

# deScripto

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Media Landscape

# Serbia in Transition



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Letter from the Editor-in-Chief

Dear Readers!

Following the concept of *deScripto*, to present the media landscape of countries in South East Europe, the media landscape in Serbia has to be observed through a special focus, which is "change". Serbia in the last couple of years has undergone a turn that might be estimated as a significant example, maybe also a model for an active transition. The political bent of that turn and for change was neither easy to do nor accomplish and has been accompanied by strong conflicts, but now has happened irrevocably. There are many areas where that move of change can be observed. One of those areas is media. Since media is not just a system of devices or of organisation, but much more a social system of intermediation, it is a cultural, political, educational and economical platform of building a society. If there is something relevant within a transition process, then it is the active movement of change of social relationship. What is changing through transition is not only the macrocosm of basic institutions (market, politics), what is changing is the microcosm of social relations, increasingly developed and organised through media and usage of media.



The young and vivid media scene in Serbia represented by open minded and creative students shows that Serbia did not lose its power of reflection. It has transferred that national talent of pride and reflection into a new era of mirroring itself through media. The students of the Faculty of Media and Communications at Singidunum University in Belgrade who mainly worked on this issue of *deScripto* have decided for a spectrum of topics, which represents the ambiguous world of media in Serbia. The outcome is a colourful picture of a vivid landscape, designed by shrill accents and continuous ways alike. Thanks to them we get an idea of what is going on in Serbia's media landscape.

This is why we thank all the students of the Faculty of Media and Communication and especially *Mirjana Stefanovic*, who did the editorial coaching and who stood responsible for this part of the issue. We hope you will enjoy it and you will gain a greater insight and understanding of Serbia.

*Thomas A. Bauer, Editor-in-Chief*

Letter from the Publisher

Dear Readers!



*deScripto* is becoming better and better. This is not only my impression as the publisher, but also from the many positive comments, letters and E-mails we received after the publication of the last number. The fact that we have started a cooperation with local universities in South East and Central Europe, has not only had an influence on the improved quality of

*deScripto* but also promotes better cooperation between the University of Vienna and universities in the region.

I would like to thank this time especially Nada Popovic-Perisic, Dean of the Faculty of Media and Communications at Singidunum University in Belgrade. She is not only a great professional, and as a former Minister in Serbia is also a person with great experience, but also a person that understands very well the needs of modern media communication. I am happy that I met her and that we started our partnership on different projects. Also, many thanks to Mirjana Stefanovic for coordinating the work in Belgrade, Selma Koric from my SEEMO team in Vienna, for coordinating the work in Vienna, thanks to all students from the Faculty of Media and Communications at Singidunum University in Belgrade and to all students in Vienna for working on this issue. Thanks Sarah Hayes for proofreading and our Art Director Zoran Spahic for the layout. And for course, thanks Thomas, for being a great editor-in-chief of *deScripto*.

For SEEMO the work is continuing "as usual". Independent of the world financial crises, we are doing our best to support media and press freedom in South East and Central Europe. Our SEEMO Media Handbook 2008 in two volumes, with about 1,000 pages in each volume, is proof of this. But also some other publications we are doing, like the new SEEMO book-edition we started with our SEEMO partner in Belgrade Dan Graf, under the name *The Greatest Investigative Journalists*. The first book "Garibi" by Esad Hecimovic from Bosnia and Herzegovina is only the beginning, with an edition in Serbian-Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin, but our plans are to continue with co-publishing the books in this SEEMO edition also in other languages. From May 2009, SEEMO will have also a new web page, we will open a Facebook community for SEEMO and of course, we will continue with SEEMO Conferences in the region, like the WAZ-KAS-SEEMO South East and Central Europe Media Forum that will be held this year in Tirana.

*Oliver Vujovic, Publisher*

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**Mission Statement**  
*deScripto* is committed to the enhancement of a climate of critical reflection on media culture and communication, in and among the SEE countries. Published quarterly as a joint project of the University of Vienna and the University of Applied Sciences Vienna, under the auspices of The South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO), *deScripto* is an independent journal of analysis and opinion dedicated to the democratisation of the media and the development of civic society in the SEE Region.

The views expressed in *deScripto* are entirely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the positions of SEEMO/IPI.

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The South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO), an affiliate of the International Press Institute (IPI), is a regional non-governmental, non-profit network of editors, media executives and leading journalists from newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations, news agencies and new media in South East Europe (SEE). With its committees, SEEMO aims to create a bridge between international media activities and media developments in the region (South East, but also Central and East Europe).

SEEMO was founded in October 2000 in Zagreb, Croatia, by a group of leading editors-in-chief, media executives, and professors of journalism and communications from South East Europe, in the presence of representatives of international institutions and with the financial support of the International Press Institute (IPI). SEEMO has local partners, members and coordinators in all countries and territories in SEE.

One of SEEMO's main activities is protecting press freedom by helping journalists and media outlets in South East Europe. Over 60% of SEEMO's press releases and letters of protest to governmental and other officials have had positive results in the past. Every SEEMO protest is distributed to leading regional and international media, national and international governmental and non-governmental organisations, politicians, and public persons and institutions. In the past, SEEMO has provided direct help to journalists in the region by giving them technical equipment and other assistance. SEEMO has also provided necessary aid to journalists who have received death threats. SEEMO has over 500 editors-in-chief, media executives and leading journalists from South East Europe as individual members, and over 100 media outlets and institutions as corporate members.

During the last seven years, SEEMO has brought together in various meetings over 6,800 editors-in-chief, media executives, leading journalists and public persons from the region. Some of these meetings, like the meeting of editors-in-chief and media executives from Belgrade (Serbs) and Pristina / Prishtinë / Priština (Kosovo-Albanians), were the first of their kind in history. No one before SEEMO had managed to gather such high-level media representatives from Belgrade and Pristina in a meeting. Between 2002 and 2004, SEEMO organised 14 dialogue meetings between editors-in-chief, media executives and leading journalists from South East Europe.

In October 2005, SEEMO organised the SEEMO Dialogue Conference between editors-in-chief and media executives from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia/Montenegro in Opatija. One month later, in November 2005, a SEEMO Dialogue Conference between editors-in-chief and media executives from Albania, Macedonia (Republic of Macedonia-FYROM), and Serbia/Montenegro/Kosovo was held in Tirana.

SEEMO also organised the first meeting of leading media representatives of all important private news agencies in the region in June 2005, and as a result of the meeting the agencies founded a regional organisation of private news agencies (APNA).

SEEMO actively cooperates with international, regional and national governmental and non-governmental organisations and institutions. SEEMO also actively cooperates with other international press freedom and media organisations, and it supports and participates in joint regional and international projects and activities.

Together with partners, SEEMO has organised seminars and conferences promoting European values and ideas (2003, 2004, 2005), ecological philosophy - environment and better transport possibilities in the region (Belgrade 2002, 2004 and 2005, Athens 2003 and 2004, Trieste 2004, Sarajevo 2004 - all conferences in cooperation with City of Vienna and Bohmann publishing group), a regional conference on investigative reporting (2002), a regional conference on minorities (2002), elections (Media and Elections in 2007, together with Radio 101, Hrvatsko novinsko društvo and Guardian Foundation), two conferences for editors-in-chief, media executives and leading journalists of Roma media in the region (2003), two conferences of editors-in-chief, media executives and leading journalists of Vlachian-Aromanian media in South East Europe (2004), several conferences on press freedom, the legal situation of media, relations between media and politicians, the public role of parliamentarians, access to information, the right to secrecy of information sources, tolerance (Media and Tolerance Conference in 2004, together with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and International Center for Education of Journalists (ICEJ)), teaching public relations and communications for governmental officials, etc.

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Helping journalists also means furthering their education. Several workshops and seminars were organised in the field of education, especially for investigative reporters (in Opatija in Croatia (2006), in Babe in Serbia (2006), in Tirana in Albania (2007), in Bucharest in Romania (2007), in Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2007) and in Sofia in Bulgaria (2007)) and also workshops for representatives of minority media. Some of the minority media workshops and seminars took place at the SEEMO Media Minority Centre (MMC) in Opatija, Croatia.

In June 2008 SEEMO organised the conference Media, Marketing and Business, as also the regular meeting of the private news agencies in South East Europe. In December 2008 SEEMO will organise the conference Public Broadcasting in South East Europe in cooperation with RTV Slovenija.

SEEMO has several international and national governmental organisations and institutions as project partners, like the Austrian Development Agency - Austrian Development Cooperation, The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, or the Central European Initiative (CEI). SEEMO has an ongoing project-cooperation with a number of foundations, universities, media schools and media companies. In the past few years, SEEMO has coordinated several media monitoring projects in South East and Central Europe, and has also organised several pieces of media research.

