

## POLITICAL REFLECTIONS OF NON-POLITICAL ISSUES IN THE DAILY PRESS IN BIH

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### Introductory remarks

Most of the media monitoring and analysis based on it carried out by Media Plan Institute regarded political issues, dominantly related to elections, followed by implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement, particularly in the segment of return of refugees and displaced persons, as well as language in the media, whether inciting tone and inflammatory rhetoric or language that stimulates and affirms a spirit of reconciliation and tolerance. This time we focused on an unusual sphere – the attitude of the print media in Bosnia-Herzegovina towards non-political issues. The monitored media sample is representative – the four most influential dailies in the country: *Oslobodjenje*, *Dnevni Avaz*, *Nezavisne Novine* and *Dnevni List*. The former two come out in Sarajevo and the latter two in Banja Luka and Mostar respectively. The monitored period is May this year, a sufficient foundation to give a clear picture of the monitored papers' editorial policies and concepts.

As we have said, focus is on non-political issues, which hid numerous traps and dilemmas right at the start. Namely, in the complex environment of the post-Dayton BiH, practically all walks of life are politicized to a fever pitch. We might say that *homo politicus* lives here, considerably hampering and even making life miserable for the so-called common man. Seemingly or for real, issues that are politically entirely neutral contain elements of politicization, petty politics and manipulation. Therefore, our primary task is to list the areas and the issues derived from them that were **not** the subject of monitoring. In any case, the subject of monitoring/analysis were not spheres of political life. First of all, not the executive, judicial and legislative authorities at all 15 levels (state, entity, cantonal, municipal, plus District Brcko).

As this article is intended for the broader region, beyond the territory of the former Yugoslavia, we will necessarily deal with certain details that are well known to the domestic

public. For instance, the post-Dayton BiH is truly a unique country in the world. Formally, it is composed of two entities: the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS). Unlike the RS, whose composition is unitary to a certain degree, with dominant Bosnian Serb authorities, FBiH is composed of 10 cantons, two of which have mixed Bosniak-Croat authorities, while four cantons have dominant Bosniak and four have dominant Croat authorities. District Brcko was left by international arbitration outside the entities, as an integral part of BiH.

The post-Dayton BiH does not have an authentic constitution passed by parliament. Instead, its constitution is a part of the international peace agreement (DPA). Real power is in the hands of the international community's High Representative. His mandate is planned to last until the end of next year, but it will certainly be extended for an undefined period. One need not point out how this division and political complexity of the country negatively reflect on the media.

The subject of monitoring/analysis were not international organizations in BiH either, primarily OHR, SFOR, OSCE, EC and others, nor any of the embassies. We also did not monitor religious communities, solely because of their collusion with politics and open articulation of political interests. As a rule, we included religious contents if they were related to certain religious holidays and events, or if they contained a historic or cultural dimension. However, even such occasions were used to articulate the political benefits of religious communities, which we had to draw attention to. We also did not treat political issues from the neighborhood or broader international politics. In short, not a single journalistic genre that touched on politics was the subject of monitoring and analysis.

It is relatively easy to conclude from the abovementioned what **was** the subject of monitoring and analysis: culture, art, science, education, music, entertainment, sport, recreation, show business, coverage of other media, and certain border areas, public life, etc.

Of course, culture, education, and partly even sport, are very much politicized in BiH. Consequently, we did not resist the temptation to try and define the directions, dimensions, meaning and scope of media manipulation of non-political issues in the four leading papers in the country. To illustrate, the issue of ecology, which in a political context should be profiled globally, here unfortunately involves strong local political tensions and emotions. A striking example are the spring floods and pollution of rivers, when garbage was coming "only from the other entity"...

An indicative case involved flags and crosses on the Stolac fortress and is actually a paradigm of the squaring of the BiH political circle. Precisely in the context of the above belief that everything in this region is politics. Especially religion.

Advertising space is not immune against politicization either, and this includes obituaries! Advertising space is a reliable barometer of the ethnic and/or political identification of leaders of companies/advertisers, on one hand, and of the papers offering advertising space, on the other. It would be desirable to separately research the aspect of political manipulation by way of advertising, especially in the context of the wide-spread practice of advertisers to blackmail newspapers that strive for an independent editorial position.

We tried to establish or indicate by analysis the following: (1) is manipulation of the media even in the case of non-political issues dominant or something typical of the BiH print media scene, or (2) is it a result of media manipulation, in the sense of the media being used as a tool by the protagonists or centers of formal and informal political power, or (3) is manipulation something of a by-product, or more precisely, a result of professional immaturity of the local media staff? More will be said about this in the final remarks. In analyzing non-political issues, we tried not to slide into an ideological/political discourse.

