

HANNA SCHECK (ED.)

Changing Identities in South Eastern Europe

*Between Europeanisation,
Globalisation, Regionalisation,
and Nationalism*



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Preface

In cooperation with the Centre for Social Innovation in Vienna, the Austrian Science and Research Liaison Office Ljubljana announced in 2010 its seventh call for proposals for projects in research cooperation and networking between institutions in Austria, Slovenia, and the Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR of Macedonia, Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/1999, Montenegro, and Serbia). The call focused on intensifying short-term cooperation in the scientific field of “Changing Identities in South Eastern Europe: Between Europeanisation, Globalisation, Regionalisation, and Nationalism,” with the aim of supporting the development of long-term scientific collaboration and to gain scientific insight in changing identities in South Eastern Europe. Funding was provided by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research within the framework of its South Eastern European Science Cooperation Initiative. Six projects have been funded from this call, and the outcomes were presented at a conference which took place in May 2011 in Vienna. This publication presents some outcomes of the funded projects and it also includes other papers reflecting the subject. It addresses current changing processes, analyses, as well as historical developments in South Eastern Europe by having a closer look at various selected aspects which describe the complex nature of territorial identification in the areas of conflict between Europeanisation, globalisation, regionalisation, and nationalism.

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HANNA SCHECK, Centre for Social Innovation

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EU accession, crimes and sports: the thematic frame of reciprocal perceptions between Western Balkan countries and EU

Keywords: EU enlargement, Western Balkans, reciprocal perceptions, EU identity, mass media discourses

The paper outlines the reciprocal perceptions between the Western Balkan countries and the EU against the background of a future EU accession of the region. Based on the rationale that mass media is a crucial platform through which reciprocal perceptions are identified and reciprocal images are formed. A comparative newspaper analysis in 2009 focused on the reciprocal news coverage in two EU countries (Austria and Slovenia) and two Western Balkan countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia), which also identified the geographical and thematic frame of the reciprocal news coverage of both sides. The paper reveals that the attention paid towards the EU region in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia is significantly higher than that paid towards the Western Balkan region in the EU countries. It also illustrates that EU-related topics are not the only thematic frame shaping the news coverage on both sides when the respective, 'Other,' is taken into account.

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Western Balkan countries and the EU

The enlargement rounds of 2004 and 2007, when a total of ten countries entered the EU, as well as the signing of the Lisbon Treaty in 2007, or most recently the global economic crisis and its impacts on the European economy have all contributed to increasing skepticism and fatigue among EU member states (EU-MS) concerning a further EU enlargement. The official accession negotiation process with Western Balkan countries⁵ (WBC) that is currently under way, presents an unpredictable factor relating to whether or not, and when, those countries will actually become EU members.

Recent public opinion surveys support these observations. While the populations in many EU-MS express a significant degree of skepticism regarding the future Croatian EU membership, or even more so, that of Bosnia, Herzegovina (BiH), or Kosovo, the populations in those countries express both a strong willingness to join the EU, combined with high expectations regarding this membership. At the same time, they express increasing skepticism about whether or not they are appreciated and welcomed as new members by the population of EU-MS. For further information, see Standard Eurobarometer 74 survey (2010), Gallup Balkan Monitor survey (2010).

The current state of research⁶ still lacks profound comparative analysis of the WBC and current EU-MS in regard to attitudes concerning EU membership, or the reciprocal perceptions between the two sides. Population surveys alone do not fully answer this question, because a lot of aspects remain ambiguous. They do not provide further information on the images and perceptions of EU and the Western Balkan (WB)

⁵ The political term is used by the EU to in order to place all the ex-Yugoslav successor states, not including Slovenia, plus Albania under a common umbrella. It designates the countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.

⁶ For the current state of research, see as examples Čučić (1997), Gromes (2009), Ott (2006), Đerić (2008), Blanuša (2007), Džihic et al. (2006), Adams (2007), Brantner (2009), Brusis (2003), Diez Medrano (2003), or Drulak (2001).

region that people may have in mind, when, for instance, they are asked about their support for a future EU enlargement. Thus, the potential conflict of differing expectations and skepticism that may result from the positions stated in those surveys can only be described and interpreted on a very abstract level, and the attitudes towards the EU cannot be traced to underlying political, economic, cultural or social principles and practices.