SEEMO started, together with the German WAZ Medien Gruppe and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), the South East Europe Media Forum (SEEMF) - South East and Central Europe Media Forum (SECEMF). The first SEEMF was organised in Zagreb in 2007, under the patronage of the President of Croatia H.E. Stjepan Mesić, and in cooperation with local media partners: Europapress Holding (EPH), HINA, HRT, Mediaservis, Obiteljski radio and NCL (Nacional) Media Group. The topic of the II SEEMF is "Media and Democracy in South East Europe: Professional Standards and Education of Journalists." The II SEEMF will be held in Sofia, Bulgaria, from 5-6 November 2008. This II SEEMF is organised by the WAZ Medien Gruppe, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), and SEEMO, with local partners Newspaper Group Bulgaria and the Media Development Centre, Sofia

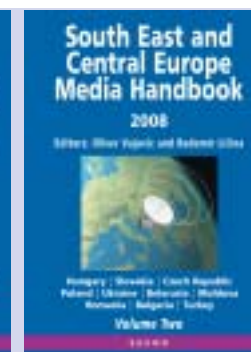
In cooperation with the University of Vienna, since 2004 SEEMO has regularly published a quarterly media magazine for South East Europe called *De Scripto*.

Since 2003, the *South East Europe Media Handbook (SMH)*, an annual publication covering media developments in SEE, which includes selected media contacts, has also been published. Since 2008 the book is published under the name "*South East and Central Europe Media Handbook* (well known

to everyone *SEEMO Media Handbook* (or SMH) in October 2008. The Media Handbook includes media reports and contact details of selected radio and TV stations, newspapers, magazines, media organisations, media schools, journalists' organisations, and internet service providers and other new media from Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus and Bulgaria. SEEMO publishes this book annually in cooperation with its partners, and since 2008 the partners are the Central European Initiative (CEI), the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, and the ERSTE Foundation from Vienna.

Next to these publications, SEEMO has published some other books in the English language, such as *Media and Minorities in South East Europe* or the *Handbook for Investigative Reporters in South East Europe*. But SEEMO also publishes in local languages from the region, for example, the publication *Istraživačko novinarstvo u JE* or the editions of *SEEMO Media Handbook* in Albanian language and in Serbian language. SEEMO is also co-publisher of different books covering media topics. Book on "Media and PR" and a book on *Media, Marketing and Business in South East Europe*. Furthermore, publications on *Public Broadcasting in South East Europe* and *Women, Men and Media* are in planning. SEEMO started also a regional research about Women, Men and Media.

SEEMO awards prizes for outstanding achievements in the field of media. The recipient of the Dr. Erhard Busek SEEMO Award for Better Understanding in 2002 was Croatian journalist Denis Latin, for his TV-show 'Latinica' (HTV). The 2003 Award was given to Kemal Kurspahić, former Editor-in-Chief of the Bosnian daily *Oslobođenje*. He and his team managed to publish during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina *Oslobođenje*. every day in the besieged city of Sarajevo. In 2005 this award was given to Brankica Petković from the Ljubljana-based Peace Institute. In 2006 Danko Plevnik, international relations columnist for the Croatian daily newspaper *Slobodna Dalmacija* from Split, received the Dr. Erhard Busek SEEMO Award for Better Understanding. Plevnik is also the author of several books analysing media, such as *Information is Communication* (1986), *Towards the Civilisation of Mobile Text* (1988) and *The Practice of Ethical Journalism* (2004). Plevnik has also published a number of books on politics, the European Union, and the Balkans amongst others. Soon his two new books, *The Right to Self-Meaning* and *The Fortune of Reading* will be available. In 2007, after careful deliberation, the jury has chosen Milena Dimitrova, commentator for the Bulgarian daily newspaper *Trud* from



Sofia, as the 2007 Winner of the Dr. Erhard Busek SEEMO Award for Better Understanding. Dimitrova holds a PhD in Journalism and is also the author of several books, such as: *Pictures from Japan* (1992), *Parliament and Journalism* (2000), and *Frantzhipani i Farangi: Two Bulgarians with the "Giraffe" Women of Burma* (2005), written together with Magdalena Gigova. Dimitrova also teaches Press Journalism and Investigative Reporting at Sofia University "Sv. Kliment Ohridski". She is the President of the Union of Bulgarian Journalists' Investigative Journalism Section.

The SEEMO Human Rights Award SEEMO Award for Mutual Cooperation in South East Europe is traditionally awarded on 10 December, International Human Rights Day. In 2002, the award was given to Christine von Kohl, a fighter for human rights in the Balkan region, and Editor-in-Chief and founder of the Vienna magazine *Balkan - Südosteuropäischer Dialog - Balkan anders*. In 2003, the award was given to Nebojša Popov, a leading Serbian human rights fighter and founder of the Belgrade magazine *Republika*. In 2004, the award was given to Fatos Lubonja, a leading Albanian writer, journalist and fighter for human rights. In 2006 SEEMO Board Members chose Abdulhalim Dede, a journalist and a member of the Turkish-Muslim minority living and working in Western Thrace, Greece, for the SEEMO Human Rights Award. In 2007 the SEEMO Board named the journalist, writer and fighter for human rights Šeki Radončić from Montenegro, who lives in Bosnia- Herzegovina, as the recipient of the 2007 SEEMO Award for Mutual Cooperation in South East Europe.

In 2007 SEEMO decided together with CEI to start as of 2008 the CEI Award for Outstanding Merits in Investigative Journalism with a prize of 5,000 EUR. This Award was given in 2007 to Drago Hedl from Croatia. The Jury based its decision on the integrity and personal courage demonstrated by Hedl in carrying out his work on war crimes committed against civilians in the eastern city of Osijek in 1991. According to the Jury, "writing about war crimes is not something that makes a journalist popular."

Since 2008 SEEMO has also the Award for the Best Photograph in the Human Rights Field. The first winner of this award (2008) was Maja Zlatevska (*Dnevnik*, Skopje), for the photograph "Zatvor" ("Prison"), her contribution to the human rights struggle in the region. A certificate of distinction was given to Marko Djurica (*Blic*, Beograd/Reuters), for his photograph "Liturgija" ("Lithurgy").

SEEMO also nominated several leading journalists from the region for important international awards. In May 2002, Bosnian-Herzegovinian journalist Željko Kopanja from *Nezavisne novine*, Banja Luka, received the Concordia Award in Austria after being nominated by SEEMO.

SEEMO Board members (since 2007): Radomir Ličina (Senior Editor *Danas* daily, Belgrade), Agron Bajrami (Editor-in-Chief *Koha Ditore* daily, Pristina), Boris Bergant (Deputy Director RTV Slovenia, Ljubljana, and EBU Vice-President), Pavol Mudry (Co-founder and Board Member SITA news agency, Bratislava), Marta Palics (Editor, RTV Novi Sad, Novi Sad), Jorgos Papadakis (Journalist, Athens) and Zrinka Vrabec Mojžes (Editor, Radio 101, Zagreb). Former SEEMO Board (2002-2006): Radomir Ličina - President, Samra Lučkin (Director, Boram Network, Sarajevo), Stjepan Malović (Director, ICEJ, Opatija), Risto Popovski (Director, Makfax, Skopje), Remzi Lani (Director, Albanian Media Institute, Tirana), Jorgos Papadakis/Mircea Toma (Director, Media Monitoring Agency, Bucharest) and Ognian Zlatev (Director, Media Development Center, Sofia). SEEMO Ethical Committee is represented by Danko Plevnik (commentator for *Slobodna Dalmacija* daily, Split). SEEMO Coordinators are: Albania - Frrok Cupi (director, *Agon* newspaper, Tirana), Bulgaria - Ognian Zlatev (director, Media Development Center, Sofia), Bosnia Herzegovina - Samra Lučkin (director, BORAM, Sarajevo), Croatia - Ante Gavranović (former president of the Croatian Journalists Association (HND), Zagreb and of Croatian Publishers Association, Zagreb), Greece - Jorgos Papadakis, Moldova - Alina Radu (director, *Ziarul de Garda* newspaper, Chisinau), Romania - Marina Constantinoiu (editor-in-chief, *Jurnalul National*, Bucharest), Serbia - Veran Matić (Radio TV B92, Belgrade), Montenegro - Željko Ivanović (director, *Vijesti* daily, Podgorica), Kosovo - Haqif Mulliqi (RTV Kosovo, Pristina), Ukraine - Aleksey Soldatenko (Programmes Director, International Institute for Regional Media and Information, Kharkiv).

SEEMO Advisers: Hari Štajner (former Director of Media Center, Belgrade), Boro Kontić (Director, Media Centar, Sarajevo), Donika Shahini and Shpresa Mulliqi (OSCE Media Department, Pristina) and Mitja Meršol (former Editor-in- Chief, *Delo* daily, Ljubljana).

The current SEEMO staff members are: Krasimira Plachetzky, SEEMO assistant; Sara di Pede, SEEMO assistant; Sladjana Matejevic, SEEMO conference and financial coordinator; Elva Hardarson, press freedom and fundraising coordinator and Selma Koric, coordinator *De Scripto* magazine.