### ***Oslobodjenje***

*Oslobodjenje* (meaning liberation) is the oldest daily in BiH. The first issue was printed in the summer of 1943 in freed territory in northern Bosnia. Hence the paper's name. *Oslobodjenje* was not the only daily paper in former BiH, but it was certainly the closest one to the one-party government. In the then system, it had a bad reputation for a long time as a rigid and uninteresting paper, with almost the character and content of a newsletter. However, in the late eighties of the last century, the process of liberalization of society did not bypass *Oslobodjenje*, declared in a traditional survey by the Split *Slobodna Dalmacija* as newspaper of the year (1989) in the former Yugoslavia, with an impressive circulation, by then and now standards, of some 100,000 copies, and with a relatively small number of unsold copies.

Following the first multi-party elections (1990), the paper adjusted to the new political climate and constellation, emphasizing its independent position. In the whirlwind and confusion of war, *Oslobodjenje* suffered greatly – materially, technically and in terms of staffing. But the paper survived. During the siege of the city, although with a symbolic circulation and small format, on a reduced number of pages, the paper failed to come out only one day of the war. For this feat, *Oslobodjenje* was declared in Great Britain as the world's daily/newspaper of

the year (1992). Today, the paper's heading still reads: "BiH independent daily/newspaper of the year in the world 1992." The paper received other numerous international awards as well, as its rich masthead testifies. However, one can hear that glory won during the war has greatly diminished in peace. Today's circulation of *Oslobodjenje* is decimated compared to pre-war circulation. It is widely believed that today's *Oslobodjenje* is too heavy and too serious, bringing every day several commentaries, columns and similar journalistic forms, and that it is split between tradition and contemporary journalistic demands, which are especially current in the print media.

*Oslobodjenje* is a tabloid only by format, and partly also by its front page design. Inside, the paper emits seriousness, despite the numerous spotted deficiencies, wanderings, even sloppiness. For instance, a news item is printed in two different places with different editorial presentation. As a rule, there is no inflammatory language in the paper, but there are unnecessary insinuations. For example, in "Issue of the Day" on the Stolac case ("Stolac, a city under a flag of the Croat people," superscript headline, May 16), the paper attempts, with full right, to denude the local power-holders' policies. However, in criticizing the erection of a memorial for Croatian Duke Father Ivan Music (the memorial was unveiled in 1998, as can be seen from an accompanying photograph), the author concludes the article/reportage from Stolac with a statement by the young Nerin Dizdar (who made a name for himself by lowering a Croatian flag from the Stolac fortress): "They could have inscribed on the memorial plaque that **Dafina** (bolded by editors), the sister of Father Music, had been the president of the Kolo Srpskih Sestara – and they would not have been wrong." Why should Kolo Srpskih Sestara, a women's humanitarian organization with a long tradition, be proscribed?

### "Sarajevo, my love"

A paradigmatic story in a brilliant sense and context has its genesis in a March issue of *Oslobodjenje* and was inspired by an item broadcast on Radio Free Europe. When students from the Prva Kragujevacka Gimnazija, the oldest high school in Serbia, found out they would be going to Sarajevo on their graduation excursion, 150 of them started singing Kemal Monteno's cult song "Sarajevo, ljubavi moja" (Sarajevo, my love)! *Oslobodjenje's* reaction was as quick as lightning. They invited the young people from Kragujevac to be the newsroom's guests. This was the first student excursion from Serbia visiting Sarajevo after the disintegration of the former country and the wars waged in its territory. This unusual event was correctly covered by the paper, garnished with a joint photograph of the guests and the hosts in the newsroom corridor.

The First of May double issue featured a reportage on sports fisherman from all over BiH socializing at Sutjeska: “Excellent organization; RS honorary fishing permit to Sarajevo Ismet Bajrovic,” said the reportage sub-headline. This is how broken ties are reconnected via the media.

The dates – First of May, Ninth of May and Twenty-Fifth of May – may serve as the fundamental dates of the monitored period for all four papers.

*Oslobodjenje’s* First of May double issue was too modest, unlike a supplement on the occasion of the Twenty-Fifth of May – Youth Day. The last Saturday supplement “Pogled” (View) in May even carried an article on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Congress of USAOJ (United Alliance of the Anti-Fascist Youth of Yugoslavia) in Bihac. A polemical editorial article was titled: “*Oslobodjenje* is proud of its anti-fascist tradition,” illustrated by numerous items on anti-fascism and remembrance of Tito. Articles emphasize that anti-fascism brings people and young generations closer more and more clearly (Saturday edition of “Pogled” on May 8, on the eve of Victory Day). On the occasion of the Twenty-Fifth of May – Youth Day, the paper published a feuilleton in 10 parts on how the Landing at Drvar was crushed and on attempts to capture Tito: “Failure at Drvar, beginning of Hitler’s end” (feuilleton title). Or, in the “Pogled” of May 29, the front page is marked by Tito’s followers visiting his birth town of Kumrovec, with an announcement of a witty and sparkling article by Josip Vricko: “Comrade Tito, we are champions again.”