This paper presents the first results of a conjoint comparative media study⁷ which is a first step in shedding light on this research gap. For an initial summary of the current relations and perceptions between the EU and the WBC, our study asked the following question:

What are the reciprocal frames of perceptions currently communicated between the EU and the WBC, and what facets of the reciprocal Other are focused on in that context?

Theoretical assumptions

We consider this a crucial question, because future EU enlargements to the WB region not only mean (re-)defining actual EU borders, but it also triggers negotiations and (re-)defining of EU collective identity concepts. Arguing with basic assumptions of Social Identity Theory and Social Categorization Theory, the concept of the EU as a collective entity thereby inevitably contains an in-group/out-group element, and relies on (real or constructed) boundaries between those who belong to the in-group and a conceptual out-group against which an individual's own concept of belonging can be demarcated. For further information, see

⁷ The media study was carried out by the Commission for Comparative Media and Communication Studies at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna/Austria, in cooperation with the Mediacentar Sarajevo/BiH, the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory at the University of Belgrade/Serbia, and the Faculty of Humanities Koper at the University of Primorska in Koper/Slovenia. Additional contributions to the comparative media analysis came from Sandra Basic Hrvatinić/University of Primorska and Gordana Djerić/University of Belgrade.

Mummendey, Simon (1997), Abrams, Hogg (2004), Abrams et al. (1990), Turner (1985), Turner et al. (1987), Castano (2004), and Castano et al. (2002).

This definition of belonging is stimulated by the basic human need for a social identity and orientation within a social environment. Social categorization helps to provide a system of orientation for self-reference, to define one's own place within the European context and in relation to other European countries. For further information, see Risse (2010) and Wöhlert (2008). The WBC continue to form a structural out-group to the EU, forming the Other against which the EU demarcates itself. Therefore, this in-group/out-group dualism (EU vs. WBC) and both sides' definition of the EU as a collective entity form crucial parameters for the current perceptions and relations between the EU and the WBC. Among the EU-MS, the perception of the WBC may be shaped by criteria according to which those member states define the EU as an entity, and whether they support or oppose a further EU enlargement. Among the WBC, the perception of the EU may not only differ but may also reveal different levels of identification with this collective entity that oscillates between the ambition to become a part of this in-group (EU), and the rejection of this membership.

Therefore, using this design for a comparative analysis of reciprocal perceptions between in-group (EU-MS) and out-group (WBC) can provide new insights not only on how the EU is currently perceived (a) from the outside, i.e. when those who are not part of the EU, but strive for a membership, look at the EU, but also (b) from within, i.e. when the EU member states observe and define a potential out-group and thus define the boundaries of their own EU collectivity. A comparison of these two perspectives may track possible gaps that become apparent from those reciprocal perceptions and the EU concepts communicated in those contexts and that might become a barrier for the WBC in the accession steps lying ahead.

In that context, mass media presents an essential communication arena for the construction of collectivity concepts. For further information, see Eilders, Lichtenstein (2010), Gerhards, Neidhardt (1991/1993),

Gerhards (2004). Due to the widespread visibility and connectivity of mass media, discourses are predisposed for the evolving and expansion of societal descriptions on unity, especially because social identification and collectivity negotiation is not merely the calling forth of stored attributes of Self and Other, but rather a dynamic process in which collective identities are continually being reconsidered, renegotiated, and recomposed relative to other groups. For further information, see Rivenburgh (1997), Melischek, Seethaler (2008), Pfetsch (2008), Weller (2000).

Furthermore, we regard transnational collectivities like the EU as ‘imagined communities,’ as social constructions. They do not preexist outside communication, but are created precisely when people speak to one another, be it in interpersonal settings or through mass media. For further information, see Anderson (2005). Arguing with the agenda setting approach, mass media thereby sets the agenda for certain topics that are transferred as relevant to the public with regard to the focus on the WBC in EU-MS and vice versa, and that form the knowledge base for the social construction of community. For further information, see McCombs, Shaw (1972), McCombs (2004).

