

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PRINT MEDIA IN BIH:  
INFORMATION WARS IN THE BALKANS SINCE 1991**

**By: Katarina Panic and Eldina Pleho**

**(Summary of Study)**

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As there is still no end to discussions on whether the media produced the recent Balkan wars or the creators of the war used the media to launch the war machine, information wars in the Balkans continue to attract the attention of media researchers, analysts, and even new generations of young journalists, who remembered these wars only as children. The authors of this work are two young journalists from Prijedor and Sarajevo who graduated in journalism this year. Based on an examination of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian press, they reached their own conclusions on how journalists covered the tragic reality of that period. The parameters for comparison are events that in different ways symbolize what was happening during the wars and the role of the media: war in Slovenia (1991), Markale case (1994), analyzed by Katarina Panic, and NATO strikes on FRY (1999), analyzed by Eldina Pleho.

The following papers were monitored: the Sarajevo dailies *Oslobodjenje* and *Vecernje Novine* and *Dani* magazine, and in Banja Luka *Glas Srpski* and *Nezavisne Novine*, as well as *Srpsko Oslobodjenje*, published for a while in Pale.

**I**

**HOW THE WAR IN SLOVENIA WAS DESCRIBED**

Although three nationalist parties won the first multiparty elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1990, at the beginning of the last decade BiH seemed to be immune from the growing nationalist tension. Under strictest party control for almost four

decades, in the late eighties and early nineties the BiH media found itself at the crossroad of what was until recently the holy idea of Yugoslavism and the increasingly strong and dangerous influence of nationalism.

Slovenia and Croatia, in close coordination, 26 minutes apart, declared independence on June 25, 1991. This date is taken as the beginning of the war in Slovenia, called by some an “operetta war” since it lasted ten days and ended on July 5, 1991 with some 70 people killed.

### **Balance between information and commentary**

The editorial board of *Oslobodjenje* had a critical attitude towards Slovenia and Croatia's separatist aspirations. The correspondent Zoran Odic reports on what is going on in Slovenia the whole time. He uses practically all types of journalistic genres, from short news items and detailed reports, through sketches, retrospections and reportages, to analyses and commentaries. He also uses all relevant sources, from federal, republic and city government bodies, JNA (Yugoslav People's Army), party press conferences, Slovene opposition, common people as witnesses or participants in events and the local media. All but one – Territorial Defense of Slovenia (TOS).

In 1991 the BiH media does not deal much with the international factors. Attitude towards the “Twelve” (European Union members) is either positive or neutral. The role of the European Troika, the ministers of foreign affairs of Italy, Holland and Luxemburg, **Gianni de Michelis, Hans van den Broek and Jacques Poos**, who were trying to negotiate a way out of the crisis, is not denied. **“The head of Italian diplomacy, Gianni de Michelis, expressed distrust of how EC stands were being interpreted by the heads of some of the Yugoslav republics. Namely, whenever a mission was completed and an agreement reached, everyone would interpret it as it suited their interests. (...) With the help of the EC mission, great success was achieved – Slovenia and Croatia were forced to suspend secessionist acts, the greatest threat to peace.”** (July 2, page 3, *De Michelis seeks signatures*, I. Zisko).

The paper's weakest point are photographs. Of 24 photographs related directly or indirectly to the beginning of disintegration of SFRY, only three are signed. On top of that, only a small number of the photographs have an informational function.

### **Devotion to the SIV – a burden of the past**

The front pages of *Vecernje Novine* are full of short news items. There is an evident lack of longer forms, of "more serious" journalistic expressions. The international factors are mentioned to the extent that they condemn Slovenia and Croatia's separatist aspirations. **"The one-sided act on secession of Slovenia and Croatia has caused, so far, reactions in the world that have been expected by everyone except the leaderships of these republics, carried away by personal euphoria which, obviously, they are no longer able to rein in. Instead of applause for the 'independence' and the final 'liberation' from the 'dungeon for the people,' the majority of the statements made over the past two days, from the majority of countries that mean the most on the map of the world, are messages of support – to a single Yugoslavia! The celebration was therefore reduced to mutual congratulations of the two 'brave' ones and announcement of support from just a few banana-republics."** (June 28, page 4, *Thick Head, Empty Pocket*, Sergije Princip).

