campaign as one more proof that the nation doesn't have to worry, because its leader knows best and is doing the best for it. This could be the essence of a new type of a populist or hybrid regime Serbia has got recently, after the model developed in countries like Turkey, Russia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Hungary.

My claim that the priority of the Serbian regime is not nationalism *per se*, including in the media, but a complete domination of the political sphere, with nationalism in the media as one of several instruments of power, can be seen from data on the appearance of Serbian Prime Minister Vucic in Serbian media. According to one analysis, in addition to his constant and restless daily presence in public through the media, during 2014 he appeared not less than several hundred times on the covers of Serbian print media outlets. From there, he did not engage primarily in nationalistic agenda, but also in the fight against corruption, economic reforms, EU integration... He didn't shy away from open nationalism, of course, particularly in connection with two key cases that will be dealt with in more detail later in this text – the so-called drone affair on the football match Serbia-Albania in October 2014, and verbal duels with the Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama a little later. It goes without saying that the described tactic of keeping nationalism on hold, to be used when it serves the purpose of absolute power, is inherently a risky thing, since this dangerous toy could easily become an independent and almost uncontrollable force that even the most powerful ones are not able to tame. In fact, Serbian media offer quite a lot of examples of this, too: nationalistic comments against neighboring nations are today increasingly in conflict with the leader's policy of normalizing relations with Kosovo, or improving relations with other neighbors.

New media

The analysis so far has centered on one side of the equation – on the Serbian Government and its attitude towards nationalism in the media. The other side - the media themselves - is to be explained as well, in order for the picture to become clearer. And here again, comparisons between two decades ago and now will help clarify what is new with the media that allows for stereotypes and hate speech to survive – as was explained – in a political environment markedly different from before.

The most important new feature is, of course, that all media have become genuinely on-line, Internet media, and the dividing lines between previously completely different types – the print and the electronic ones – have disappeared. Today's media are also interactive in ways unimaginable two decades ago. Readers and watchers can have a much more active approach, including many ways in which they can add comments to the texts or programs they had previously read or watched. During the last several years the so-called social media or social networks have spread these wider borders even further, allowing for those networks, which have countless ways in which one could contribute to their content, to become an equal part of the information system. Many people have lost the habit of going directly to the websites of particular media, since they can get a lot to read from other people who are sending them links to stories they particularly like or dislike. This is one more opportunity to post comments that in turn begin to have lives of their own. An earlier one-way influence of media on people who consume them has been transformed now into a two-way street. And because of their hidden identities, lay commentators are less constrained than professional journalists themselves. Free from accountability, they tend to influence the public agenda and the basic tone of media contents, lashing out on issues and persons, and using language that would seem improper to be published in old-fashioned media. This is, of course, the main source of insults, hate speech and stereotypes in today's combined media-social networks. Even the most inflammatory texts or pictures of journalists cannot compete with comments that follow them. Therefore, if the media want to pass a nationalistic message, they could only “pull the trigger” with a less insulting comment or the headline and leave the rest of the message to be passed by uncensored and radically nationalistic comments of readers, deliberately chosen exactly because of its inappropriate content. This is the modern and dominant way of reproducing hate speech and stereotypes towards neighboring nations, through combined action of traditional media and new social networks.

If we compare this state of affairs with that of twenty years ago, we see two distinct novelties. Previously, print media in Serbia used to lag behind their electronic counterparts in spreading nationalism. Journalists and editors in the print media felt constrained by at least some professional standards and didn't allow the worst of the contents to be published. The same went for personal attacks, or for degrading generalizations about whole ethnic groups. In the case of Serbian media vs. the Albanians, for instance, one could rarely find examples of such type of language. It was mostly used for political leaders of the unloved neighbors – for then Kosovar Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova, for instance. Such an approach served another purpose: Albanian resistance to Serbia in the 1990s could be presented in this way as an isolated phenomenon, done by people who were “seduced” by their political leaders.