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# Communications in the Age of Hypermodernity

By Nada Popovic-Perisic  
Dean of the Faculty of Media and Communications

The age of hypermodernity has been facing the significant inflation of the culture of 'screen'. Never before were people in possession of so many 'screens' as today, not only to 'see the world', but to be live their own life. We are living in a world within the world where the event becomes spectacle. A network of screens has transformed our way of life, our attitude towards information, time and space, travel and consumption. To be is to be 'glued' to a screen.

Emancipation begins with questioning the opposition between viewing and doing; with understanding that the obviousness that constitutes the relationship between viewing and doing constitutes the part of domination and oppression structure. It begins with our understanding that 'to be viewing' also affirms or transforms such distribution of positions. A viewer acts as a student or a scientist, he is selecting, making comparisons, interpreting.

Communication has taken over huge amount of space in our 'modern' societies. Communications has become, as Philip Breton says, a new utopia; the more appealing and more acceptable as 'big' ideologies like socialism and liberalism are in crisis. It is a utopia of a man 'without his interiority' reduced to his image in the society which due to communications became 'transparent'. An apologia of planetary universalism without any substance, a naïve enthusiasm of 'virtual worlds' and 'global village' have strengthened a terrifying demand to discover the same roots, demand for identical, a rejection of all other ways for those roots to be reached... Today we see clearly to which extent the media focused all their powers on information, that it makes them a powerful tool of disinformation.

Liberalism of the world of media whose interest does not necessarily overlap with public interest led to evolution of

populism. Authorities in the world of communications who give rise to a utopia of 'a planetary world' could, in near future, become a backbone of authoritarian regimes which control people; all the more so as they spend their time nailed to computers and also as their communication is technically transparent.

A diffusion of communication utopia recently unfolded with a relative lack of criticism. Liberalism and power of media are accepted as a sign of our political maturity. There are indeed authors like Régis Debray and Jean Baudrillard who tried to criticise the media society, but their criticism makes for a few isolated voices.



Nada Popovic Perisic with associates  
Photo by Snezana Skundric

I believe that a criticism of communication utopia should avoid a false debate between technophiles and technophobes, or a type of debate which is for or against media and new networks. Problems are much more complex to come down to such simple alternatives. A difference should be made between the means and their application, and especially, the significance which is given to them by society. Information technology would play a lesser role in society if less importance was assigned to a certain concept of rationality. That raises the question as to why our

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society pays so much attention to communication. Presence of technology in our environment is not a necessary sign of modernity. Criticism is based on the fact that real modernity is firstly political and only then technological. The essence is not criticism of communication by itself, but of its excessive use. If we say 'everything is communication', we take upon ourselves a responsibility we can not justify.

By definition, media are supposed to bring people together, in other words, to make it easier for them to gain access to events, because communication, in its nature, tends to abolish distances. But 'distances' put up a struggle more than we could have expected. Recognition of a uniqueness of a culture, which is necessary in order to understand an event, is complex and it resists media analysis. By transferring information, media help increase ignorance, because the biggest ally of ignorance is the illusion of knowledge. Denis de Rougemont insists in one of his texts on thorough differences which exist between 'information' and 'knowledge' and 'information' and 'recognition'. One of the problems is that a modern man thinks he has knowledge of the event just because he has information about it. Regardless of quality of work of journalists, information always faces a step after which it can no longer offer a meaning to the event. When it comes to media we are facing a yet another paradox; our feelings are more easily stirred up by television fiction than by pictures of real misfortunes in the world.

Media and communications study is a very wide field with unclear borders that is hard to cover by programmes that offer high level of specialised training. Therefore, we have opted to research this subject through its links to philosophy applied to media and communication. Philosophy, as creative questioning of the world, aims our approach.

Post-modern philosophers like Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, and Jacques Derrida are in the basis of our consideration and critical analysis of the world of media. According to Foucault's division into 'seeable' and 'speakable' the focus inside a culture shifts towards speakable. In such a way picture is no longer being watched but 'read'. Our philosophy tradition has favoured the individualistic concept of cognition for a long time. Information and communication science accompanies philosophy in one attitude: only inter-subjectivity and already established communities can create the subject and 'self' provided with identity. Placed in the field of communication linguistic signs loose their prestige and autonomy: they are a part of the orchestra in which languages of body, pictures and signs have their place. Our language is no

longer, or in other words, not only the element of exposing the truth. From photography to video, from information to testimony, we are facing a semiotic orchestra of signs.

If communicating means 'having in common', and sharing what is common, the contemporary world and its interconnectedness continuously restore ways for us to stay together, and to revive our world in its details. Spiralling differences between scales of communication ranging from interpersonal to interplanetary, suggests the fact that one scientific discipline is not enough to cover the entire field of study. Hence, discipline like communication science searches for its consistency and tries to achieve it by means of confrontation of different knowledge. Communication is nowadays at a crossroads of philosophy and social sciences. That is why it helps us understand several changes in the age we live in. First of all, how to think alongside metaphysical? Namely, this science follows and analyses developments in the processes of desacralisation and secularisation, which Max Webber considers to define the modern age. Secondly, it teaches us how to criticise logocentrism. Namely, our language is not only the means of discovering the truth, but a part of an entire orchestra of signs, what we call semiosis. It helps us criticise egocentrism. On contrary to the individualistic concept of cognition, establishing of subjects is overseen through inter-subjectivity. And finally, how to consider individualism and autonomy. New technologies make the sender's monopoly on the meaning of a message more difficult, and private acceptance of the message on behalf of an ever-growing circle of recipients, easier. For too long philosophers have been placing reasons inside a conscious individual as an innate ability. Information and communication science manages to describe the outer side of reason which lies in socio-technical networks of our cognition and classing.

How can we evaluate the effects of technology? It has been viewed as sub alternate reality for a long time. A project of mediology - logic of media - is to examine numerous effects of technology on a spiritual side, and its efficiency, according to a materialistic and eco-logical approach. This communication culture appears to be complicated because it should embrace semiology, which involves mediology, then, models of cybernetics, especially laws of circular causality and self-organization, terms of social psychology and psychoanalysis. This curriculum should not only show how a message circulates but also in accordance to which imaginary and symbolic influences it does so. That set of disciplines poses as a perfect challenge. It can be of interest to sociologists, philosophers and logicians. That was the very reason for the foundation of Faculty of Media and Communication and it decided the nature of the curriculum taught at our Faculty. ■



## Media Change - The Key of Social Change

*Society is built through intermediation, which becomes increasingly mediatised. Mediatisation changes the mechanism of social trust.*

By Thomas A. Bauer

Serbia over the last years has become a significant example, maybe also a model for an active transition. The political way of and for change was not easy to be done but has now happened irrevocably. There are many areas where that move of change can be observed. One of those areas is the media. Since media is not just a system of devices or of organisation, but much more a social system of intermediation: it is a cultural, political, educational and economical platform of building a society. If there is something relevant within a transition process, then it is the active movement of change of social relationship. What is changing through transition is not only the macrocosm of basic institutions (market, politics), what is changing is the microcosm of social relations, increasingly developed and organised through media and usage of media. The young and vivid media scene in Serbia, I suppose, is somehow the continuation of a talent, Serbia always has been famous for: ambiguous poetry and poetic ambiguity. This special character of intellectual refraction takes care for strong ties to tradition in times of revolution and also provokes with strong tones for revolution in times of stagnation. The media landscape in Serbia is a landscape of social and cultural change.

In a media society, social change in first line is media change. Media is a source of experience that constructs experience becoming knowledge because of the structure of sharing different perspec-

tives and because of its repeatability. Since knowledge, always being a cultural good, in context of social usage of media increasingly becomes a media good, it turns-becoming an economic factor. What counts, is the fact that media do not produce knowledge, but distribute and construct in another social-cultural constellation than the one knowledge is usually produced or distributed. Media do not construct a hierarchical distance and the social rituals they are effecting, are rituals of personal or individual usage. In reference the principle of trust that has always been important in communication of science and knowledge, the social construction of (publicly negotiated) knowledge refers to other (new) constellations of credibility, or of criteria for objective significance. Along the social change there is a level of media change, which is obviously and firstly a change of technology - but in sum it is more: media change is a change of culture (and social meaning) of getting connected to society or to communities, or to any time to any one in any topic in any manner. It is a continuous changeover of relations aiming to be related to a meaningful environment.

This new mechanism of trust in media might have to do with the in same time decreasing importance of institutions (cultural critical evaluation), when media understanding as (special) institutions or such that just replace traditional ones, shifting over them to be-

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come media-like institutions: media religion, media politics, media education, media economy and so forth. But trust in the media also could emerge through the social construction of ubiquity. Increasingly media get used by people that generate knowledge or conversation and also by people that search for knowledge or conversation - both supposing that media are the framework of reference of all, for all, and in relation to all. Media are supposed to be the measure of reference in order to value what one thinks one should know about supposing that any other also could know from there. This concentration of generalisation makes media to become the agencies of the generalisation of social presumption and central agency of social connectivity. As this means a change on all levels of the concept of social change: a change in social relations, a change in the structure of the discourses, a change of values of the traditional social practice, and - last not least - a changeover in using technologies for the construction of social relation, the concept of social change related to the contemporaneous societies, is a *change of the principle of social intermediation*.