Happenings in Slovenia were covered by a productive reporter, Zijad Softic. With unconcealed condemnation, he writes about the situation in this republic. He speaks directly about how facts perished. **"The truth was the first victim once again. Figures on the dead and the wounded do not match even remotely. While the latest press release by the SIV (federal government) used the figure of five dead soldiers (...), Slovene Minister of Defense Janez Jansa mentions the figure of several hundred killed and wounded."** (double issue on June 29/30, page 4, *Army on Border*, Zijad Softic).

The burden of the past – media dependence on the state apparatus – can be felt the most in this daily. More than one-third of each issue is dedicated to press releases by federal government bodies. There is not a single piece of information originating from the TOS, and in comparison to *Glas* and *Oslobodjenje*, *Vecernje Novine* writes the most

about the unfortunate fate of the army staff living in Slovenia and Croatia and harassment of their families.

### **Serbian propaganda in embryo**

Unlike the two above papers, *Glas* (at the time of the events in Slovenia, it still did not have the prefix *Srpski* – meaning Serb) can boast of photographs as an informative, journalistic genre and as top information on the front page (the only signed ones).

*Glas* has inadmissibly few of its own articles. Of 110 analyzed articles, as many as 96 are by news agencies. Only 11 articles are by authors, while three are unsigned. As for genres, short news items prevail. *Glas*'s editorial policy can be analyzed only with respect to selection of agency news items and their placement.

Seeds of warmongering journalism can be found in articles by two reporters from Dvor na Uni (border between BiH and Croatia), based on choice of interviewees. **Stanko Cetojevic** from the Banija, originally Montenegrin: **'I remember the Glina slaughter when the Ustashas killed 2,500 residents of Serbian nationality. By God, 1941 will not be repeated; it won't, because we felt the blade of the Ustasha knife once. Banija has risen to its feet determined that we shall all die, but shall not be slaughtered as sheep by anyone ever again!'** Awakening and revival of the spirits of the past are the beginning of use of stereotypes in the BiH media. **"We will not allow an independent state of Croatia to be created in this region at any cost! Banija bled once, it will bleed again, but 1941 will not be repeated, Vajagic, President of the Dvor na Uni Municipal Assembly Executive Board is categorical, adding that the Serbian people will not be left to itself."**

### **At the dawn of awoken nationalism**

In the early nineties, the analyzed media was what is called socially owned, freshly liberated from the strong influence of the League of Communists. As a result of historic inevitability, the old system was liberalized and ultimately lost elections, while nationalist parties, despite wanting to, had not succeeded in taking control of the media. It was a time of free, even anarchistic journalism, but also of foreboded ethnic divisions with the

legacy of old practices still present (such as use of only one source or propaganda for one's own political option). In political terms, the three dailies of that time still had not built their stand on the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the threat of war. There was evident confusion, as well as fear of war, whose counter-balance was preservation of Yugoslavia. Advocators of the future open nationalism satisfied themselves with carrying information rather than commenting on it. But, pens were already being born what would tomorrow take ethnic positions. The first stage of journalist awakening after decades of political one-mindedness and confusion with the growing social and economic changes was to result initially in impulsive defense of the joint homeland, and after that, even faster, in identification with hard-line nationalism.

## II

### THE SILENCE AND THE COVERAGE OF MARKALE

As much as one could speak of media independence and journalistic professionalism in the early nineties, with the beginning of the war in Bosnia these elements were suffocated by the drums of war. Yugoslav patriotism was replaced by Serbian and Croatian patriotism, communism by nationalism; dozens of the best journalists were left jobless refusing quasi-patriotic instructions to spread hatred and intolerance. Journalists who were professionals were forced to retire or were fired and replaced by those who were ready to serve with no questions asked. The professional level toppled down and once respected media outlets were compromised.

#### **Laurelled fighters for the truth**

On Saturday, February 5, 1994, ten minutes after noon, 66 civilians were killed and 197 wounded lightly or seriously by a mortar shell at Sarajevo's Markale market. The first and second day after the massacre, *Oslobodjenje* dedicated five prime pages to what happened. Prevalent were warm human stories, reports from hospitals, condemnation of the international community's indecisiveness and short news items – reactions from the country and world (only the latter were taken from agencies, mostly from BH PRESS, while all the rest was 'covered' by *Oslobodjenje* journalists). As for journalistic forms, commentary and reportage were dominant.

Unlike 1991, in this period *Oslobodjenje* had the most functional photographs, but the rule of not signing them continues (of 23 photographs, 18 do not cite the source).