A possible explanation for the paper’s modest First of May double issue is the newsroom’s caution in the context of the paper’s legacy that it was once burdened by class and ideology.

The paper’s traditional division into sections does not mean automatic elimination of politics from non-political issues, or from supplements, such as KUN on Thursdays (KUN is short for “culture, science, art”). It is understandable that reviews of books about the war or genocide carry a pronounced political message and note. There are similar examples in “Tribina” (Panel, featuring readers’ letters), “Feljton” (Feuilleton) or “Izbor” (Selection) of articles from other media, mostly from our neighborhood.

In his column “Clearing,” in an article titled “Language above languages” (May 11), Zija Dizdarevic confirms how much discourse about language, that pronouncedly socio-cultural phenomenon, is here at the same time an inflammatory political issue and a powerful weapon of political manipulation. The author reacted to a public statement by Prof. Munib

Maglajlic, who repeated an earlier allegation that there is no Bosnian language on FTV and that the press has succumbed to Croatization. Dizdarevic questions the insistence on orientalism in standard Bosnian language, reminding that many oriental terms have been accepted by other peoples in the neighborhood as well. The column sub-headline is also indicative: "From patriotic linguistics to cultural hegemony."

There are also opposite examples. On the second page, in "U zizi" (In the spotlight), which is dominantly political, Edin Krehic writes a commentary titled: "Insemination of science" (May 27) in celebration of Sanja Sibincic from Banja Luka, who has a master's degree in medical science and who carried out artificial insemination after which the first test-tube baby was born in BiH. The place where the commentary was printed (Politicka zaoka - Political sting) is a paradigmatic example of how thin, or practically invisible, is the line between political and non-political issues. It also indicates the paper's lack of a clear editorial policy. The column "Priblizavanja" (Coming together) by Tomo Pocanic (May 15), featured on the second page, can be placed in a similar context. Its title is "Bridges of connection" and it speaks about the integrative power of sport in this country.

Another date in May is current, the 15<sup>th</sup>, marking the end of the Dravograd operation (in the north of the former Yugoslavia, today Slovene-Austria border), when war in Yugoslavia's territory finally ended. For the partisans, that is victory day, while for the defeated that is the so-called Way of the Cross or Bleiburg. *Oslobodjenje* on May 18 brings an article by its Zagreb correspondent, with a sense of proportion and professional editorial presentation. The item superscript headline reads: "Croatia after commemorations in Jasenovac and Bleiburg," with a striking and longish headline: "Put down banners from which love and forgiveness can be read," which sublimes a sermon by Bishop Mile Bogovic. Along with photographs of the Jasenovac stone flower and the Bleiburg memorial, there are also two text boxes: "Boycott of Jasenovac" and "ustasha iconography," illustrating the still widespread division of Croatia along the partisan-ustasha line. This is less a political determinant and more a socio-cultural indication, with a significant reflection on BiH.

*Oslobodjenje* covers issues related to culture, science, art, education, society, etc., more pronouncedly and consistently than the other three dailies. The "KUN" supplement brings book reviews and art, music and film reviews, without any tinges of politics, politicization, petty politics or similar derivatives and hints. This is the paper's constant characteristic, including the monitored period.

The Saturday edition “Pogled” has a mosaic-like character with items on politics, economy, society, local sub-culture events, etc. Since it deals with politics too, there are inevitable excursions onto the sensitive and slippery ground of our disagreements and quarrels about the character of the war, victims and suffering, figures on the dead and missing, collective guilt, identification, etc.

### **A stage for social dialogue**

*Oslobodjenje* carefully cherishes the “Tribina” section, featuring a broad range of items in the form of commentaries, retrospects, opinions and suggestions. At the top of this section is an editorial note saying that articles cannot insult other people and that an item cannot be more than 50 lines long. The former condition is strictly adhered to, but there are deviations from the latter. There have even been items in installments. The “Tribina” is least of all a “shoulder to cry on” about communal and similar issues and problems; instead, it is pronouncedly politicized with divergent and opposing views.