Such a situation can be described best as *mediality* or *mediatisation* of social (and personal) life (especially when getting reminded through reflections of Cultural Studies that not the (technical) structure makes media being a media, but only the use of it. The use of media structures (technology) intends the particular process of intermediation and makes media working as an agency of news, mobility, connectivity, flexibility, belongingness etc, of all what man makes realising and verifying as a social being. Media technology of the modern type work in exactly that sense: as the technical device media is the dispositive (Foucault) of just this generalised presumption: media connect and intermediate people - to people, to all thinkable environments, events and experiences.

Referring to the interest of *futurability* as the key interest of the concept of social change, the conclusion is: there is a lot to think about and to research within that context - of course, first of all about the quality of media technology, which - again - is not only a question of technological functionality or aesthetics, but also one of the cultural aesthetics and ethics. In order to keep the social and the cultural balance in that process of development, a technologically competent world of devices and markets needs on the other hand a culturally competent user society. *Media literacy* therefore should not only be a subject for advanced schools, it has to become a general main subject in societal learning programmes, since the world understands, who understands the media (Luhmann). Societies with an elaborated general media literacy level and with a high developed concept of *mediality* (mediatisation) will have much more chances to play a significant role in marking the benches of social change. ■



Press conference with President Boris Tadic  
Photo by Imre Szabo

*small number of journalists so the absence of several journalists for a couple of months would not be feasible*", Ivanovic remarks.

Good quality investigative reporting requires time and resources. One example is journalist and *Blic* editor Branislav Grkovic, receiver of UNICEF award for the story on battle against child pornography. *"The story exposes the pattern by which the new era of technology mirrors the old power imbalance, readiness of abusers to transpose their old criminal habits to the cyberspace and empowered by the new technology occupy that space before children have even stepped into it. It is an excellent and convincing piece of investigative work... It also elucidates the regional dimension. The articles appeals to fight this form of crime and violence back by good preparation and adequate policies,"* the jury stated following the decision on the award.

It took almost half a year for Grkovic to investigate the leads to the story.

*"The entire process lasted around five or six months, partly because of how information got to me, and also because of technical matters. I will make an example: I had to wait for three months to gain permission from the Ministry of Police to interview one policeman who worked on such cases,"* he notes.

## Struggling with Funds and Interests

*While in the past media were controlled by politics and the ruling ideology, today this control is exerted by finances and the principles of the market economy. Many media discoveries came months, years, even decades after that in which they had happened, and they still attracted huge attention. We have not done everything we could, we have not learned enough.*

Media experts in the developed world sometimes ask the question if investigative journalism is the only true form of journalism, then is everything else is just public relations?

From the perspective of societies in transition, well developed democracies enjoy the abundance of investigative journalists that expose affairs of public importance and are able to prove facts before publishing. They can monitor their societies through the discoveries of investigative journalism. In Serbia, as in most countries in transition, things are quite different. Both media professionals and the public agree that there is not enough investigative journalism. Not that there is not any, but there is far less than necessary in a society that is not famous for weeding out corruption, crime and abuse of power.

Milorad Ivanovic, deputy editor-in-chief of a nation wide daily *Blic*, considers lack of financial resources and proper education to be main reasons. *"There is some investigative journalism in Serbia but not as much as in Western countries. Over there investigative journalism implies journalists spending a lot of time and money working on a story. Unfortunately, media here do not have funds to finance major investigations. Besides, media outlets here employ a*



By Aleksandar Skundric,  
Student, FMK

**Media here do not have funds to finance major investigations**

A journalist and teacher of investigative journalism, Branko Cecen, comments on that matter: *"Serbian media do not make enough profit to be able to engage into developing investigative teams, or to let journalist spent three months on a single investigation. However, media are not doing*

*much to overcome that obstacle. Not every story takes months to write; sometimes it can be done much faster. After all, many media discoveries came months, years, even decades after that which had happened, and they still attracted huge attention. We have not done everything we could, we have not learned enough. Only when we do, will we have the right to complain*", notices Cecen.

Another important issue is status of journalists as professionals. Describing in short the findings of research in this area, Cecen summarises: *"Journalists are underpaid and unprotected, both*

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legally and physically, and they are supposed to risk their safety in order to inform on the issues being hidden from the public. Now imagine an editor saying to a journalist: "First you need to work and get some proper training. Then in your own time go and investigate the wrongdoings of some guy who can kill you and get away with it. And you will get 300 EUR at the end of a month". I find it extraordinary that there are people who are willing work in such conditions", Cecen concludes.

### Investigative journalism and education

Currently, investigative journalism is being taught as a course at two Belgrade faculties and in the universities of Nis and Novi Sad. There have been an abundance of professional trainings provided through the donations of various institutions in EU and USA. However, the interest of students and journalists for the investigative journalism is decreasing. There are also serious differences and inaccuracies about what the term investigative journalism means. In the socialist times of former Yugoslavia, investigative journalism implied a combination of analytical journalism and some sort of scientific investigation.

"There are two sides to that story", says Milorad Ivanovic. "There is lack of adequate training on investigative journalism so many are confused about what it is. On the other hand, those who attend the available courses go back to new rooms unable to apply that which they have learned."

To make matters even more complicated, privatisation of the media and new rules of the market democracy have brought financial interests of the media owners before the interests of public and the journalism. "Many media outlets will not investigate those affairs that affect business interests of their owners. In the past they were controlled by politics. Today it is tycoons who are often more powerful than the media and those who want to survive are afraid of criticising tycoons for they fear they might lose advertising income", says Cecen.



Journalist Branko Cecen  
Photo by Igor Marovic



Milorad Ivanovic, editor of daily newspaper BLIC  
Photo by Imre Szabo

### Lack of legal response to the findings of investigative reporters is number one complaint

Problems become more serious when some media choose to distort and manipulate facts. That causes confusion among the auditorium - viewers, listeners and readers.

"There is investigative and pseudo-investigative journalism. In some printed media we can read texts that at first glance look like serious pieces of investigative journalism but the stories are completely made up. And then you can hear ordinary people saying: "They are all the same". That is why there is no real public reaction to investigative discoveries", says Cecen.

### The effects of investigative stories

Branslav Grkovics story uncovered a major flaw in Criminal Law. Has it been removed? "No. There is no political discussion, no political interest for the Parliament to go after it. Have anything happened after I published the story, I would be able to say: "Thanks to my text, someone realised something and something happened". But it did not", concludes Grkovic.

Lack of legal response of the government and judicial institutions to the findings of investigative reporters is the number one criticism of Serbian journalists. According to the law, prosecutors are obliged to act upon any revelation that a person, official or an institution has broken the law. Reactions from public prosecutors on information from media are still exception rather than a rule. As general public gets oversaturated with news and revealed scandals, the lack of public response to the journalistic discoveries becomes more and more obvious.

Investigative journalism in Serbia faces more obstacles than it has incentives. It is easier to find a good investigative journalist than someone optimistic when it comes to the future of that profession. However, with examples such as Grkovic or several international awards winner TV series "The Insider" the future does not look so grim. It improves in small steps. The question remains if it is fast enough? ■

## It Takes Faith and Persistence

Interview with Brankica Stankovic, the author of the investigative TV series *The Insider*

By Aleksandar Skundric,  
Student, FMK

**T**he *Insajder* (Insajder) series by Brankica Stankovic is one of the rare cases of television investigative journalism on Serbian television. The three-member team is led by Stankovic in search for evidence related to the most sensitive topics for the Serbian society including football mafia, money laundering, organised crime and corruption. Last year Brankica Stankovic received the 2008 Award for Better Understanding in South East Europe awarded by SEEMO. In the course of her work, Brankica Stankovic introduced new and improved standards of investigative journalism and has addressed in her TV series the important issues that have been either concealed or sidelined by the authorities. In an interview for *deScripto* Brankica Stankovic says that "things are going to change, but it takes a lot of persistence and faith in what you're doing to accomplish that"

Stankovic further explains: "When you keep in mind that what you are doing is in public interest then you do not let anything be an obstacle in your work. I think that we as the investigative team proved that. We have encountered various difficulties in our work - people "closing the doors", spirals of silence. However, we publish everything we are sure we have enough evidence to prove and for which we are certain is correct. We also name the people who refuse to answer along with the questions they refused to address. That way a viewer can make conclusions if someone is hiding something and also why that someone is stubbornly ignoring questions and remains silent in spite of the obligation to respond as a holder of public function. I believe that, eventually, many things in this country are going to change, but it takes a lot of persistence and faith in what you're doing to accomplish that."