### **“Genocide under UN auspices”**

Authors of commentaries in *Vecernje Novine* do not shrink from using very harsh judgments at the expense of the international community (in further text this term is used to denote international institutions engaged in BiH): **“Serbs committed genocide against Bosniaks under direct United Nations auspices. (...) This dilemma – who fired – illustrates the attitude of the entire world public towards the war in Bosnia. From this attitude results the solution proposed by the French: because one side is beastly, because it has committed crimes never committed before, all parties to the conflict in this territory should be disarmed, including the victim. Hence, the Serbs should be punished for staging such terrible massacres and Bosniaks for going to the market on Saturday. At 12.30, on top of that!”** (February 8, page 2, *Thank you, dear Pale, thank you, New York, Ozren Kebo*).

An unusual constant of the then Sarajevo media is that it expressed a much more negative, ironic and sharper stand towards the international community than towards Serb military units holding the city under occupation. It also gave much more space to the international factors and their operation in and regarding Bosnia-Herzegovina. The reason is because it had regarded Karadzic’s followers as the enemies since the very beginning of the war and thus did not expect anything good from the enemy. But, the international community (with all its institutions) had come to BiH to mediate talks to reconcile the conflicting ethnic groups and bring about a faster end to the war. And there is another thing that the military and civilian authorities of the then Republic of BiH, and the media as well, could not forgive the foreigners: the arms embargo.

### **Lying (for) the people**

In addition to coming out under a ‘different flag,’ *Glas Srpski* (the adjective *Srpski* was added to the name *Glas* in September 1992), printed in Banja Luka, mostly differed from the Sarajevo papers in that, starting with the victory of the multiparty system, it gradually

started to serve just one political (better put ethnic) option and directly created the opinion of its audience in closest cooperation with the growing war machine. Over time, its audience, due to information isolation and the market monopoly of one option, was developed to seek precisely what it was used to. *Glas Srpski* remains loyal to the 1991 tradition: it does not have its own agency contents and instead takes them from agencies, but only agencies with a mostly propagandistic function. In journalistic approach, it develops xenophobia and prejudice; promotes the 'heavenly people' and devalues everyone else; develops, maintains and spreads fear and hate – all in the service of 'higher goals.'

In the first issue after the Markale massacre, on the front page *Glas Srpski* carries an interview that Radovan Karadzic gave the previous day to Television Belgrade: **“We have a very disciplined army and strict commands; the number of shells is recorded every day and no one can fire from our positions without commands and orders. The latest crime indicates that the Muslim side continues to stage shows. (...) The bloody incident in Sarajevo is one in a series of crimes committed with the intention of accusing the Serb side, on the eve of important events, before important conferences.”** (February 7, front page, *Muslim imputations*, Tanjug).

Other articles also try to prove that the massacre was not committed by Serbs, that this is being insinuated against them for the who knows which time, that Karadzic is demanding that the Markale investigation be carried out by foreign experts rather than Muslims who would rig the report, that both Serb military and civilian forces are categorically rejecting responsibility for the crime at Markale... Also, foreign officials' statements are being taken out of context and only the part that is suitable or that could be interpreted in such a way is carried. For the whole next week after February 5, *Glas Srpski* does not have a single photograph directly or indirectly related to the killing of civilians at Markale.

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The media language in this period was a language of hate, religious and ethnic intolerance and warmongering talk. Another thing that split the BiH media space into two (and later into three) parts were the main qualifications: on one side are aggressors, cut-

throats, Chetnik criminal beasts, vampire Greater Serbs, Karadzic army's fascist phalanges, criminal orgies of non-humans and criminals, and on the other are fundamentalists, mujahedins, Ustashas, anti-Serb conspiracy, monstrous Islamic fanatics, jihad warriors... There is another lingual phenomenon worth mentioning: *Glas Srpski* uses the ekavian articulation of the local language, which has never been used anywhere in BiH (it's how Serbs in Serbia speak) and the alphabet is exclusively Cyrillic, while the Sarajevo media uses exclusively the Latin alphabet and the so-called western variant of what used to be the Serbo-Croat language (Croatisms – in order to avoid Serbisms), which was also never native to this part of BiH.

### III

#### **NATO INTERVENTION IN FRY IN 1999**

March 1999 in the Balkans will be remembered as the beginning of the end of the bloody conflicts that marked the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the wars in Slovenia, Croatia and BiH, conflict erupted in Kosovo, where, according to numerous political analysts, everything had started in the first place. Escalation of violence and human rights violations in Kosovo in the spring of 1999 were determinedly prevented by western forces, taught by the experience of Croatia and BiH. After unsuccessful negotiations between the western forces, i.e. NATO officials, and President of FRY Slobodan Milosevic, air strikes were inevitable. NATO started bombing FRY on March 24, 1999.