In the monitored period, attention was drawn by disagreements over the artistic transposition, or film narration, of the movies “Summer in the Golden Valley” and “Fuse” by Srdjan Vuletic and Pjer Zalica respectively. Three signatories, Bosniaks by ethnicity, wrote an open letter (published in several papers), strongly criticizing the above authors and their movies for grotesquely presenting the lives of Bosniaks, for which they use the term “Bosniak community.” Srdjan Vuletic is particularly targeted, whom they suggest should make movies on the topic of his own community, “which he surely knows better.” Evidently, the article signatories are bothered by the fact that Vuletic, although Bosnian, is not a Bosniak-Muslim.

May was also marked by the Eurovision Song Contest in Istanbul. Most articles contained a note of enthusiasm and patriotism. However, an item on Saturday, May 15, more by editorial presentation than by the correspondent’s article, suggested animosity against our eastern neighbor’s representative: “Zeljko Joksimovic accuses BiH team of scandal,” in the context of a statement that his performance will be a “revenge for the 500 years of the Ottomans staying in our territories.” The article includes insinuations that the song *Lane Moje* is a plagiarism.

At the time of our monitoring, the Press Council of BiH (self-regulatory body) published its first report based on print media monitoring in January – March 2004. In *Oslobodjenje*’s report of May 14, the headline says the print media Code was violated most of all by *Glas Srpske*, *Dnevni Avaz*, *Slobodna Bosna* and *Ljiljan*. The report provoked fierce reactions,

especially by representatives of the blamed media from Sarajevo. The biggest dispute was caused by interpretation of Article 10 of the Code, Persons Charged with Criminal Acts, which insists on a fundamental legal institute – the presumption of innocence – according to which no one can be declared guilty without a valid court verdict. Of course, Karadzic and Mladic immediately come to the foreground, and their qualification as war criminals.

Nagorka Idrizovic wrote an interesting retrospect on this issue/dilemma (“Pogled,” May 22) entitled: “Both by law and by morality”, with a superscript headline “Can Radovan Karadzic be called a criminal,” without a question mark at the end. The article includes a text box entitled: “Is Heider an idiot?” Idrizovic uses as crown proof the case of the journalist Oberschlick, who in an article called the rightist Heider a Nazi and an idiot. The Appellation Court of Vienna judged against the journalist, but the Human Rights Court in Strasbourg overturned the verdict, considering it a violation of Article 10, Freedom of Expression, of the European Convention on Human Rights. The analogy here is in order.

More will be said about the controversy provoked by the report in analysis of the other papers.

### ***Dnevni Avaz***

*Dnevni Avaz* was launched in 1995. Its very name and design were somewhat of a shock for numerous press consumers. Namely, the paper’s name/masthead has in it the Turkish word “avaz” (voice), which was rarely used among the elderly Muslim-Bosniak population. The artistic and graphic solution of the masthead featured a dragon, which also carried a certain mythical symbolism relayed to the local media landscape. Namely, those who were better informed and/or close to the Democratic Action Party (SDA), the leading Bosniak political party, claimed that *Avaz* was launched with the aim of destroying *Oslobodjenje* as a symbol of the preceding government.

In the masthead, the paper also carries the label: “The highest circulation BiH political daily,” which is true. However, how high the circulation really is, not just of *Avaz*, but also of the other dailies in BiH, is something that no one knows for sure. Although it sounds paradoxical, circulations are the strictest guarded secret here, whether they are exaggerated, diminished, or suppressed. In most western countries, it is a legal obligation to give papers’ printed circulations. The First of May issue of *Avaz* gave the figure of 114,586, with three exclamation marks (!!!), which sufficiently illustrates the provincial and gloating spirit. Those who are better informed, however, claim that *Avaz* is printed on Fridays in 80,000 to 90,000

copies, impressive by local standards, and on the other days, on average, in one-half of these figures. How high is the number of unsold copies is the biggest mystery, again in line with the provincial spirit, translated in the saying: “May the neighbor’s cow drop dead.”

On the inside pages, in marking the date, *Avaz* prints the names of the months in both language variants – Bosnian and Croatian (*Oslobodjenje* makes a compromise by using Roman numerals). The price of the paper is given in the local currency (KM), in the currency of neighboring Croatia, and in euros, the only tender in Montenegro, where the paper’s owner and publisher is originally from.

The First of May double issue consisted of a total of 96 pages, 53 of which were advertisements, including obituaries, on as many as 24 pages, which is also indicative in the sense of what readership circle the paper is intended for. Or, more precisely, what ethnic and religious group. The standard number of pages in the paper is around 60, of which one-third are advertisements.

By the technical and editorial organization of the front page and the inside pages, and by the way news items and contents are presented, *Avaz* is closest to a tabloid. To recall, tabloid originally means two things: small format and concentrically laid out news items and short articles with large headlines, text boxes and similar graphic and technical solutions, and with an abundance of photographs. However, the term “tabloid” experienced a certain positive semantic shift. Tabloid used to be a synonym for so-called yellow press, which is outdated as a qualification today.