[Have you seen any improvements in the overall conditions for investigative journalism? Media legislation has been progressing along with the work of the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance...](#)

**Stankovic:** There are some positive steps, but that's still minimal in comparison to normal, democratic countries. In Serbia, people still



Brankica Stankovic,  
Author of  
THE INSIDER

Photo by BETA SERVICE,  
Vladimir Milanovic

don't know faces of certain business people and politicians who are virtually "owners" of Serbia. There are people who acquired all sorts of properties and companies around the country and public don't know who they are and where their money is coming from. They choose to stay anonymous and simply respond in a casual tone: "I never give interviews nor answer questions". They are arrogant to journalists and act like they are protected from everyone. We had a minister who spit on and even kick a journalist and everyone just laughs! That's unacceptable. Journalists should not withdraw when faced with such behaviour of politicians or powerful people. Otherwise, what difference media legislation make. Who is going to enforce it? The whole system has to change in Serbia so that journalists can have a role as everywhere else in the democratic world. Public is to control government not the other way around.

[Have authorities undertaken any activities as a result of your findings? Any arrests being made or policy changes implemented...](#)

**Stankovic:** The prosecutor's office reacted several times during the broadcast of *The Insider* in which we revealed the details about the ways money was taken out of Serbia during UN sanctions and citizens of Serbia were being robbed. There are few more examples of arrests. Police and the Prosecutor's office reacted after the aired our findings about "football mafia" and cigarette smuggling. Several indictments followed the broadcast and some people were arrested. However, I still see that as an attempt to trick the public into believing something is being done to resolve organised crime. I don't think any of those are related directly to *The*

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*Insider*. If it were, then surely many of those for whom we, the journalists, proved to be involved in crime, contract killings, corruption, smuggling, would have been arrested by now.

I believe the authorities are reacting to *The Insider* primarily because of its wide viewership. As citizens throughout Serbia are retelling its content after each episode, it would have been too much for them to ignore it and take no action. It is not up to a journalist to prosecute and arrest, but it is to reveal every doing that either government or certain individuals are trying to keep away from the public. Therefore, if we dig out evidence and disclose it publicly, the prosecutor should react. That, unfortunately, is not happening yet.

**Do you consider the public and the media react appropriately to your discoveries?**

**Stankovic:** I don't. Quite the opposite. Number of media outlets, especially newspaper and tabloids, are trying to cover up whatever *The Insider* discovers. Or else the journalists working for such media use false information to confuse the public and falsify the essence of what we reveal to the public. The question is why? Why would any Serbian journalist mind disclosing this kind of information in the first place? Isn't it in every journalist's interest for a story to be investigated thoroughly? The answer is yes. But, many journalists here aren't really journalists. They are paid by certain individuals to protect the interests of criminals, business people, politicians...This is something to be ashamed of! Of course, there are also professionals, but just take a look at the Serbian media today - all the lies and propaganda - and you will soon realise that the professionals are in the minority. The only comforting thing is that it all remains written and one day many of those will be ashamed of lying to their readers and viewers. In my opinion, those journalists should be fought against just like every other type of criminals in this country. ■

## More Doors Still to be Opened

Interview with Rodoljub Sabic, Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection

By Aleksandar Skundric, Student, FMK



Rodoljub Sabic, Commissioner for Information of Public Importance

Photo by FoNet Service, Nenad Djordjevic

**R**odoljub Sabic is the first appointed Commissioner for Information on Public Importance and Personal Data Protection in Serbia. Since the passing of the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance in 2006, the Commissioner played a vital role in the implementation of this important legislation piece. "It is my duty to help in exercising the right to a free access of information of public importance to everyone, and that goes for journalists and the media as well. I try to do my best in the current working conditions, which are modest", says the Commissioner in an interview for *deScripto*.

Sabic continues: "As for the assessment of what has been achieved until now, it depends on what we take for a parameter. In comparison to how government and public companies acted upon their duty as prescribed by the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance four years ago, the situation has certainly improved. Nevertheless, in relation to what could and should have been done, there is little to be happy about. We could and should have done more. Therefore, there are a lot of government bodies that deal with the public's right to know in a correct way, but there are still those that do not."

**In terms of concrete results, how would you describe the current status?**

**Sabic:** If we are talking about lack of response by certain government agencies, the problem is not severe from the point of view of quantity (number of cases) but the principles matter. In over two thirds of all cases, responsible government bodies submit the information they previously refused to disclose after just initial intervention of the Commissioner. In the other 30 percent of cases I had to issue an official request by the Commissioner for the information/documents to be handed out. In the majority of cases government bodies obey the request with more or less enthusiasm.

Out of 6,000 cases that we have addressed so far, there are between 100 and 200 of those where responsible government agency refused to obey the Law. That number seems small. Nevertheless, it is unacceptable for anyone, and especially for public authorities not to obey the Law. This problem should not be underestimated. Decisions of the Commissioner are law-binding, and the authorities are to obey them accordingly. In case they do not, the Government of Serbia is legally required to enforce the execution of the Commissioner's orders. That has not been a case yet. I have already labelled that lack of response from Government as an indirect breaching of the law. I believe it is necessary for the Government to change its attitude towards this issue regardless of how small the number of such cases is. ■

## Deconstructing Stereotypes

Interview with Boban Stojanovic, the activist of the Queeria - Queeria Centre for Promotion of Culture of Non-Violence and Equality

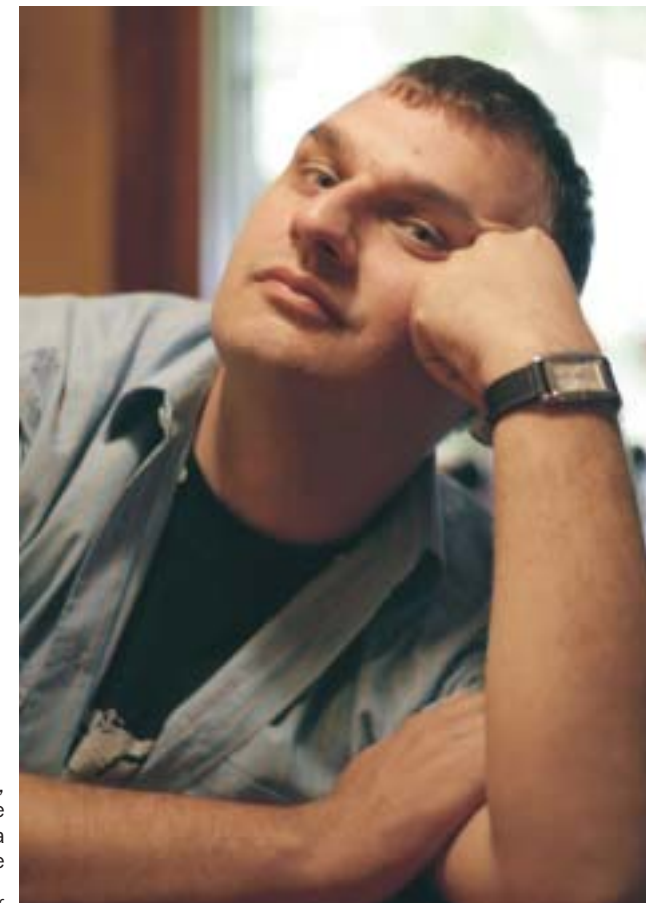


By Nikola Herman, Student, FMK

**I**n November 2000, the Queeria Centre was established as the first youth branch, a working group within a political party, Social-Democratic Union, to publicly promote the rights of sexual and gender minorities. In 2006, the group registered as NGO - the Queeria Centre for Promotion of Culture of Non-Violence and Equality. Today, the Queeria has become a well known brand in the Serbian media scene and the best recognised activists in the promotion of queer culture. In December 2008, the Centre received funding for its web platform from the Ministry of Culture under the programme

that supports minority media in Serbia thus becoming the first Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgender (LBGT) organisation supported financially by the government.

The corner stone of the Queeria approach is the inclusion of all interested in supporting the affirmation of queer rights and culture. Their strategy is somewhat unusual in comparison to typical human rights advocates. "We believe that in order to be successful advocate for the rights of others, we first have to be free ourselves. An individual should not rely solely on institu-



Boban Stojanovic, Coordinator of the NGO Queeria Center Belgrade

Photo by Snezana Skundric

tions and policies to protect their rights. Normative optimism is the ideal that requires discard of all criticism. To have laws is good, but the laws come and go, so do governments and politics. Being free, being who you are is what attracts others to reconsider their position. When you are free and comfortable with yourself, you set other people free", says Boban Stojanovic, one of the founders of Queeria Center in an interview for *deScripto*.