At that time, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as a consequence of the wartime journalism, three ethnic and two entity media structures were still established and they were under the influence of the ruling political parties. Hate speech, however, was less pronounced or found its place in less conspicuous contents (education, culture, entertainment...). Also, a new and strong bloc of more or less independent media, supported by the international community, developed.

The aim of this work is to use analysis of the print media in BiH in the period from March 24 to April 1, 1999 to establish how the media reported on what was going on in neighboring then FRY. But, our aim was also to see whether and, if so, how much the BiH media participated in creating an atmosphere of uncertainty in BiH, caused by the

NATO strikes on Serbia and Montenegro. To recall, in the mentioned period BiH already had behind it four years of atrocious conflicts unfolding in its territory and the situation was gradually normalizing, at least when it comes to inter-ethnic relations.

### **Human stories come first**

In articles in the Sarajevo magazine *Dani*, analytical reportage-type forms prevail in most cases. The source of information is usually a journalist/reporter. There are also articles by field correspondents, which is not very common in the other analyzed media. This magazine's priority view was directed at human stories from Kosovo, and less at events in all of FRY. Unlike the other media, it does not carry details on the NATO operation itself, reports on attacks and the targets hit, statements by officials, reactions, or information on protests against the strikes. Crimes against the Albanian population in Kosovo are in the center of its attention.

### **Neutral, objective and superficial**

"*Vecernje Novine*" gave a lot of attention to developments in FRY. As for sources of information used, agency items are dominant. The number of authors' and correspondents' articles is very small. Photographs are adequately present and their origin is always cited. Emphasis in viewing events is mostly laid on information concerning the Albanian refugee crisis and the crimes committed against this population of Kosovo. It is interesting that reactions to the NATO strikes are carried almost equally – both those that fiercely oppose the attacks, as those that welcome them.

### **Proven professionals**

The oldest daily paper in Bosnia-Herzegovina, "*Oslobodjenje*," in the monitored period professionally covers developments in neighboring FRY. What this paper can also boast of over the other media is the fact that it has a developed correspondent network from the region and world. Not a single media outlet had so many authors' articles on the crisis in FRY as "*Oslobodjenje*." Correspondents from Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia regularly sent reports from the field on what was going on. This paper gave a lot of attention to stories about the lives of people in FRY cities during the NATO

bombardment. A lot of attention was also given to the Kosovo refugee crisis, which is a common characteristic of this paper and the other analyzed media from the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. "*Oslobodjenje*" adequately uses photographs and always cites their source. Along with a large number of articles by correspondents, it also uses Reuters and BH Press items.

### **The Albanian plight – genocide**

"Dnevni Avaz" gave maximum attention and space to coverage of developments in FRY in March 1999. Dozens of articles on the crisis in the neighboring country were published. Photographs as a medium are used by this paper to the maximum. Several headlines were criticized by the Independent Media Commission of BiH ("Finally bombs for the Balkan butcher," and "Milosevic's bloody feast in Kosovo"), because they are impolite in style and might worsen the situation regarding inter-ethnic intolerance in BiH. A specific characteristic is that Avaz calls crimes against the ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo genocide, which later became a part of the official indictments in The Hague. The dominant articles are the ones dealing with the results of the strike, the armed potentials of NATO troops, as well as articles on the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo. There is a very small number of authors' and correspondents' articles. Generally, press releases by institutions and agency information is carried. The dominant source of information is Reuters agency, although there are also frequent articles in which foreign agencies are cited as the source, without being named specifically, which diminishes the credibility of information.

### **Live remains of the warmongering machine**

"*Srpsko Oslobodjenje*" (a paper created when a group of Serb journalists separated from the Sarajevo *Oslobodjenje*) is a paper that covered developments in FRY solely through the form of commentary and was thus suitable for propaganda. Photographs as a medium are not used at all. They are replaced by caricatures, another specific characteristic of this media outlet in relation to the other analyzed media. Genres such as news items, press releases and reports are unknown to this paper and, if we exclude one interview, all the rest are commentaries about the crisis in FRY. Language and style used by commentators to describe the abovementioned developments are examples of

the darkest wartime rhetoric and propaganda. Kosovo's Albanians are called the Schiptar gangs, Americans are called nationalists, and their then president a fascist. The attack on Serbia (they do not use the term FRY; they use Serbia instead) is called an aggression and a conspiracy against the whole Serbian people. They call for retaliation and heat up the situation in BiH by commenting that Serbs from the Republika Srpska are very careful because, as they say, now is the most suitable moment for Izetbegovic's militants to create a long desired Islamic state.