*Avaz* does not have a traditional division of pages. It has something in-between. To illustrate, the paper does not have classical culture pages, nor literary and art reviews. This is substituted by short stories and news items mostly about the entertainment business, sketches of politicians and public figures, interviews made on certain occasions, statements that are taken or carried, etc. *Avaz* is an informative paper, it has sections “Commentary of the Day” and “Figure of the Day,” but it does not go deeper into the background of news.

With regard to presentation of light issues, one may say that *Avaz* is a print version or variation of the Karaoke Show. For the less informed, Karaoke Show is a contest for anonymous singers broadcast on TV, a manifestation of local sub-culture, with elements of kitsch and trash. Or, a headline given to a small item: “Matija Matko, football player in “Celik”: I didn’t read a single book to the end” (May 15).

Avaz does not have inciting or inflammatory rhetoric when it comes to the other two peoples in BiH, but it is ruthless towards Bosniaks who do not share the same political views. This is its constant editorial characteristic.

Indicative questions are asked in a section called "Public opinion research" (*ad hoc* telephone polls) and their orientation, as a rule, is pro-Bosnian. Numerous articles are permeated with a spirit of affirmation of BiH as a joint country of all its peoples and citizens. To illustrate, when the European Youth Peace Summit was held in Sarajevo (mid-May), "Figure of the Day" was Sasa Toperic, top musician, UNICEF and UNESCO ambassador, president of the American-Bosnian Cultural Foundation, and project manager for the International Youth Peace Summit.

An article entitled "Remembrance of the fateful May 2, '92 – the day when all dreams of Bosnia's division were destroyed" has a similar editorial tone. The article mentions the longest TV news broadcast in one dramatic day and night, which lasted a full 14 hours (from 3 p.m. to 5 a.m. the next day). The article contains elements of a media sketch.

An item by S. Radulovic about the series "A new name for a new time," broadcast on the local station Radio Srpsko Sarajevo, was similarly inspired. Namely, the radio's moderator and editor-in-chief Dejan Karleta followed the trail of a Constitutional Court of BiH decision on erasing the prefix "srpski" (meaning Serb) from the names of cities and municipalities in the RS. Karleta suggests that the disputed prefix should also be left out of the radio's present name, after which BiH would again have Radio Sarajevo.

"Bosnian handicrafts in America: famous Robert Redford buying knitted slippers," is the headline of a reportage (May 25), which speaks affirmatively about a multiethnic and local non-governmental organization from Tuzla. A week before, a reportage was published, called "Love-sickness at Banski Dvor," about a successful evening of *sevdalinka* (authentic Bosnian folk song) in Banja Luka.

### **Reflections of media disputes**

Avaz focused considerably on media disputes in the country. It did it less successfully if Avaz itself was a subject of dispute, especially during the election campaign in the fall of 2002. There were stormy reactions in the paper after the publication of the first Press Council report because the paper was emphasized as one of those that violated the Press Code the most. Controversy is most noticeable with regard to use of the term "war criminal," although

this is not dominant in the report, but in *Avaz* this detail is placed in the foreground (articles in issues of May 8 and 14).

An item that illustrates our media quarrels is an article announcing a visit by Sejda Sjekirica, the mother of Sanel, who was arrested by Spanish authorities for alleged connection with international terrorism and afterwards released: “I will sue all who lied about my Sanel” – is a striking detail from the front page announcing a more extensive article on page eight (May 22), with a photograph of the mother and the caption under it: “Sejda Sjekirica pointing to a headline in *Oslobodjenje*.” Using its usual rhetoric, *Avaz* typically labels *Oslobodjenje* “a low-circulation daily.” And, vice versa, *Oslobodjenje* calls *Avaz* “a little dragon.”

Like *Oslobodjenje*, *Avaz* also carried in its “Kiosk” section (“Izbor” in *Oslobodjenje*) a Sidran interview from the Zagreb weekly *Globus*, where Sidran’s lamentation for Kusturica is underlined.

RTV EXTRA (48 pages) is regularly presented as “The most complete TV and SAT program.” The issue of Friday, May 7, consisted of a total of 136 pages! This time, once again, roughly one-third of the total number of pages were advertisements and obituaries. An earlier wide-spread practice was that companies close to the SDA advertised in *Avaz* and this later continued as a stereotype. Today, however, everyone advertises in this paper, including well-known international companies. On this note, for quite a while now, *Avaz* has not been so close, at least not publicly, to the leading Bosniak political party.