Today's situation is completely different. Readers' comments include both the gravest ad hominem insults and threats one can imagine, as well as collective characterizations of the whole nation, in the darkest colors possible, of course. To be sure, such a collection of stereotypes and hate speech is certainly not confined to readers' comments, although this part of the media content can hardly be beaten in extremism. Numerous examples of the same kind are easily identifiable in the works of professional journalists. Most examples, however, come from tabloids rather than from the “serious” press, one should add. The problem is that tabloidization has been a general and strong trend in Serbia in the last several years and some of these media outlets (like dailies *Informer*, *Vecernje Novosti* or *Kurir*) have a respectable circulation, while others with the same nationalistic orientation (like another daily *Nase Novine*) do not. In any case, more serious newspapers (dailies *Danas* or previously *Politika*, or weeklies *Vreme* and *Nin*, for instance) have considerably lost their readership and influence in comparison with a decade and more ago, but have by and large restrained from nationalism, cultivating a more open, liberal and balanced approach. This differentiation between print media outlets in Serbia should be taken very seriously; they are not all the same at all. Some newspapers, like *Blic*, the daily with the highest circulation in Serbia, stay halfway and are rightly referred to by some media analysts as “semi-tabloids”. Although overall less nationalistic than *Vecernje Novosti* or *Informer*, *Blic* keeps a certain dose of nationalism, together with a carefully crafted critical stance towards Prime Minister Vucic that all other mentioned dailies except for *Danas* lack. This combination of softer nationalism and criticism at the same time allows *Blic* to obtain a kind of double “legitimacy” – a “patriotic” and a “democratic” one, and keep high ratings in public.

Enemies and friends

In one more way contemporary Serbian media differ from their predecessors in the 1990s. Back then, state-owned media under the regime's control established a pattern within which there were friends and there were foes of Serbs among Balkan nations and - to a lesser extent - among Serbia's national minorities, too. Greeks were the best example of the former and Turks and Albanians of the latter image. By the end of that decade, since the outbreak of the violent conflict in Kosovo, Albania as a country replaced Turkey in this worst position because of its support for the Kosovo Liberation Army. As for Serbia's national minorities in the 1990s, ethnic Albanians were portrayed in the worst colors in the media (again, contrary to electronic media, mostly indirectly, with little insulting references to "Albanians as such"), while the general picture of ethnic Hungarians was the best (or rather - the least bad), because of the perceived loyalty of theirs to Serbia.

At present, Albanians from Kosovo have an undisputed worst image in Serbian tabloids, depicted in much more straight ways than before, practically without any constraints. In the minds of journalists from these media, and of readers' comments in them, Albanians somehow deserve this because of their ancient hatred towards Serbs and Serbia, which led them to commit crimes against Serbs, start the war and secede from Serbia. In recent years it became the habit of tabloids to cease differentiating almost always between Albanians from Kosovo, and the ones from Albania, or Macedonia, or Montenegro. They are now usually taken together by Serbian media, as one nation with the worst possible characteristics, and with no substantial internal differences among them.

As noted before, two decades ago Serbian print media used to balance its attitudes toward various Balkan nations, i.e. to degrade some of them treating them as enemies (first Turks, due to their support for Bosniaks in the Bosnian war, and later Albanians), and glorifying others, like Greeks. The divide obviously did not only reflect the differences between Serbia's opponents and supporters in the wars of the 1990s. It was also of a more general cultural nature: it reflected the conflict between Orthodox Christians and Muslims. It's important to note that nationalistic Serbian media most often disregard the fact that not all Albanians are Muslims, and generally treat them only as such. This is, of course, more convenient for the creation of the image of an eternal conflict between Muslims (including Albanians) and Christians (including Serbs), that never stops, but only perpetuates itself in new forms.

The novelty of the situation in Serbian media is that Greeks have largely disappeared from the "good" side, or more correctly said - they were

replaced in this place by the Russians. Serbian fascination with Russians is an interesting and complex phenomenon that we cannot go into in great detail here. It is significant, though, because the best possible image of Russians is directly confronted and at the same time directly comparable with the worst possible image of Albanians in Serbian tabloids. As in the example with Greeks in the 1990s, the current admiration and love for Russians in Serbian society and its media is not based on some respectable knowledge of this country, or on many experiences in personal encounters with Russians. Russia was chosen to become the prime target of Serbian adoration because the choice of best Serbian friends was rather limited, and also because as an influential country and member of the UN Security Council Russia has been seen as the main protection force against wider recognition of Kosovo in the aftermath of Kosovo's secession from 2008.