Project design

A cross-national comparative analysis of print media news coverage has provided further insights into the reciprocal views, topics, norms and values consulted as a source of information when attitudes and opinions towards the EU or the WBC future membership are queried. Focusing on the year 2009⁸, we compared two EU-MS (Austria, Slovenia) and two WBC (BiH, Serbia). For each country, the data sample consisted of

⁸ The stratified random sample included 12 publication days. For each month, one issue of each newspaper, taken from the 2nd week was chosen, creating an artificial week from Monday to Saturday (Sundays were excluded since not all newspapers have regular Sunday editions). The following publication days were analyzed: January 5, February 3, March 4, April 9, May 8, June 13, July 6, August 4, September 9, October 8, November 6, December 12.

three daily newspapers: For Austria, the two quality dailies, *Die Presse* and *Der Standard*, as well as the tabloid newspaper *Kronen Zeitung* were analyzed. The Slovenian sample included the quality newspapers, *Delo* and *Dnevnik* as well as the tabloid newspaper, *Dobro Jutro*. For Serbia the quality newspapers, *Danas* and *Politika*, as well as the tabloid, *Kurir*, were analyzed. For BiH, due to the ethno-political divisions in the country that also affect the circulation range and relevance of newspapers in different regions, we chose *Dnevni Avaz* for the newspaper read by the Bosniak population, *Nezavisne novine*, which is read by the Serbian population, and, *Dnevni list*, which is read by the Croat population.

In a quantitative content analysis, and using the same analytical categories (codebook), we identified the geographical as well as the thematic spectrum of the reciprocal news coverage when (a) in Austrian and Slovenian newspapers focused on the WBC (i.e., when articles referred to Albania, BiH, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, or Serbia, or to the transnational geopolitical categories ‘South Eastern Europe [SEE],’ ‘Western Balkans’ or ‘Former Yugoslavia’) and, vice versa, when (b) in Bosnian and Serbian newspapers focused on the EU region (i.e., when articles referred to EU-MS, and/or the EU as a geopolitical entity, and/or EU institutions). The whole newspaper edition was included, to also identify the scope of societal levels in which EU or WBC are perceived.

Reciprocal perceptions between EU and Western Balkans

Level of attention paid towards each other

Starting with the overall level of attention paid to the EU region in the WBC, and vice versa the level of attention paid towards the WBC in the two EU-MS, we identified significant quantitative differences (see figure 1).

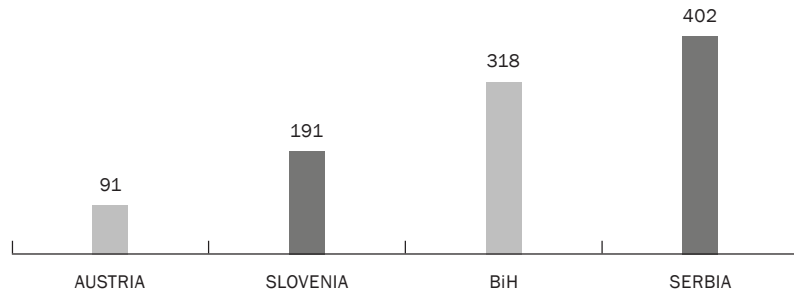


Figure 1: Number of identified newspaper articles

In the Bosnian and Serbian newspapers, the focus on the EU region was significantly higher than the reciprocal focus on the WBC in Austria and Slovenia. We found the highest level of attention towards the respective Other in the Serbian newspapers, while Austrian newspapers revealed the lowest level of attention paid towards the WB region. This indicates that the focus on the EU region was a significant frame of reference for both WBC in the daily news coverage; a relevance that was not attributed to the WB region in the regular reporting of newspapers in Austria and Slovenia.

The geographical spectrum of the news coverage

In Austria and Slovenia, the focus on the WBC was predominantly shaped by references made towards individual countries: In Austria, references towards individual WBC were found in 91.2% of all identified articles with a focus on the WBC, compared to 86.4% in Slovenia.

In both countries, most references were made towards Croatia and Serbia (see figure 2). One difference between both countries was a significantly higher level of attention paid towards Kosovo and Macedonia in the Austrian newspapers, while both EU-MS had a similar focus on BiH. Montenegro and especially Albania were only marginally referred to in both countries' news coverage on the WB region.

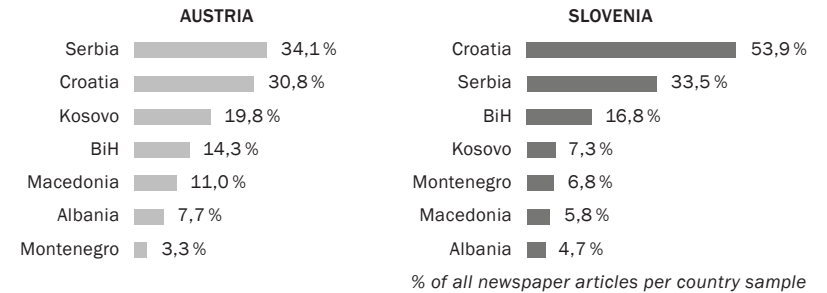


Figure 2: Frequency of references made to Western Balkan countries

In contrast to that, only 44.0% of the Bosnian articles and 58.2% of the Serbian articles were referring to the level of national entities when focusing on the EU region. In the Bosnian context, countries most often referred to were UK, Germany, Sweden, or Slovenia, while Serbian newspapers most frequently related to France, Germany, UK, or Italy (see figure 3).