In technical and organizational terms, *Dnevni Avaz* is a contemporarily equipped paper and company, with a rich gamut of weeklies and other periodical editions. The newsroom composition is dominantly Bosniak. Journalistic names are not high-sounding, such as the ones at *Oslobodjenje*, but *Avaz* has a better organized and wider correspondent network than *Oslobodjenje*. The paper regularly features items from the other entity. They are usually correct, and the ones with all-Bosnian connotations are especially affirmative, such as, for instance, an article entitled “Good results of spa tourism and treatment in BiH,” report from the spa Banja Vrucica near Teslic (May 12).

### ***Nezavisne Novine***

*Nezavisne Novine* was launched in 1998 in Banja Luka, with substantial assistance from foreign donors. Relatively soon, the paper acquired a high reputation in the country. It is the first media outlet in the RS that plucked up the courage to criticize then incumbent authorities

and to reveal compromising information on many actors of the wartime and postwar period. Due to a series that exposed crimes committed by certain paramilitary groups in the RS during the war, the paper's founder and director Zeljko Kopanja was seriously hurt when a bomb was planted under his car in the fall of 1999. He lost both legs. That was certainly a high price to pay for his paper acquiring an independent position in the media landscape of BiH, and even broader.

By its front page and content, the paper unambiguously suggests that it is free of a provincial and parochial spirit. In addition to issues covering all of BiH, *NN* also brings items from the neighborhood.

*NN* is printed in its own state-of-the-art printing house with an average circulation of 23,000 copies. There is no reliable data on the number of unsold copies. The paper is printed in the Latin alphabet, using an eastern variant of the jekavian dialect (a kind of Serbian language). A double issue is printed on weekends, which means the paper does not come out on Sundays.

In its traditional poll, *NN* declared American Ambassador to BiH Bond Figure of the Year 2003. The paper's double issue of May 8-9 brings a remarkable joint photograph which says a lot. Namely, next to Kopanja and two unidentified elderly persons are all young and sparkling people. Bond literally said "young and educated, which is *NN*'s success formula." Judging by the photograph, one can also see that the paper's newsroom is dominantly female! We might add, also ethnically and nationally balanced. Today, many people believe *NN* is the only authentic BiH daily paper, with a high professional level at that.

*NN* came out on the First of May as a triple issue with a rich content, with the inevitable *NN Revija* (NN review) supplement.

Cultural, art and corresponding issues are presented in a breezy, leisurely and witty way, a real refreshment in broader BiH journalism. It seems that journalists writing about music are particularly inspired, such as the female duo: Sandra Gojkovic and Vesna Iliktarevic, in an extensive article entitled: "Culture of sound in a blind alley" (First of May triple issue). The article is a catalog of problems in the entertainment business in Banja Luka, although there are as many as 30 bands in the city on the Vrbas River, which are barely surviving. To paraphrase freely, the article says that trash and kitsch are suffocating rock music, as well as manifestations of sub-culture, an essential accompanying phenomenon.

The weekend after that (May 7), an article was featured across two entire pages, in the form of a centerfold, about Dado Topic, portrayed as a cult figure on the ex-Yu rock scene. The item was skillfully editorially presented – selection of photos, captions under pictures, effectively written sub-headlines and superscript headlines. The next two pages are dedicated to the international rock scene.

Sport is also written about extensively. Items were observed which emphasize the integrating function of sport, such as an interview with Milanko Mucibabic, the new president of the Olympic Committee of BiH (First of May triple issue), in which his crucial statement is given in the headline: “Everyone must help BiH Olympic athletes go to Athens.” The whole article exudes an all-Bosnian dimension of the national Olympic movement and sport in general.

Sead Fetahagic writes satirical columns on Mondays, “Iz pozadine” (From the background, earlier published in *Oslobodjenje* under the same superscript headline), ruthlessly slamming the protagonists of incumbent politics, regardless of their national and ethnic background. However, these are not classical political retrospects. This is literature.

As its feedback space for articulation of readers’ opinions, *NN* formally uses the “Forum” page, where it invites readers to present their views, opinions, dilemmas, etc. However, most of this space is taken up by the paper’s columnists or editors, the already mentioned Fetahagic, Slavo Kukic and his mammoth column “Balkanska krcma” (The Balkan inn), “Pjesnani sat” (Sand watch) by Mate Djakovic, “Politicka estrada” (Political entertainment business) by Pero Simic, “Nezavisni stav” (Independent stand) by Josip Blazevic, Zekerijah Smajic, and occasional items by the editors Dragan Jerinic and Mirjana Kusmuk, and others. Authentic readers’ letters are rare, both in the monitored period, as well as after it. This practice was observed even before, which is indicative of the paper in a negative sense.