Russia also satisfies an important criterion for Serbia's best friend – it is Orthodox Christian, and it has kept more or less developed historical ties with Serbia. Expecting support from Russia, Serbs fell in even greater love with this country when it began to regain its influence under President Vladimir Putin who became the most loved foreign politician, with ratings higher than the ones of Serbian politicians. Two characteristic features of writings about Russia from the more nationalistic part of the Serbian media spectrum deserve to be mentioned in this context. The first one is the most frequent slogan in texts about Russian-Serbian ties. It reads: "Serbs and Russians are brothers forever" and it has been repeated in a great number of texts, including numerous headlines in the last couple of years, echoing very similar or the same sentence that Serbian media used to publish about the Greeks in the 1990s. The second example is not about something written, but on the contrary, about something deliberately omitted from the texts that glorify Russia. It's the false assumption of the majority of (badly informed) Serbian citizens and media consumers that it's not the EU that is the key donor of aid, the main investor in Serbia, and the main trade partner (which is true, and which was tried to be unsuccessfully explained many times in the media), but it's Russia, instead.

Bifocal media views on Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro

Instead of a clear-cut picture, the image of three of Serbia's neighbors – Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro - is more complex.

Macedonia is a good case in point. The general image of Macedonia is very specific: most Serbian media suggest that it is a complicated, dysfunctional and instable country of people closest to Serbs of all ex-Yugoslavs. The

“closeness paradigm” refers naturally only to ethnic Macedonians whose country Macedonia is, in this interpretation. The country is, further on, unfortunately doomed to more conflicts in future between its two dominant ethnic groups, and perhaps even to dissolution that would just confirm the already existing deep and irreconcilable ethnic and territorial division. It’s a country on whose future no one should bet; in a way even more hopeless than Bosnia and Herzegovina. The affirmative part of Macedonia’s image in Serbian media comes from two sets of simple but important facts. This is the only ex-Yugoslav republic that Serbia was not in military conflict with during the 1990s, or in some other serious disputes (like with Montenegro) afterwards. Also, the Macedonian nation is in many ways close to Serbs, in terms of culture, religion, language, habits, heritage from the common state.

Serbian tabloids have in fact a kind of a bifocal view of Macedonia. There’s a sharp difference in attitudes and consequently rhetoric in Serbia about ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians of Macedonia and this is genuinely a very specific image of the country. One could hear and read the best possible things about the former, and the worst possible things about the latter. Ethnic Macedonians are generally seen as hostages or victims of ethnic Albanians, because they will be outnumbered in the future, and their „own country” will be either divided, or, more probably, included in „Greater Albania“, because of the specific constitutional design and power-sharing politics, and because ethnic Macedonians do not have the courage or the capacity to stand up to the „Albanian challenge“.

The dominant prism through which Macedonia’s ethnic relations and its future are seen and understood, as is already clear from this interpretation, is the one of Kosovo, so the analytical instrument used is the „Kosovo prism“ or the “Kosovo paradigm”. For many Serbs and for some Serbian media, Macedonia is currently in a kind of transitory phase, in which Serbia used to be in the 1980s, characterized by growing and unjust concessions to Albanians. All this would ultimately lead not to the diminishing, but instead to the radicalization of demands, the result of which could only be Albanian secession or Greater Albania – just like in Kosovo.

Interestingly enough, the coverage of Macedonia ever since the latest political crisis began, in January 2015, with the opposition’s claims about mass surveillance by the Government has been quite modest until the big anti- and pro-Government rallies in May 2015. Initially, Serbian media were neither interested in the internal Macedonian political crisis, nor capable of predicting the proportions this political clash would gradually get. When mass rallies of the opposition and government supporters set the stage for EU mediation between the two sides, a closer look was offered by Serbian media, including direct reporting from Skopje and a series of comments.

The anti-government rally offered Serbian media a chance to focus on different things, too, showing also the framework in which they (want to) understand Macedonia. And while more serious print and electronic media were emphasizing, among other things, ethnic Macedonian and Albanian flags tied together as a symbol of the non-ethnic character of the protest, nationalistic media simply disregarded and omitted this, not allowing it to upset their understanding of Macedonia, eternally condemned to its internal ethnic division.