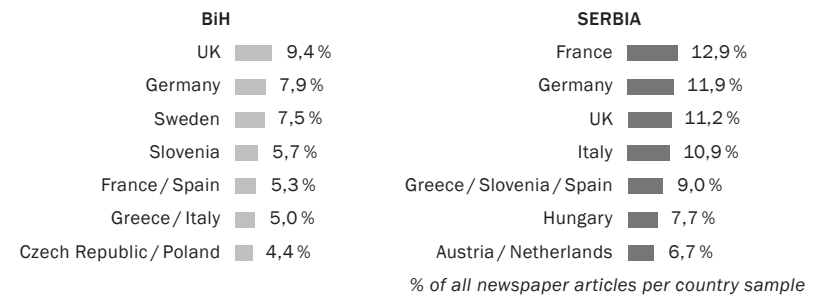


Figure 3: Frequency of references made to EU member states (10 most frequent countries)

One overall feature we noted is that all analyzed countries most frequently included references to their own country when the reciprocal Other was observed, meaning articles also had a national focus. Serbia

stands out especially with self-references in almost every article of the sample (86.6%), while national self-references were found in 54.9% of the Austrian and 34.0% of the Slovenian newspaper articles on the WB region. An exception here was BiH, where the reference towards the EU (70.4%) exceeded their own national self-references (50.3%).

Compared to the level of nation entities, fewer references were made in Austrian and Slovenian newspapers with regard to transnational entities when the WB region was taken into view (see figure 4). The label most frequently applied in Austrian newspapers was 'South Eastern Europe / the Balkans,' while only Slovenian articles to a significant extent, also applied the label 'Western Balkans' to refer to the region. A third category used was 'Former Yugoslavia.'

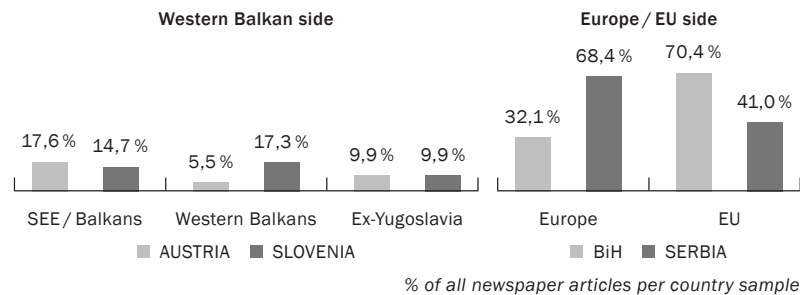


Figure 4: Frequency of references made to transnational entities

Compared to that, in BiH and Serbia the reference to a transnational level was identified much more frequently when the EU region was taken into view. In Serbia, the label most frequently applied here was 'Europe,' a collective reference significantly less used in the Bosnian newspapers. Instead, in BiH more than every second article of the sample referred to the collective entity 'European Union / EU,' while only one third of the Serbian articles did so.

The thematic spectrum of the news coverage

In the context of this geographical spectrum of reciprocal perception, a variety of topics were taken into view in the analyzed newspapers of each country. Many articles, especially in the Serbian and Bosnian sample, included references to more than one thematic area, and especially in the Bosnian and the Serbian sample, articles not only discussed one but a variety of topics in combination. In all four country samples, the thematic area of Politics was most frequently focused on (see figure 5).