"Our position is the queer position. Some of our activists belong to the gay and lesbian population and some do not. While we do express our choices and affiliation where we believe it's important, we don't believe in the correctness or incorrectness of the cultural concepts, we do not subject to authority and we do not accept any forms of isolation - physical nor emotional. The position of gay person in Serbia is the position of the condemned, stigmatized and discarded. There exists a certain consensus in Serbian society around concepts of human rights and unacceptability of the violence but in practice gay people are associated within the context of the morally problematic group. Our solidarity goes with anyone who does not conform to violence to express their selves and represents no physical threat to the society", says Stojanovic.

**How would you describe your approach?**

**Stojanovic:** Our work is based on market principles - we are developing more than one 'brand' and we consider the needs of

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our target groups such as media, the gay community outside of big cities and out of Internet reach. Many human rights organisations speak the language that's not easily understood by the wider audience and mostly preoccupied with the problem of violence. We respect that but are aware that such language and approach is somewhat devoid of what I would call "the joy of living". Therefore we are searching for new approach to human rights and advocating against violence and homophobia.

**What are some of your major strategic points?**

**Stojanovic:** We live in a society where authorities are addressing human rights of those indicted by the court in Hague, right wing politicians have adopted the language of non-violence, and fascists are adopting political correctness. That leaves us with no room but to look for new strategies. Our first position - show no fear. People who spread hatred towards LBGT count on inciting fear. We want to live free, joyful and happy in spite of bad experiences.

Secondly - be a celebrity and hang out with celebrities. Activists of Queeria Centre are often invited to appear in the media because of their attractive appearance, openness and the identity role-playing. In the media, we are positioning ourselves not as victims but as stars of tabloids. We do not judge the journalists and media. We provide them with



Snapshot of Nikola Herman „August face“ on Queeria Calendar

kind of information and entertainment they need: front covers, commentaries on stage performers, gay icon popularity contests, interviews with celebrities, etc. If the journalists are creating the demand, we offer them a good product.



LOGO of the Queeria Center Belgrade

**What about pointing to the violence and discrimination of gender and sexual minorities?**

**Stojanovic:** When it comes to concrete examples of violence against people, we condemn it publicly. When we talk about discrimination of the gay population, instead of saying that we are discriminated against based on our personal characteristics or choices, we talk about sick partner in an intensive care whom we cannot visit because it is the privilege of the closest family members. If people do not identify with a problem, there will be no empathy, thus no support and no change.

Taking up the public space is a key to our strategy. Any public space: workshops, public discussions, press statements, talks... If we don't use it, someone else will.

And, of course, our favourite 'weapon' - playing with the stereotypes. One cannot identify with a homosexual person through ethnicity, religion or such a similar key. In search for ways to advocate for our rights, we can think about 'universality of human rights' and try and make public identify through that concept, but that's kind of too broad. If we try to portray LBGT as 'normal' by the standards of the majority - we would

be labelled as 'sissies' who are faking it. For that reason in its public appearances, the Queeria presents visibility and confirmation of all stereotypes. There are over twenty nationalities and ethnic groups in Serbia represented by the Constitution. They have the right to promote their culture, tradition and art, to wear their traditional folklore and costumes. Our traditional costumes are tight shirts, tight underwear, gossiping and obsession with sex, so - what's the problem? All of that has been a part of gay culture for centuries, so you cannot say that we are "trees without roots". ■

# Between the Rock and a Hard Place

## Privatisation of the Local Media in Serbia

*Journalists point to issues such as the absence of a media register, lack of transparency of ownership structures and suppression of the research-oriented journalism as a result of a commercially driven privatisation process.*

For quite a few decades one of local newspaper in Vojvodina - a renowned weekly *Suboticke novine* performed successfully on the local market with the assistance of the local authorities in Subotica. On 19 June 2006, it was sold for the first time in an auction. Nine potential buyers took part in the auction. During the auction the price increased 75 times (the starting price was 12,000 EUR, but it reached the price of 860,000 EUR). The office building in the centre of Subotica, whose value is more than 280,000 EUR, was also included in the property of the sold newspaper.

The journalists of *Suboticke novine* expressed an interest in participating in the auction. They were engaged with developing the business plan and the strategy for further development of this media outlet. Their goal was to ensure financial sustainability of the newspaper while accommodating to the principles of ethics and professional standards of journalistic profession. They presented this programme to the local authorities, political parties, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Culture and Media, but they never got any response.

*Suboticke novine* became the property of the consortium of three owners - two entrepreneurs and a journalist. One of them, the entrepreneur Rajko Stojnic had an 85 percent share. The only partner with the professional experience was the journalist Nada Harminc, who owned only 5 percent of the consortium's shares. That way they met the legal requirement that one of the

buyers in the group has to have a journalistic background. The privatisation contract with the municipality of Subotica secured the new owners monthly monetary support to the newspaper in the amount of 10 percent of their yearly budget.



By Vladimir Vljajic, Student, FMK

Fourteen journalists and two reporters resigned after the newspaper was sold. They accepted an offer from the regional daily *Dnevnik*, which in part belongs to the WAZ media concern, to further develop a new weekly media outlet in Subotica called *Suboticke*. As of June 2006, *Suboticke* were printed regularly covering key topics in the city with better equipment and a more efficient business strategy. In a short while, *Suboticke* achieved the circulation rate of its rival *Suboticke novine*.

According to the editor-in-chief of *Suboticke* Dragica Pavlovic, the only motive of the journalists leaving the privatised *Suboticke novine* was to keep the professionalism and avoid working under terms dictated by people who are not in the media business. The journalists expected the new consortium to eventually

neglect the professional standards for commercial purposes, thereby jeopardising their positions as well as the position of the newspaper.

In a sudden turn of events, several months later one of the member of the new consortium, the journalist Harminc, decided to step out and terminate her contract. The other two owners of *Suboticke novine* were arrested for abuse of their position.

The national daily newspaper *Politika* reported in one of its June editions in 2007 that the privatisation agency annulled the privatisation contract because the buyers did not respect the clauses of the contract. The owners were accused of unlawfully pilfering money obtained from selling the newspaper and falling short of fulfilling their obligations including payment of salaries to the employees of the outlet. Furthermore, they have put the office building under mortgage, which they were not entitled to. That way they gained even bigger financial benefits against the law. After nine-months of delay and court proceedings, the employees of *Suboticke* finally received their salaries.

On 18 October 2007, *Suboticke novine* was sold for the second time. This time it was sold for 100,000 EUR on the Belgrade Stock Market. Just like the previous owner, the new buyers got the entire property of this media outlet including the two-storey building in the centre of Subotica. Yet, this time the buyer had to take on the responsibility for around 70,000 EUR of

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debt made by the previous owner. As the circulation of both *Suboticke novine* and *Suboticke* was insufficient for commercial survival of either newspaper on the local market, an arrangement was set between owners of both outlets to have journalists of the latter return to their original post - *Suboticke novine*. In return, the new owners *Suboticke novine* committed to print all of its editions in the printing house owned by the media concern to which *Suboticke* belong to. That way, *Suboticke novine* would continue to publish in full with verbal guarantees to keep all the journalists that returned to the newsroom in full employment. At the same time, the owner of *Suboticke* would make a profit out of doing the printing job for all the editions of their previous competitor. In November 2008, the agreement came to fruition. In the statement that followed on the online edition of *Radio-television Vojvodina*, one of the journalists Zlatko Romić stated that the editorial staff accepted the offer to return to *Suboticke novine* because both outlets were poorly managed and did not prove to be competitive in the market.

### Lack of vision and clear objectives in the privatisation

In spite of the verbal agreement to keep all the employees in *Suboticke novine*, three journalists soon lost their jobs. One of them is Zlatko Romić, considered to be one of the best reporters by his colleagues in the newsroom. The reporter Mihalj Novak and advertising officer Stipan Stipančić were also dismissed. Furthermore, salaries have decreased by 30 percent and are also running late for four-months - all against the agreement, Romić claims. "What are the criteria by which the workers were fired and why was the agreement violated?" he asked his superiors, but he never got a response.

Zoran Kosanović of the Independent Journalist Association of Serbia (NUNS) from southern Serbian city Nis describes another example of privatisation of local media, this time in the south of Serbia. In the third biggest city in the country - Nis, the local newspaper *Narodne novine* was privatised in 2006. Twenty journalists left this newspaper and went to the newly founded *Nase* daily. Less than a year later, *Nase* went out of business. The same group of journalists went on to found new weekly *Niski glasnik*. That one also failed, and journalists joined the other media outlets. *Narodne novine* is still being published with double decreased circulation and significantly lesser number of employees with overall little focus on local affairs. "Instead", Kosanović says, "the newspaper is filled with news provided by the national news agencies. Its content could not be praised for quality."

These cases involving *Suboticke novine* and *Narodne novine* are striking and somewhat representative of the challenges brought by the privatisation of local media. The process started in 2001 as part of the overall privatisation of the state and public capital throughout Serbia. However, the initial results in the local media sector were not satisfactory, which was the reason why the privatisation process was discontinued at the end of 2007.