Images of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro in Serbian media follow to some degree a pattern similar to the Macedonian one, but with many specific elements, too. During 2014 and 2015, two of Serbia's neighbors, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, have been covered in Serbian media in a poor and unsystematic manner, usually related to some major events, and with clear higher interest merely for some specific issues that are in direct connection with topics of relevance in Serbia itself. The image one could get about these countries has thus been essentially incomplete and less than necessary for any kind of more general and solid conclusions. A lot of basic information that would allow the public in Serbia to follow the political, economic and social life in those countries on a regular basis was lacking. It doesn't seem that Serbian media have for these neighbors any higher interest than their international counterparts.

This runs counter to the previous practice when media paid special attention to those neighbors, because of the special type of relations that Serbia generally used to have with them. All that had mostly to do with Serbian society's high sensibility for the position of its minority in each of these countries. Notwithstanding all specificities and differences between Bosnia and Herzegovina, on one side and Montenegro, on the other, one common argument used to be put forward in both cases: Serbia and its media should be on alert, because the rights of Serbian minorities are or might be endangered.

When it comes to Bosnia-Herzegovina, this kind of the kin-state's care for its ethnic minority was identified almost entirely with the issue of the position of Republika Srpska within the complex state of BiH, or even more narrowly with the competences or the autonomy that the predominantly Serbian entity possesses. Any other aspect of or approach to the issue of the position of ethnic Serbs in Bosnia has been disregarded and marginalized. Thus, Bosnian Serbs acquired in Serb media the characteristics of a de-personalized collective body, whose exclusive expression is Republika Srpska.

It is no wonder that the described perspective has offered ample possibilities for a predominantly simplified, but not entirely black-and white

presentation of Bosnia's ethnic communities in the majority of Serbian media, however. Due to its heavy war-crimes legacy from the 1990s war in Bosnia, Bosnian Serbs ceased to be presented any more as blameless actors or as pure victims even in the most nationalistic Serbian media outlets, which had often been the case before, especially until the ICJ Srebrenica ruling. Most media in Serbia, however, continued to take the Bosnian Serb side, either directly by justifying their actions in the conflict-ridden Bosnian policy process (or at least by not exposing it to criticism), or indirectly, by rejecting to present in detail the points of view of two other communities in this country.

The best case in point is the way in which most media in Serbia present the often-mentioned issue of the blocked decision-making process in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the ways out of it. It's usually taken for granted that almost any kind of proposed institutional reform in the direction of a more centralized decision-making is equal to giving the upper hand to the Bosniaks. In Serbia's political and media interpretations that is, needless to say, equal to the violation of equal rights of three constituent Bosnian nations and an outright assault on the autonomy and the very existence of Republika Srpska. It's important to keep this basic attitude in mind, because it has a lot to do with the changing way in which Serbian media present Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik. The attitude towards him in Serbian media has changed very much ever since Aleksandar Vucic took power in Serbia, in 2012. The previous Serbian Government, under President Boris Tadic, although generally considerably less inclined to nationalism and consequently to unlimited support for Bosnian Serbs, held much closer ties with Dodik and his Government. By supporting Dodik, Tadic wanted to gain the legitimacy of a "patriot" at home, something he was lacking due to his staunch pro-European standing and concessions to Kosovo in the initial phases of Belgrade-Pristina negotiations. In other words, Tadic was using Dodik for his own domestic political gains, and the media followed suit, by presenting Dodik in a very favorable way. When Vucic took power in Serbia, as a former nationalist, he didn't have to prove his patriotism in the way Tadic did, and consequently his support for Dodik swiftly diminished, as it also turned out to be counterproductive in light of growing international pressures on Serbia's Government to distance itself from Dodik, but also because Dodik's power began to erode under the rising popularity of the opposition in Republika Srpska. Vucic clearly refused to put "all eggs in Dodik's basket", while keeping the necessary level of support for the autonomy of Republika Srpska, and thus leaving the door open for cooperation with any party or coalition capable of winning elections in this BiH entity.