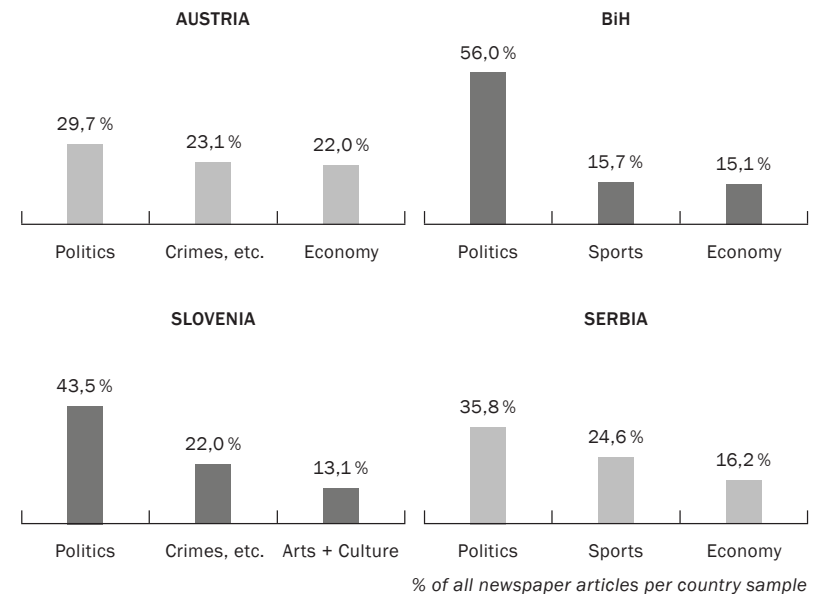


Figure 5: Thematic references (3 most frequent thematic areas)

In the Austrian newspapers, articles most often referred to EU-related politics, reporting for instance on the EU enlargement perspective and the state of progress of different WBC, or the liberalization of the

Schengen visa regulations for the WB region. With regard to the former, most attention was paid to Croatia's state of negotiation, whereas with the latter, particularly BiH and Serbia were taken into view.

Other frequent topics were the bi-national border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia, the Serbia-Kosovo relations and in particular, the KFOR-Mission of the NATO⁹ and the EULEX-Mission¹⁰ to Kosovo. On a national level, Austrian articles focused on the nation-building process in Kosovo, the political structure and conflicts between the structural entities in BiH, or the resignation of the Croatian Prime Minister Sanader in July 2009, and the political causes and impacts of this internal governmental change.

A second thematic area frequently referred to in Austrian newspapers was Crimes and Catastrophes. Here, the news coverage was mainly shaped by articles reporting on criminal immigrants from the WB region in the national context of Austria. Here, the WB side was identified by references to the respective criminal actor's nationality/country of origin (predominantly of Serbian origin).

A third relevant thematic area was the dimension of Economy. Identified topics here focus mainly on Croatia (e.g., Croatian economic legislation reform, the Croatian credit system, or real estate market), but also on the economic situation in BiH, economic relations among SEE countries, or on the situation of the region as a whole in different economic branches. Some articles had a national focus on Austria, centering on news about Austrian companies (e.g., REIWAG, Hypobank AG). Those national-based topics were put in relation to Austrian foreign trade relations with specific SEE countries or the region as a whole. The central focus here formed the news coverage of Austrian-Croatian economic relations, but we also found articles referring to relations between Austria and Serbia, or the SEE region as a whole (e.g., expansion of the above-mentioned companies to Serbia and Croatia).

In the Slovenian newspapers, Political news was dominated by a

focus on the bi-national relations between Slovenia and Croatia, and in particular, the Slovenian-Croatian border dispute (e.g., during the time of our analysis, an arbitration agreement on the border dispute was reached between the two countries). This dispute is mainly a bi-national issue, however it was also partially connected to the EU level, and here mainly with regard to the political impacts it has on Croatia's accession negotiations with the EU, of which Slovenia is already a member. Other than that, minor topics including the visa regime liberalizations for the WB region, or the internal EU positions on EU enlargement in general. We also identified articles that dealt with international relations between the WBC (e.g., Serbia and Kosovo), NATO, and the KFOR-Mission, or Croatian internal politics (e.g. war crime prosecution, resignation of Prime Minister Sanader).

As in the Austrian sample, a second thematic area frequently focused on was Crimes and Catastrophes. However, other than in Austrian newspapers, articles did not focus on crimes in Slovenia, but mainly referred to events and criminal actors in Serbia, Kosovo, Croatia, or BiH. Perceiving Slovenia as a central corridor for drug trafficking to the EU, one central focus was put on organized crime. In this context, the news coverage also outlined connections from the criminal groups to the political systems of the mentioned countries, indicating that those criminal structures in the WB region are not sufficiently combatted by the governments of the region.