President of the Independent Journalist Association of Vojvodina (NDNV) Dinko Gruhonjić states that the real issue is the lack of clear objectives and goals of the privatisation. "Media are not the same as any other business and that was not taken into consideration. Protecting the interest of the public should be key criteria." Gruhonjić also points to other issues such as the absence of a media register, lack of transparency of the ownership structures, as well as the fact that this kind of privatisation results in suppression of research-oriented journalism. Yet, the biggest problem, as Gruhonjić singles it out, is the



Newsstand in Belgrade  
Photo by Kornelia Szabo

fact that the privatisation process has not been continued yet. Current public debate on Law that should preventing media concentration /monopoly could help overcoming most of the issues. However, Gruhonjić believes that such a law should have been passed and enforced way before the actual media privatisation started.

### Law on Media Concentration could help overcoming most of the issues

Dragan Janjić, former editor-in-chief of BETA news agency, who recently held a position of the assistant to the Minister of Culture, believes that the law that would

prescribe on 30-30-40 ownership structure principle (that is, local authorities would have 30 percent of the ownership of the local media, the employees would also have 30 percent of the shares, and the 40 percent would be on the market) would resolve the complicated situation of the media, allowing for more efficient privatisation. Some local authorities refuse to accept this proposition as the Law on Local Self-Governance allow them to have larger share in the ownership structure in the local media which leads to another set of confusion.

"Privatisation of the local media is a delicate process because of the various challenges brought to the journalist profession by poorly managed or non-transparent process", says Prof. Dr Boban Tomic, journalist and

media theoretician, who analysed and studied this issue in his PhD thesis.

"First, there is a danger of shutting down the media. For example, if the local media is not sold on the public auction due to the lack of interest among buyers, media loses its working licence. On another instance, if it is sold successfully, new owners could decide to completely give up on media activities and take it to another business direction. The Law provides the opportunity to do that after two years of privatisation. In both cases, local media gets shut down and journalists are left without job. That makes a lot of impact on the public interest of people in local communities", Tomic explains.

Journalists also fear the "tycoonisation" of the media, which means that business

people with shady backgrounds (and probably connected with criminal and unethical business structures) will buy local media using their influence or cash. The main motivation of these businessmen is the power acquired through the media but also the social prestige of owning your own media outlet. Tycoons would certainly use the privatised media for their own "business interest". Privatised in such a way, "reformed" media would certainly have to comply with new rules for the "journalist standards" and of the "businesslike" behaviour.

Another set of challenges brought by privatisation of local media is a significant change in conception and broadcasted programme/content. In some instances, new owners accommodate to the commercial outlook of their programmes which become focused more on entertainment and less on public information.

Journalists around Serbia have invested some efforts to suggest to decision-makers to enable the workers in the media business to buy out shares in their media and thus make the ownership structure more transparent. As journalist Jasmina Lukac wrote in the daily *Danas* (in the article "Will there be any buyers at all?" published on 1 June 2006), the media would remain the property of journalists, which would be an additional stimulus in doing the job well. However, those efforts have received little or no response yet.

Local media around Serbia are in a deadlock as far as privatisation is concerned. Preparation for privatisation is going slowly and there is an obvious lack of interest on the side of the buyers. The local authorities are either not interested or scared of losing the media influence, so no one supports nor supervises the preparation process for selling remaining media outlets. All that led the privatisation process to move from its initial phase down to some sort of a 'zero position'. ■



# Editors to be Held Responsible

Interview with Nadezda Gace, President of Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia

*Serbian media are operating on a market basis. So editors believe that in order to sell they should produce flashy headlines to be noticed on newsstands. But, it is not only scandals that sell and editors should think about the responsibility that media have towards society.*

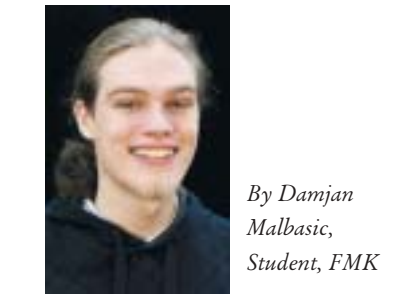
The Serbian media landscape has rapidly developed and diversified in comparison to the 1990s primarily due to privatisation of the media and the growth of private investment in media outlets. Today, the majority of public media consumption has been centred on a few commercial television stations with national coverage - Radio Television of Serbia (RTS), TV B92, Pink, and Fox. Serbian readers are mostly consuming dailies such as *Blic*, *Novosti*, *Politika*, *Pres*, *Danas*, and tabloid *Kurir*, all of which are privately owned.

Judging by the opinions of journalists and the public alike, the quality of journalism does not meet the professional standards of developed and democratic societies. The majority of journalists are poorly paid, working in modest conditions and have not had many opportunities to be properly trained and educated.

“What you read in our dailies or watch in the news programmes are predominantly topics that are of little importance for citizens’ everyday life. That is the number one problem with Serbian journalism. Media are saturated with stories like murders, crimes, political scandals, intrigues... which can be explained as expected outcome of a long-lasting obliteration”, says Nadezda Gace, president of Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia (NUNS) in interview for *deScripto*. The NUNS President has had a long and rich journalism experience since the times of the former Yugoslavia. After

being expelled from formerly state-owned RTS for protesting against the propaganda of Milosevic regime, she worked for Jugoslovenska televizija - JUTEL (founded in 1990, just before the war, by journalists from all parts of former Yugoslavia who wanted to preserve a integrated media scene), and then in many print media outlets such as the Slovenian journal *Delo* and the Serbian newspapers *Borba*, *Nasa borba* and *Danas*.

“The problem is not the topics but the approach that journalists take. No critical approach whatsoever. It all comes down to the same clichés. If they are covering corruption - they report that person got arrested and then make accusations before the trial is over. The affair goes on in the media for couple of days, prepared to serve as ‘remedy’



By Damjan Malbasic, Student, FMK

or consolation to the impoverished and disappointed public. And then, nothing. This kind of approach makes it impossible to publicly open serious discussions on issues that are important for the future of Serbia”, says Nadezda Gace.

### Journalists are not to blame

For that, Gace holds editors to be the most responsible. “I do firmly believe that journalists are not to blame for such a state of affairs but editors. And I am not saying that to defend journalists but because I know that between them and what ends up on TV, radio or newspaper there stands the editorial team. It is the editorial teams who are responsible for not opening up some of the most important subject matters in our



Newspaper headlines on arresting Radovan Karadzic

Photo by FoNET news agency, Zoran Mrdja

society. They are responsible for production of such a high amount of prejudices and stereotypes.”

### The influence of politics and money on the media in Serbia is large and is intertwined

There has been a lot of talk in Serbia about the influence of politicians and tycoons on the media. It is widely believed that some of the most powerful politicians and business people have control over the majority of media outlets. Asked to comment on that, Gace points out that in the west, print media are allowed to make a choice regarding their political affiliation. In Serbia, it has not been clearly defined yet. She also referred to the survey conducted by NUNS a couple of years ago. The majority of citizens believed that journalists are not corrupt. “Another fact was worrying. People expressed their belief that only politicians lie more than journalists.”

“On the other hand, there are the rich people gaining influence on the media, or even buying some outlets. I believe their motive is not to ‘rule’ over media. It’s more like they believe that by having influence over media they can get closer to a certain political party. Therefore, the influence of politics and money on the media in Serbia is big and greatly intertwined. Influences today are much more sophisticated than in times when only one political party was ‘giving orders’. There are many more roundabout ways to shape public opinion”.

### Political tabloids

Another popular belief in Serbia is that the media is becoming means by which politicians try to assault and neutralise both their opponents and journalists who do not conform to their interests. Asked if tabloids are particularly responsible for that, Gace answers: “First of all, media la-



Nadezda Gace, Head of NUNS  
Photo by Imre Szabo

belled as tabloid in Serbia are not the tabloids in the sense of what we see in the West. What we are dealing with here are political tabloids used by politicians to ruin reputation of their political opponents. In Serbia issues are not raised to be solved, but to be used by politicians to deal with each other”.

Although it is difficult to prove, Gace assumes that such tabloids “came to be with the aid of the remnants of the old state secret services that are well connected to political leaders”. “These remnants are still very powerful, because brothers-in-arms have a stronger relationship than any others.”

### Issues are not raised to be solved, but to be used by politicians to deal with each other

“After 15 years it is still not known who murdered a journalist Dada Vujasinovic, or who killed Slavko Curuvija nine years ago. Former Minister of Police reported that a journalist from Jagodina, Milan Pantic, was not intended to be murdered, but only beaten up in order to be intimidated. His murder is still unsolved. These cases are not being solved because they would eventually reach some people that are not to be reached.

Evidence would probably lead to high-ranking officials”, says the NUNS President.

Lack of educated, thorough and documented investigative journalism Gace considers as the key reasons for which some of the most important issues have never been properly investigated and reported on. In cooperation with the US Embassy, NUNS has established the Centre for Investigative Journalism for all journalists interested. However, Gace thinks that the government should also stimulate the development of investigative journalism.