Those Serbian media outlets that were independent of the government's influences (daily *Danas* and weeklies *Vreme* and *Nin*, for instance) didn't have to change their approach to Dodik, which had been unbiased, balanced and critical. Others began to accommodate to the new official line. The previous frequent presence of Dodik and often direct or indirect support to him in the media has been replaced by shorter and much less rare stories that would merely briefly quote Dodik's statements, without comments.

We could conclude at this point that the previous predominantly black and white image of Bosnia's ethnic communities has gradually disappeared, leaving space for a much more complex multi-color picture. Bosnian Serbs and their political leaders do not look all as white (meaning: good) as before in Serbian media. Media thus need a wider palette for their portrait, with several new shades of white. Bosnian Croats cover the gray area, between the white and the black, and also with more than one nuance. When they unite in everyday political struggles and outwitting with Bosnian Serbs against the Bosniaks, they get space in Serbian media and they look good; otherwise, they do not. The black color is of course reserved for Bosniaks, with few shades of light black or dark grey, particularly because of their compliments to the pragmatism of the new Serbian leader, on his visits to Sarajevo in the springs of 2014 and 2015.

Like Bosnia, Montenegro was being followed in Serbian media with much more interest and care before - in the first years after its 2006 secession from Serbia - than now. While it lasted, this increased attention managed to satisfy the readers' habits from the past and a natural inclination towards the "second eye in the head", as Montenegro was being referred to in its relation with Serbia. There was one additional and perhaps more significant reason for a more intense coverage of Montenegro at that time, though: media were then following - and very often leading - Serbia's public frustration over the fact that one more ex-Yugoslav nation, the one closest to the Serbs, decided to exit the joint state and continue an independent life.

That's why by and large Montenegro and its political leadership were seen in a very bad light indeed. Two more factors contributed to the darkness of the image, if I could use the color metaphor again. The first one was the characterization of Montenegro as a "mafia state", or at least as a state "captured" by its long-lasting political leader Milo Djukanovic and his entourage. The second factor is the Serbian ethnic minority in Montenegro that opposed the referendum on independence, and stood against Djukanovic later, too. Several years ago, while this opposition was more significant, their statements, actions and claims about violation of their rights were being recorded with great care in most Serbian media, with big headlines and often on the front pages.

Most of this is gone now, although the interest for the opposition against Djukanovic has remained. The ethnic side of the story has mostly paled and faded away, except in the cases of anti-Serbian hate speech in Montenegro. Put simply, former relations with Montenegro, mostly based on emotions are being replaced now, although not completely and with unequal pace, with the ones based more on rationality and pragmatism. Normalization seems to be prevailing, although it often means less information from and on Montenegro. An important part of news and analyses from Montenegro that most Serbian media lack nowadays is about this country's success in Euro-Atlantic integration, which makes it a regional leader.

Albanians in Serbian tabloids' stereotypes and hate speech

In order to understand more precisely the logic and the machinery of stereotyping and hate speech production in Serbian tabloids, I'll focus on the way Albanians were presented in these media outlets in relation with two recent events: the October 2014 football match between Serbia and Albania and the clash of an armed group of Albanians with Macedonian police in Kumanovo in May 2015.

The "drone affair"

An unprecedented wave of comments with almost exclusive negative connotation vis-à-vis Albanians as a nation was triggered by an incident during the football match between Serbia and Albania in Belgrade on 14 October 2014. The match was interrupted after a drone with the flag of Greater Albania was flown by Albanian fans above the players' heads. Serbian players tried to take the flag down, Albanian players tried to prevent this, and the fight started among them. The culmination of the event was the breaking in of Serbian fans into the pitch, where they attacked and hurt several Albanian players.

Reactions in Serbia that spread over all media outlets for days used to marginalize literally all other topics in public and expressed a high level of humiliation and anger because of the incident that was almost universally referred to as "provocation", or "deliberate provocation". Literally all media outlets had the drone affair on their front pages at least once, because of the seriousness of the conflict that rose out of it and because the football match was being expected with excitement. It was supposed to be followed by the historic visit of Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama several days later. Expectations ran high, as this was supposed to be the first visit of an Albanian Prime Minister to Belgrade in little less than sixty years! Emotions were

highly aroused not only among nationalists on both sides, since the drone affair turned an opportunity for reconciliation into another opportunity for conflict.