### **Issues with a social note**

We observed that *NN* covers acute social issues in the country in a more pronounced way. There are many examples, practically in every issue. An item from Breza, a mining town near Sarajevo, about a former miner who has lived in an abandoned railway car for a year (May 3), can serve to illustrate this.

In the next day’s issue, on the front page, are images of a strike in Bosanska Gradiska, in northern BiH, RS. *NN* appreciates the sensitivity of the phenomenon of renaming cities, streets, squares, etc., which was also the case here, and the toponym is given in two

versions: "Gradiska/Bosanska Gradiska." Among the numerous posters and placards carried by the strikers, one stands out because it rhymes in Bosnian, "Paddy, brother, they are not giving us salaries," (High Representative to BiH Paddy Ashdown).

*NN Revija*, a supplement in the weekend double issue, gives the central spot to "The topic of this issue." Issues with a social note prevail here, but not just traditional ones, in the context of searching for social justice or revealing injustice; there are also ones with a broader meaning, such as: "Smoking and advertising of cigarettes is (not) prohibited" (May 8-9). Or, "Poverty prevents schooling," and "Hunger is killing pensioners," both featured in a double issue (May 15-16).

Protection of the environment and architectural heritage is also the newsrooms' preoccupation, without any entity limits. This is testified by an item from Bihac on Una River Day (May 18), where 11,000 paper bags, as easily degradable packaging, were given out to citizens. In the next day's issue, the paper brings a reportage on the activities of Eco-Center "Bocac," on the example of hauling out tons and tons of garbage from the Vrbas River. Or, an article entitled: "Vrbas unites ten municipalities" (May 25), where residents of villages along the Vrbas decided to revitalize this beautiful river, under the motto: "The Vrbas, my life."

"Beauty becomes disgrace" is the title of a reportage from Ostrozac near Bihac on the devastation of the old town on the Una. A large color photograph, with three inserted miniature photos, effectively supplements the article, which in this case is closer to the genre of reportage (May 13). In the same issue is an item on the opening of a restoration and conservation workshop for easel painting at the Art Gallery of BiH in Sarajevo, as a donation of the Government of Japan.

Reflections on the Eurosong in Istanbul are witty: "...Perhaps I have grown old, but I never liked disco, perhaps I am a romantic, and I prefer to say 'Lane Moje' (My lamb)," wrote Mato Djakovic in his column "Pjesnici sat" (May 15), offering a clear allusion to his music and other affinities in the rivalry between the representatives of BiH and Serbia and Montenegro on the eve of this year's Eurosong.

The results of the Eurosong vote were written about by Branko Todorovic (president of the RS Helsinki Committee) and Slavo Kukic (May 17 and 19). Both articles are pervaded with a spirit of strong optimism with regard to the future of coexistence in the region.

## ***Dnevni List***

*Dnevni List* was launched on October 1, 2001 as the youngest daily in BiH at that time. The paper carried a symptomatic motto in its masthead: “The first daily in BiH in Croatian language.” We titled an analysis of the first 100 issues: “In a rift between two homelands,” which said enough and suggested the paper’s profile. In further elaboration of this dichotomy, which was obviously too heavy a burden, we emphasized that the paper was at the same time in a rift between the mother country and the country of origin. Due to certain political circumstances, this burden of dichotomy gradually yielded. Today, *Dnevni List* is a paper that fits into the media environment of the country, rarely rosy, usually gray. The paper’s masthead says it comes out in “Sarajevo/Mostar,” which indicatives political maturity and acceptance of the reality of the post-Dayton BiH. The paper’s average circulation is 8,000 copies and the percentage of sold copies is 65 to 70.

The First of May issue was marked by preparations for the opening of the Old Bridge in Mostar. “Opening of the Old Bridge – half the road in rebuilding Mostar” – this is a part of a characteristic statement by a Mostar official placed in the headline.

Another event was related to the activities of the agile Nansen Dialogue Center Mostar, which in cooperation with centers in Sarajevo and Banja Luka held a successful conference on conflict prevention and peace building. The choice of Mostar for the issue was not coincidental, which an extensive item in the paper emphasizes. The article also underlines the need for education on peace and conflict prevention through civil society mechanisms.

In the center of the *List* front page (May 2) is the dominant figure of Cardinal Puljic at the marking of the “300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the torching of a Franciscan monastery and church in Olovo.” In the item’s announcement is the cardinal’s key statement made at the gathering calling to the faithful to “restore trust in God.”

The next day’s front page is marked by the first Communion in the Mostar cathedral. With a large color photo, on three-fourths of the front page, an item was announced whose title is “Living to make the Church and the people proud.”