A third thematic area frequently taken into view was Arts and Culture. Here, articles reported on movies or music from the region, events in the region (Croatia in particular), or artists and guest concerts from the WBC in Slovenia. This level of perception indicated a high level of interconnectedness especially between Slovenia and the other countries of the former Yugoslavia, with many cultural projects still being produced in a conjoint process of Slovenian and WBC artists and cultural markets, or with artists well-known beyond their own countries of origin in the WB region.

In the Bosnian newspapers, the central thematic area of Politics was dominated by EU-related topics, the most central ones being the

⁹ NATO-led international peace-keeping force for Kosovo

¹⁰ European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo

procedural and formal issues of the EU accession process and the visa liberalization for BiH and the WB region. However, in the context of those topics, the newspaper coverage rarely went beyond the frame of deterministic projections of the EU enlargement and visa liberalization processes in BiH. Questions of the actual implications of the EU accession for BiH citizens and state, involving pro or/and contra arguments, were rarely discussed.

References to EU politics were often related to internal political topics in BiH, primarily regarding constitutional changes and the negotiations of the political parties concerning those changes. Other topics within that context were, for instance, internal disputes between entities and between political parties, issues of harmonization of customs tariffs, or state incentives for domestic food production. Additionally, some articles referred to the role of EU actors in BiH and topics concerning the transformation of the OHR¹¹ to EUSR¹², the implementation of EU laws in BiH, or the conduct of individual EU-MS or their ambassadors in BiH.

In some articles, the relations between BiH and the USA were taken into view, as well as the involvement of the USA in negotiations for constitutional changes. This level of international relations was often discussed alongside the Bosnian relations with the EU, since both EU and international actors such as the USA or NATO mainly act side by side in its negotiation role with regard to nation building process in the country. Other topics were specific bi-national relations between BiH and individual EU-MS (e.g. Italy, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovenia, or Sweden), as well as the bi-national dispute between Slovenia and Croatia.

Besides this rather dominant focus on Bosnian political interrelations, the national politics of Croatia (especially the resignation of Prime Minister Sanader) and the Croatian-Slovenian border dispute were taken into view, and were discussed with regard to the connec-

tions and impact of those topics on the Croatian EU accession process. Furthermore, the Serbian EU accession as well as the internal political progress of the country was reported.

A second thematic area in which the EU region was frequently taken into view was Sports. Here, articles reported on a variety of events, either on a European-wide level or in different EU-MS (e.g. European Championships, UEFA¹³ Champions League, German football league, Danish handball league). In some of these contexts, performances of Bosnian representations and clubs were referred to, such as friendly games between Bosnian and German football teams, or the ranking of BiH representation in FIFA¹⁴ qualifications, etc.

As in Austria and Slovenia, a third thematic area in which the EU region was taken into view was the area of Economy. Topics related to in that context were for instance the international financial crisis and its impact on different countries in Europe, as well as on MMF¹⁵ and EBRD¹⁶ credits and bank loans. Other thematic references were made to international trade and labor markets, or the gas conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Besides that, Bosnian newspapers focused on problems of the Bosnian economy such as the shortage of national buffer stocks, economic deficit, a lack of incentives for national food producers, foreign trade de-balances, or the decrease of custom revenues and the need for harmonization of import customs tariffs.

Last but not least, in the Serbian newspapers, Political News was dominated by an outward perspective. The international involvements with and relations towards Kosovo, and especially the recognition of Kosovo as an independent state, formed a central focus in the Serbian news coverage. In this context, the EU side came into view, but an even bigger focus was on USA politics. In other articles, Serbia's relations with the UN (with regard to UNMIK¹⁷), or the negotiations for a future

11 Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina

12 European Union Special Representative

13 Union of European Football Associations

14 International Federation of Association Football

15 Money Market Fund

16 European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

17 United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo

Serbian membership in NATO were taken into view. Articles with EU references also reported on Serbian internal political debates, on the overall political system, internal political disputes between parties or ethnic entities, or the new statute of the Vojvodina province that was approved by the Serbian Parliament in November 2009.

With regard to EU-related politics, topics such as the Schengen visa liberalization for Serbia and the WB region, or the Serbian EU accession process, and especially the Serbian formal application for an EU membership candidature were covered. In that context, the newspapers reported on reciprocal visits of Serbian and vice versa, of EU officials, as well as on the results of those talks between the two sides. We also found frequent references to Serbia's cooperation with the ICTY¹⁸ trials in The Hague, which is seen as a crucial pre-condition for a future EU membership of the country. Minor topics reported were the elections of the president of the European Commission and of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, two positions that are also relevant for Serbia's EU accession efforts.