Nationalistically oriented Serbian tabloids used the opportunity to unleash the whole repertoire of stereotypes and hate speech against Albanians. Daily Informer's front page on 16 October was very clear: "Shiptars' *schweineri*" (this German term for a particularly awful nastiness is often used in Serbian: "svinjarija"). Like most of the Serbian media, on the same day, Nase Novine commented the convenient theory (withdrawn later without explanation) that Rama's brother was flying the drone, and added in the headline: "American passport, Albanian bastard" (allusion to the news that Rama's brother arrived to Serbia with a US passport).

In order to put the whole blame for the incident on the Albanians only, most Serbian media tried to hide unpleasant details about the wounds of the Albanian players, which they got from the Serbian fans and even from some security people at the stadium. The verdict from the pages of many print media was clear: Serbs only reacted to the Albanian-made incident that had been carefully planned and prepared in advance, with the aim to "start the war", as daily Politika claimed on 16 October. Several media outlets opted for the blame to be shared by "Shiptars" and the European Union together, though, with the joint plan of both having allegedly been to "start the war in the stadium..." (daily Alo, 16 October). The reasoning behind such statements was that the EU is always too gentle towards Albanians, in total contrast with its much harsher attitude towards Serbs that are not forgiven any misdeed, even if it's of much smaller proportions than this one. Some commentators implied that the drone incident was also planned in order to disturb the planned visit of the Russian President on 16 October, during which he attended the military parade in Belgrade.

Of special significance here is the over-use of the pejorative term "Shiptars" for the Albanians in lots of media outlets. Traditionally, the term is used in Serbia with the intention to additionally offend and degrade an Albanian. It is part of the usual vocabulary in nationalistic Serbian media, while non-tabloid media by default do not use this word, not even in readers' comments. Ebart Media Archive from Belgrade counted the sharp rise of the usage of the term Shiptar in connection with the drone affair: while it was used 11-12 times in each of the previous three months, in October, there were 42 cases in Serbian print media (<http://www.arhiv.rs/ekstremizam/ekstremizam.html>).

Again, not all Serbian journalists and not all Serbian media do this. In March 2015, this practice was criticized by the Appeals Commission of the Serbian Press Council. Following the Appeal of a prominent Serbian NGO Youth Initiative for Human Rights to the Council, the Council issued an

official warning to the editors of daily Informer which on 18 February 2015 ran a headline “Four Shiptars beat to death a Serb in Austria” (<http://www.savetzastampu.rs/cirilica/zalbeni-postupci/2377>).

Few days after, the “drone affair” was for a short time overshadowed by Putin’s visit to Belgrade on 16 October, but this visit offered media another chance for comparison between Russians as Serbian “friends” and Albanians as Serbian “enemies”. Additional occasions for anti-Albanian tones in Serbian media appeared when accounts of numerous Albanian celebrations of the drone affair were published in Serbia. Photos and reports presenting enthusiastic Albanian crowds celebrating what appeared to be an Albanian “victory” in the new conflict with Serbs, were met in Serbian tabloids with a renewed sense of insult and humiliation, but also – and perhaps more importantly – as an additional confirmation that Serbs are not wrong at all in thinking badly of the Albanians.

The drone affair had its continuation in the Serbian media during and after the visit of Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama to Belgrade, which was postponed for 10 November 2015. His statement on Kosovo’s independence (“which is a reality that Serbia should acknowledge”) at the press conference prompted an immediate and nervous reaction of his host Serbian Prime Minister Vucic who criticized Rama for the “provocation” that was not part of the protocol. Vucic who as a former staunch nationalist has in reality done more for the normalization with Kosovo than his predecessors, and has been criticized by Serbian nationalists for “recognizing Kosovo” against Serbian interests, cried out at the event that Kosovo was part of Serbia and will remain so.

Despite Vucic’s later pledge that he doesn’t hate Albanians and is always ready to speak with them, the new affair set the whole arsenal of anti-Albanian statements in motion again, in numerous Serbian tabloids, just two weeks after the drone affair. Several dailies ran again emotionally charged and insulting headlines on their front pages on 11 November: “Rama flew in to provoke” (Vecernje novosti), “Rama spit on Serbs in the middle of Belgrade” (Kurir), “Edi Rama – a shameless Shiptar” (Informer).