In the same issue is an item on the “non-canonic situation in Capljina,” in the context of a several-year-long rebellion of Franciscans against members of St. Peter’s Order, better known as the Jesuits.

The Law on University Education, a part of the so-called Bologna Process (standardization of university education in Europe), provoked a lot of controversy and resistance. Croats in BiH offered the fiercest resistance, viewing solutions in the new law as an attack on their cultural independence. The title of an article speaking about this sensitive issue was striking: "Bosniaks and Serbs rejected 20 Croat amendments." The sub-headline features a statement by a Croat member of the FBiH Parliament: "Genocide against Croats continues," with the explanation that no Croat representatives participated in drafting the above law. The item was conspicuously featured on practically the entire ninth page, called "Politics," although this matter falls under the sphere of education (May 3).

Two days later, the law on university education was targeted once again, qualified by the same Croat member of parliament in the following way: "the law is unconstitutional, retrograde, assimilatory, anti-European and passed against the will of the Croat people." We are obliged to explain here that the new law abolishes segregation in education, which persisted as a paradox and anachronism after the conclusion of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Inconsistency and disorientation in sorting items is illustrated by a reportage from Medjugorje (May 11), entitled: "Millions of pilgrims from the whole world," featured in the "Politics" section!?

*Nedjeljni Magazin* (Weekly magazine), as a supplement, brings an extensive item on the centerfold, entitled: "In Federation, 600 saw-mills operating illegally." In addition to an economic aspect, the article also warns of unfavorable ecological consequences of uncontrolled wood cutting.

In the same issue, on an entire page, is an inspired and affirmative item about Pocitelj (author Toni Sarac), entitled: "Architectural pearl on the Neretva River," which illustrates a new pro-Bosnian tone in the paper's editorial policy and orientation. Pocitelj is a valuable architectural heritage from the Ottoman period, and during the war and after it, it was subjected to desecration by Croat extremists (by erecting a cross on top of a fortress, etc.).

In next week's *Magazin*, attention was attracted by an extensive reportage from Ključ (central Bosnia), entitled: "Scene of surrender of last Bosnian king," recalling that Ključ was "among the oldest, largest and best fortified towns in the Medieval Bosnian State..."

*List* also covered this year's Eurosong vote with sympathies, and Sanja Bjelica in the regular "Daily Commentary" (May 18) declares "Lane Moje" as "the best as a paradigm of resistance to the Englosong."

The Saturday *Fokus* (Focus) edition is marked by columns written by Zvonimir Jukic, Pejo Gasparovic and Zekerijah Smajic, all authors of a pro-Bosnian orientation, which is also very indicative of the *List's* present editorial policy.

Still, a reflex of the previous period persists with regard to some issues, such as coverage of Bleiburg and the so-called Way of the Cross, or leaning toward the clericalist position of the Catholic Church: "Europe needs Christian foundation for its unity" (May 23) – title of a report on the celebration of Central Europe Catholic Days in the old Austrian Marian shrine of Mariazelle. This was a clear allusion to the announced passing of the first European constitution, in the context of insistence of certain Catholic countries to include in the constitution preamble the words that Europe's heritage is a Christian tradition.

One gets the impression from some items and articles that *List* strives to achieve the position of a medium as a means of evangelization, which is basically not bad, but this is sensitive ground where it is easy to slip into clericalism, as we have warned here.

### **Instead of a Conclusion**

Common for all four papers is their identical tabloid format, but not tabloid content. *Oslobodjenje* is closest to the traditional look of a political daily, with commentaries, opinions, views, examining the background of news, etc. Culture and art issues are covered regularly and appropriately, and presented in a relatively traditional way. The paper especially cherishes *vox populi*, which is commendable, although emphasizing readers' reactions may sometimes profile/impose views on the paper's audience.

*Dnevni Avaz* is something in-between. Overfull with information, needed and unneeded, reliable and unreliable. No harm meant, but *Avaz* is excellent reading for taxi drivers at a stand waiting for a customer. The stand can be in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Mostar...

*Nezavisne Novine* with its non-political contents brings real refreshment to the bleak BiH media landscape.

*Dnevni List* is painstakingly building and profiling itself as a serious and reliable paper. It is in that context that can we characterize the contents that were the subject of this monitoring project.

Although a plural form was used in this article, derived from the institution where I am employed, this article is pronouncedly the author's stand, with elements of impressionistic critique. Hence, by form, close to the essay genre. Thus its very expected and understandable limitations and weaknesses. This work is a sublimated of a media-communication and socio-cultural approach in elaborating the possible and essential political reflections of non-political issues and developments in the country, through the viewpoint and angle of the four leading dailies in BiH.

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