As in the Bosnian sample, Sports formed the second most frequently referred to thematic area in the Serbian sample in which the EU region was reported on. Articles mainly reported on Serbian teams competing in the European football league UEFA, the European basketball league, the national basketball team's involvement in the European championship, or the Serbian national volleyball team's participation in the European championship.

Following Sports, Economy forms a third thematic focus when the EU region was taken into view. One main topic here was the international economic crisis and its impacts on Serbian and other European countries' economies. In that context, financial institutions like EBRD, IMF¹⁹ or World Bank and their financial aid and investment in Serbia were reported on. Other topics included Serbian foreign trade relations with European countries or companies (e.g., the Italian car producer

Fiat), the Serbian export economy, or foreign tourism in Serbia. Domestic economy issues varied from privatization problems to state investments and the fight against the economic crisis. As in the Austrian sample, the economic topics discussed were mainly directly related to the Serbian economy.

Implications for EU-Western Balkan relations

A comparison of the outlined geopolitical references shows that the Austrian and Slovenian focus on the WBC was shaped by the observation of individual countries rather than the region as a collective entity. Both EU-MS have a rather selective perspective, focusing on specific countries such as Croatia and Serbia in particular, while others such as Albania or Montenegro are rarely taken into view. The concept of an overall Western Balkan Other (integrated by recognizable common self-determination policies or common political agenda that would be equivalent to the EU) could not be identified for the analyzed sample, since most articles mainly focused on individual WBC at a time. In Serbia and BiH, the news coverage on the EU region significantly applied references to a transnational level, perceiving the region rather as a geopolitical entity than as individual countries.

A comparison of the thematic spectrum of the news coverage on the respective EU or WB Other in the four countries showed that the political dimension formed the central societal level on which both sides observe each other.

The EU-related political level was particularly relevant in the Bosnian and in the Austrian news coverage, while in both the Slovenian and the Serbian news, slightly more attention was paid to the level of other bi-national and international politics. This may be explained by the fact that both countries' foreign political relations are currently shaped by an ongoing bi-national political conflict, in Serbia with regard to the independence status of Kosovo, and in Slovenia referring to the bi-national dispute with Croatia. Both are key topics of negotiation in the two countries' EU accession process.

¹⁸ International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia

¹⁹ International Monetary Fund

In all four countries, one central aspect of the reciprocal perception on the political dimension was the boundaries between the EU and the WBC. All four countries frequently addressed this, mainly with topics relating to the EU accession process of the region. In Bosnia and Serbia, their individual accession was most prominently discussed, while in Austria and even more so, in Slovenia, the Croatian status was focused on. In addition to that, Austrian newspapers revealed a significant focus on internal political matters of the different WBC.

Besides the EU boundaries, in Bosnia and Serbia a second emphasis was identified concerning the relations between the EU side and the WB side. The topics discussed indicated a strong orientation towards the EU. The findings suggested that the EU forms an important reference point when internal politics of the respective WB country were discussed, without necessarily also discussing in more detail EU-related issues. Here, we noticed that the Bosnian perspective on the EU was less critical than the Serbian one, but on both sides few substantial informative debates and questioning of EU politics and EU accession were found. Other than in the Serbian sample, when referring to the EU we also noticed a focus on the underperformance of Bosnian national political actors on political disputes, and on the need for political improvements against the background of a future EU accession, which indicated a pattern of negative Bosnian self-presentation.

In the Serbian sample, the political topics discussed not only indicated a strong orientation towards the EU, but also to other international actors such as the UN or the USA. A closer look at the topics presented, indicated that the perspectives on the EU and the interrelations between EU and Serbia was perceived slightly more critically, especially with regard to the outlined EU accession criteria that are expected from the country (e.g., cooperation with the ICTY, Kosovo status).

A second dimension that articles with reciprocal references touched on in three of the four analyzed countries was economy. However, as our analysis showed, this dimension was less relevant compared to the political perception, and rarely touched EU-related economic topics. Thus, while the political perceptions were strongly embedded in

the overall framework of the EU, this was much less the case when the economic dimension was touched on in the reciprocal news coverage of EU-MS and WBC.