Radically negative attitudes towards Rama in Serbian media couldn’t change much despite his later pleas for calming down the heated atmosphere in Serbian-Albanian relations. Serbian media first noted with concern and criticism that on the way back home after the Belgrade visit, he was welcomed by ethnic Albanians in South Serbian towns of Presevo and Bujanovac with the signs “Welcome Mr. Prime Minister”. The same slogan was, by the way, then used by the Kosovar Serbs during Vucic’s visit to Kosovo in March 2015: both national minorities wanted to state in this way that they do not recognize the state they live in.

In early April of 2015, Rama had another controversial statement that stirred the souls in Serbia and provoked a new cycle of anti-Albanian reactions in Serbian media. Albanian Prime Minister said at a press conference with the Kosovar foreign minister Hashim Thaci that Albania and Kosovo can unite within the European Union, but if the EU continues to shut the door to Kosovo “two countries will unite in a classical way” (7 April 2015). This time around it was not only the Serbian public and all Serbian media that sharply criticized the Albanian Prime Minister for propagating “the idea of Greater Albania”; similar reactions came from the highest Serbian politicians as well, and were given high prominence in the media. They all lashed out on the idea of the unification of Kosovo and Albania, claiming that it cannot and will not be allowed. Most comments kept repeating the buzzword “provocation”, and everybody asked the EU to condemn such a dangerous idea. The EU was being accused of double standards vis-à-vis Serbs and Albanians: while propagating Greater Serbia seems to be forbidden, propagating Greater Albania goes unnoticed and unpunished.

The Kumanovo incident and the “Greater Albania” idea

On 9 May 2015 Macedonian police clashed severely with a group of heavily armed ethnic Albanians in the Macedonian town of Kumanovo. The armed conflict of the police with this group that was hiding in several houses left 8 policemen and 13 members of the group dead, and around 30 of them were arrested. The event gave rise to numerous interpretations all over and beyond the Balkans because of several reasons. Most importantly, even a month after the incident the motives of the group have remained mysterious, as Macedonian authorities have not released any news on ongoing interrogations of the arrested. The choice of the group’s hiding – in a town without high interethnic tensions and in the vicinity of Macedonian borders with Serbia and Kosovo – is another unexplained but much commented detail, too. The event has been also connected with two similar incidents from the region that occurred in previous weeks: one in the Bosnian town of Zvornik, when a radical Bosnian Islamist opened fire inside the police station, and one in Gosince (in Macedonia, near the border with Albania), where a group of armed men also attacked the police station. Last but not least, some interpretations put the Kumanovo incident in the context of the rising confrontations in Macedonia between the Government and the opposition, claiming that both the Gosince and the Kumanovo incidents might have been orchestrated by the Macedonian Government which might have tried in this way to reopen the ethnic conflict in the country in order to downplay the accusations of the opposition.

Due to a whole complex of little known and unexplained details amidst a volatile region prone to ethnic conflicts, the Kumanovo incident has provoked an array of debates and controversial interpretations. It proved to be, once more, an excellent opportunity for media-based battles among proponents of different opinions, with the usual blaming games along ethnic lines.

Serbian tabloids seemed to have welcomed the opportunity with a kind of satisfaction that they can finally solve the mentioned mysteries of the Kumanovo incidents. Already the first reports exposed the theory according to which this event is just a logical and expected episode of the struggle of ethnic Albanians for Greater Albania. Among many covers published in these days in Serbia that carried the words "Greater Albania" in their headlines, one should single out the sensational cover of daily Blic on 10 May, all in red, and with a giant Albanian eagle, with the headline over it reading: "Greater Albania is knocking at the door". Variations of such an interpretation of the Kumanovo incident have flourished all over the tabloid part of the Serbian press. Without explicit statements of the arrested Albanians about their motives and plans, and also without any organization publicly taking the responsibility for the action, Serbian tabloids had to rely on previous knowledge about the members of the Kumanovo group, some of which were known for their participation in armed struggles against the Serbian and Macedonian security forces. And while other Serbian media outlets handled the affair more carefully, asking questions rather than giving definite answers, and offering their readers various interpretations of the incident, the tabloids found that the lack of solid facts was in fact an advantage that should be used without hesitation.