### **NATO strikes – aggression against the fraternal people**

"Glas Srpski" dedicated dozens of articles to the crisis in FRY. These are mostly press releases and short news items, with just two commentaries on developments related to the NATO intervention. Photographs are used very little and their origin is usually not cited. Entire pages without a single photograph are not rare. The source of information almost 100 percent are Tanjug and Srna agencies. There are practically no authors' or correspondents' articles. The paper does not write at all about the refugee crisis in Kosovo. The entire coverage of NATO strikes against Serbia and Montenegro comes down to publication of letters of support, protests and rallies, and condemnation of the "aggression" by officials and individuals. This daily characterized the NATO operation as "aggression against the fraternal Serb people." The dominant articles are the ones about the success of the Army of Yugoslavia and about downed NATO planes, for which there is no confirmation from the other side. Generally, the other side is not consulted at all in articles in "Glas" in this period.

### **"Nezavisne" also silent about the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo**

In the monitored period, "*Nezavisne Novine*" from Banja Luka paid adequate attention to developments in neighboring FRY. A similarity in reporting on these developments with "*Glas Srpski*" is in that most articles feature press releases, reactions by officials, associations and individuals to the attack on Yugoslavia. In choosing terms to describe the NATO operation, this paper generally uses the words "strikes" and "action" and does not use the word "aggression." There are very few reports from the field by correspondents, practically none. Sources of information are agencies, usually Beta. Photographs are used rarely, and in cases when they are used, their origin is cited.

Informational genres are dominant and there are very few analytical contents. This outlet does not mention the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo and there is nothing about refugees from Kosovo. Stark news items and press releases generally dominate.

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Coverage of Kosovo and the NATO intervention by the BiH media is in line with the (in)dependent editorial policy of the media in that period. Media in the Republika Srpska treats these developments as a part of its own patriotic responsibility. Two outlets hold positions on the opposite sides of the scale: *Srpsko Oslobodjenje* publishes classical propagandistic pamphlets with an unconcealed intention, by animating “its” public opinion, to destabilize inter-ethnic relations in Bosnia. *Nezavisne Novine*, which later grew into a real Bosnian-Herzegovinian daily, uses the independent Belgrade agency Beta as the main source of information. It does not qualify the NATO intervention as aggression, but, surprisingly, it practically does not mention the Albanian exodus.

Generally speaking, newspapers from the RS one-sidedly interpret the causes of the events in Kosovo and most of them apply negative selection of information.

The monitored media in Sarajevo covers with more balance the consequences of these events both in Kosovo and in the bombed Serbian cities, usually comprehensively, such as the Sarajevo *Oslobodjenje*, and it explains the genesis of these events and carries information about reactions both for and against the strikes. To a small extent, articles (actually headlines) appear that smack of malice. This relatively positive assessment is a consequence of the great efforts of the international factors in Sarajevo to boost the professional education of journalists, unlike the then media in the RS, which was almost beyond the reach of this kind of influence.

### **Crawling into the third millennium?**

The Bosnian-Herzegovinian media today still operates in a territory split into two entities, cut up into three ethnic parts, with one political philosophy dominating in each one of them. Some media outlets continue to convey the will of their respective political elites. Adherence to the fundamental ethical codes of journalism is thus slow to take root in

them. The appearance of alternative media over the past several years, whose power is increasing, and reconstruction of state broadcasters into public broadcasting services points to the conclusion that changes are taking place in the overall BiH environment and that the fundamental principles of journalistic professionalism can develop in its media in the long term.

Still, hate speech, the main propagandistic tool from the period in which we analyzed the media, has mostly disappeared. But, the road to highly professional journalism is long and that is why we put a question mark after the last heading in our work: Crawling into the third millennium?

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Katarina Panic graduated in May 2004 from the Media Plan High College of Journalism Sarajevo, specialized group on press. Eldina Pleho graduated in July 2004 from the Faculty of Political Science in Sarajevo, Department of Journalism. Translated by: K.H.  
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