In the Austrian sample, the thematic analysis showed that this focus mainly referred to Austria's economic involvement and interests in the region. Being a geographic neighbor of the WB region, the same could have been expected for Slovenia. However, compared to Austria, the economic perception of the WBC in Slovenia was only of minor relevance. This indicates, that the Slovenian perspective on the WB side was to a large extent dominated and thus shaped by the political level and here in particular by the issues that accompany the bi-national relations with their direct neighbor Croatia.

Other than in the political dimension, the aspect of EU boundaries was not focused on in the economic dimension. In BiH and Serbia, the discussed topics mainly touched on the interrelations between the EU-MS and the WBC or focused on domestic economic topics in the two countries. Again, in many instances the EU served as a reference point when economic evaluations of their own countries or the WB region were made, or, when articles focused on the financial benefits the WB region can expect or already have received from the EU within the course of the economic rapprochement process of the region towards the EU. Here, the already mentioned pattern of negative self-presentation in the political dimension, as it was outlined for BiH, was also employed when the national economy was discussed.

The most interesting result of our analysis was that beyond Politics and Economy, other societal dimensions shaped the thematic frame of reciprocal perceptions. It is with those thematic areas that we traced two major differences between the reciprocal perspectives of both the WB side and the EU side: While the two EU-MS focused on the dimension of crime/delinquency when the WB Other was taken into view, the two WBC frequently observe the EU region in the dimension of sport.

Especially in the Austrian newspaper sample, crime news formed a significant level on which WBC or actors from the region were observed. Geographically, those articles predominantly looked towards the in-

group (Austria), with the out-group (WBC) side stepping into view as criminal immigrants (of mainly Serbian origin), who have crossed the geographical, but also normative boundaries of the in-group. Those implications were mainly implicit, i.e. by pointing out the criminal activity and the impact of those crimes, but they were also made explicit, i.e. by referring to the “wave of criminals sweeping over Austria” or “crossing the Schengen borders” from SEE. In the Slovenian context this level of perception was shaped by an outward perspective, not covering crime news and events within their own national boundaries but in the WB region, Croatia and in Serbia in particular, which results in not only a negative, but also a distancing perception of the depicted WBC and not just of individual actors.

Compared to that, in the two WBC the news perspective on the EU region was significantly shaped by sports-related news, in particular by the news coverage of European sports events and the involvement of WBC in the same. The topics suggested that the discussion of Sports in both countries did not communicate boundaries between the in-group EU and the WB region. Bosnian and Serbian sports teams were portrayed alongside other European teams (e.g., in international competitions), and no structural or geographical distinctions were communicated in those contexts.

The two differing thematic foci indicate two opposite perceptions: Metaphorically speaking, the level of sport unites people, by bringing them together in a positive competitive activity that takes place on a mutual level. Compared to that, crime and violence rather divides people, by bringing them together in a negative competitive activity, with damages for one side. The negative connotation of crime and violence, per se, creates a negative setting for the perception of the WB Other, and this may implicitly challenge the region’s degree of belonging to the EU in the context of the respective news coverage, while the setting of sports does not challenge the belonging.

In the beginning of this paper we argued that shedding more light on the currently perceived relations between the EU and the WBC is an important task in view of the future EU accession of the region. By

identifying the thematic spectrum for the agenda that newspapers set in the selected EU-MS and the WBC, we provided a first step in mapping the societal dimensions which the reciprocal perceptions between the EU-MS and the WBC communicate, based on attitudes towards each other that can be identified.

However, it is not only the frequency of the consulted thematic areas and dimensions of reciprocal perceptions in the analyzed newspapers that make those areas and dimension more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences. Particular interpretations and positions presented in the news reports on the portrayed topics can have an influence on the weight and relevance that readers give to certain issues, as well as on the images they connect with them. As McCombs (2004) has put it, attention and comprehension are closely connected. For further information, see Kioussis (2005), Soroka (2003), Entman (2004), Bruter (2005), Pfetsch, Adam (2008), Page et al. (1987).

Therefore, the next step of our conjoint cross-national analysis will be a more detailed qualitative analysis of the arguments and positions that are given with regard to the portrayed topics. This analysis can provide further insights on the perceived similarities, differences, gaps, potential conflict lines that are portrayed in the context of those topics. It allows deriving more detailed conceptualizations of the EU as a collective entity as they may become apparent in that context, and to further corroborate and specify the assumptions on the reciprocal perceptions of belonging and differences between the EU and the WBC we have introduced briefly in this paper.

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