Instead on facts (that were truly missing), tabloids relied in this occasion on rumors, picking and choosing those among them that would best support their preconceived prejudices, stereotypes and conspiracy theories. It is hardly surprising that in this recreated context, the Kumanovo incident became suddenly crystal clear: the armed Albanian group should be labeled a "terrorist group" that was trying to provoke wider incidents on the Macedonian-Serbian-border, in order to realize the old dream of Greater Albania through a new war in the Balkans.

To name the Albanians "terrorists" seemed to be of special significance particularly for Serbian tabloids. In this way, the Kumanovo incident could have been directly connected with radical Islamic terrorism, which is one of the pillars of the interpretation pursued by Serbian nationalists and tabloids. The majority of international media and Western governments have so far refused to use the term "terrorist", opting for more neutral terms. This provoked harsh criticism in Serbian media that accused the West once again for too soft an approach to the Albanians and to the idea of Greater Albania.

As time went by, the described theory on Albanian terrorists trying to realize the Greater Albanian dream was added an important annex in many Serbian media: Albanian terrorists were allegedly merely misused by the US in order to produce chaos in the Balkans that would in turn make the construction of the Russian-Turkish gas pipeline through Macedonia and Serbia impossible. One variant of this interpretation of the Kumanovo incident pointed out also that such a move was a warning addressed to Serbian Prime Minister Vucic and Macedonian Prime Minister Gruevski to give up leaning on Russia and turn westward instead.

No wonder the mentioned enrichment of the original theory could be found in Russian media that are obviously carefully read in some Serbian circles. In order to make it more convincing, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov repeated the basic contours of this theory during his visit to Belgrade. Serbian media stopped short, however, of adding that Macedonia was facing territorial claims from its neighbors, which was part of Moscow's interpretation, too.

Several attempts were made in the press to investigate the possibility that the Macedonian Government itself staged the conflict in Kumanovo, but this theory didn't attract many supporters.

Serbian tabloids usually make a big fuss with anti-Albanian messages in the aftermath of some event with bad connotations. When, on the other hand, something good happens in Serbian-Albanian relations, they mostly remain silent, in contrast to earlier times when they used to be explicitly opposed to such developments. This time around they have not published a word about two events from Belgrade that got wider coverage only in the non-nationalistic part of the Serbian media spectrum. The first of those events was the Belgrade premiere of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in early April of 2015, at the National Theatre. Shakespeare's drama gathered for the first time Serbian and Kosovar Albanian actors who played in Serbian and Albanian languages. While nationalistic Serbian media kept quiet, the play and the initiative (to be repeated in Pristina) were warmly welcomed in some journalistic and intellectual circles in Belgrade. The second event of the same kind and with the same type of optimistic message concerning the improvement of Serbian-Albanian relations was the Pristina Week in Belgrade (already second in a row), in the beginning of June 2015. The Serbian Minister of Culture opened this manifestation, which is an additional encouragement that something good can be done. Serbian tabloids boycotted the manifestation with "loud silence" again.

Conclusions

Contrary to optimistic expectations, the frequency of stereotypes and hate speech about neighbors in the Serbian media has not decreased since the wars from the 1990s. This is additionally worrying because most of the media are privately owned now, in contrast to two decades before.

Tabloids and their comments sections are the main source of hate speech and stereotypes about neighbors in Serbia. The other part of the media spectrum has a balanced approach, but its influence is limited, in contrast to much more popular tabloids.

Among the monitored neighboring nations, Albanians are presented in the worst possible ways by Serbian tabloids, while the image of Macedonians is the best. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro attract some attention only when the issue of the Serbian minorities in those two countries is in focus.

It is high time to pay much more attention to the content of the tabloids, in Serbia and elsewhere in the Balkans, as well as to the ways in which politicians exert influence on media. Both professional associations of journalists and national regulators should demand stricter respect for journalistic standards. The judiciary should also stop turning away its attention from clear violation of human rights stemming from the reproduction of hate speech and unhidden insults by some media.