### Responsibility for public speaking

The president of NUNS disagrees with the general opinion that all Serbian newspapers are beginning to look like each other and like tabloids; “I would not agree that there is an all-out tabloidisation. There are still newspapers like *Politika*, *Blic* and *Danas* which operate in a different manner.”

“Again, editorial teams are responsible. Serbian media are operating on the market basis. So editors believe that in order to sell they should produce flashy headlines to be noticed on the newsstands. But, it is not only scandals that sell. And editors should think about the responsibility that media have towards society”.

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However, the NUNS president is optimistic when it comes to instituting and implementing responsibility of public officials for their public speaking. "For NUNS it is our number one priority. We issue so many press statements reacting to every account of inappropriate public speaking or offence against someone's personality in public. A politician was recently called 'murderer'. An actress who played in a move about Srebrenica was titled as 'whore' in one tabloid. We act immediately to protect the rights of people and journalism speech. 'Street talk' creates negative public opinion. Increasing circulation by using such words is no excuse", Gace says.

Acknowledging that in the 1990s young people were deprived of proper education, Nadezda Gace says that the malfunctioning education system and lack of knowledge are hardest to compensate. "Besides all the wars and poverty that Serbia suffered, lack of education is great burden to Serbia. Knowledge leads the way out of crises and makes the wheels of society spin", she says. NUNS regularly organises trainings, workshops and calls professionals to assist with education of young journalists.

The head of NUNS notes that she does not have any illusions that politicians elsewhere in the world do not try to have media 'on their side'. "But there are rules to the game. In Serbia rules still have not been set. There still are no standardised systems".

Asked about the role of NUNS in drafting media legislation and the goals of this organisation today, Nadezda Gace replies that the voice of NUNS is being heard: "Nowadays we participate in writing bills on media consolidation and transparency in ownership in media. I think we play a good role. Many do not like what we say, but we are not here to be liked. We stick to morality and ethics. I think that NUNS has a good effect on things that matter and we do not want to be associated with any political option". ■

## Serbian Media Going Online

### Increased Number of Internet Users Speed Up the Development of Media Web Presentations and Online Media Outlets



By Ana Koncul, Marko Herman, Students, FMK



The Internet arrived in Serbia in 1995 when EUnet was the first company to sell dial-up connections on the market. Over the next seven to eight years it didn't change much. Few wireless and satellite providers were operating but were way too expensive for many users which relied on dial-up until late 2002 and 2003, when first cable providers came onto the market. Although it wasn't a quantum leap in speed, it allowed users to have stable connections that didn't rely on the quality of Telekom Srbija's infrastructure. Two years later, at the beginning of 2005, Telekom introduced an ADSL service as an alternative to the cable connections.

According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, in the beginning of 2008, 47.6 percent of households in Serbia were owners of a computer (a desktop or a laptop), and 33.2 percent of households were regularly using the Internet. Less than a half of Internet users, only 15.5 percent of households have broadband Internet access, but the number of broadband users has almost doubled in comparison to the year before. The latest development is that new ADSL speeds that are available to the users give us good reason to think that broadband access will spread even more

widely. Also, it is worth mentioning that 74.5 percent of households have at least one mobile phone, and that around the third of them use their phones to access the Internet.

When you analyse the way the Serbian media responded to this rather fast development of broadband Internet penetration, you could see that they reacted rather late but also that things are moving in a direction which is beneficial to all. The best example is use of video materials on media websites. In the early days, only TV stations used some of their material online, and some of them streamed their programmes. Now, many media websites, those of traditional media going online, and those of media started online, use video materials to illustrate their stories. And sometimes, this video material is being produced for their websites, although it's mostly something freely available online.

Also, broadband connections allowed the users to more easily send their own contributions which are becoming more important for media.

So when we talk about new media in Serbia, we talk about how the traditional media grasped the possibilities the

Internet brought them, but also how the web only media and citizen media developed in recent years.

#### Traditional media in the new environment

Although the national television network, which is now transformed into the public service network existed for much longer (radio for around 80 years and TV for half a century), it is best to follow its development from the point of dissolution of former Yugoslavia at the beginning of 1990s, when it started broadcasting under the current name - Radio Televizija Srbije (RTS). During the reign of Slobodan Milosevic, RTS was censored and known for manipulation and limited freedom of expression. As a response, a radio station with a different news concept was established by a group of young people under the name Radio B92. Over the course of the following years this became a well-established national TV and radio station B92. A year ago, B92 also established a cable news channel - B92 INFO, along with the new version of their online issue for mobile devices.

#### Relevant links:

- <http://www.rts.rs/>
- <http://www.rts.rs/page/blog/sr.html>
- <http://www.rts.rs/page/live/sr.html>
- <http://www.radiobeograd.rs/>
- <http://www.b92.net/>
- <http://blog.b92.net/>
- <http://www.b92.net/kultura/>
- <http://www.b92.net/radio/uzivo.php>

Today, both RTS and B92 have a dominant influence on creating public opinion in Serbia and both have developed online news platforms with increasing number of visitors. Only a year after B92.net was started, in 1996, it was proclaimed as the most visited and the most influential website in the region. The contents of both websites are similar: mostly news, both al-

low streaming of radio and TV programme, and both influence public opinion. Both have blogs mostly written by well known public figures, as well as comments sections and forums. And both sites have much more cultural news than their radio and TV schedules.

Millions of people confirm their trust in these stations on a day-to-day basis, and with the possibility to react (to comment their content on their websites, in their forums etc.) the trust in the two most relevant (new) media is far from being questioned, and it's getting bigger by the day.

#### Newspapers online

Daily newspapers are probably the first printed media organisations to realise that the Internet will influence them greatly. This realisation leads newspapers in several directions. Some refused to use the Internet for anything more than a simple presentation, some decided they could sell access to most of their information (which proved wrong), and some started putting all of their content online for free.

One of the first to use the Internet and to try to sell and provide their content freely was *Danas* ([www.danas.rs](http://www.danas.rs)) daily. This media outlet started as the opposition to the government print media in the 1990s and built their reputation as the strong opposition, independent from the government newspaper, which promoted the voices of the opposition political parties, youth organisations and NGOs. Today, *Danas'* web edition is a modern news website with contents updated several times a day and on the way to fully integrate video materials into their content.

Similar to theirs is the website of *Blic* daily ([www.blic.rs](http://www.blic.rs)). They also update their content on when-it-happens basis. Their website also leads to other publications under the *Blic* brand, and provides their readers several way of communication with them; to comment on their stories

and engage in a discussion forum. *Blic* also started their own blog which is written by several important figures from Serbia's economic, political and public life. Another Ringier's newspaper - freely distributed *24 sata* ([www.24sata.rs](http://www.24sata.rs)), fully implemented their orientation towards younger audience on their website. Short news stories, commenting option and fresh design, with possibility to download each issue in PDF format for offline reading. They are also the only daily to experiment with *KlikMee* ([www.klikmee.com](http://www.klikmee.com)) technology, which allows easier access to online content for the users of photo capable mobile phones.

None of the daily newspapers have implemented a real web 2.0 oriented platform and citizen journalism is only in its infancy.

#### Periodicals

Weekly and monthly magazines showed mostly less understanding for the Internet. They usually provide content that is widely available online (mostly in other languages), and try to appeal to the readers by additional content and nicely designed "packages". Therefore most periodicals' websites are Internet advertisements for their latest issues without much freely available content. For instance, the weekly magazine with a good reputation - *Vreme* ([www.vreme.com](http://www.vreme.com)), publishes some of the stories and offer web subscription for those who want to read it all online.

On the other hand, another important weekly - *Ekonomist* ([www.emporal.rs](http://www.emporal.rs)) discarded such a model and created a full web portal related to economic and political issues. Content from their printed issues is available for reading online and only requires a free registration. Their online content is much richer than the printed version.

Looking at bi-weekly and monthly periodicals, it's even harder to find those with websites. It seems that mostly those ori-

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ented towards younger audience put some effort in their online presence. For instance, relatively young free monthly (soon to be bi-weekly) city guide *City Magazine* ([www.citymagazine.rs](http://www.citymagazine.rs)) created a website that has its own life between two printed issues and also used a bit of web 2.0 trends by implementing a blog which is written by some of the staff members as well as other figures relevant to the local urban scene. Similarly, *RLN* ([www.realno.org](http://www.realno.org)) has a website developed with much attention. And although not much of their content can be read online, they allow the download of the PDF version of the magazine.

#### Web magazines

Today, there are more interesting web magazines in Serbia than websites of traditional printed media.

*Personal magazin* ([www.personalmag.rs](http://www.personalmag.rs)) is one of those examples. A very informative IT related magazine run by one of the well known Serbian bloggers. Another good example is *Benchmark* ([www.benchmark.rs](http://www.benchmark.rs)), which follows the tradition of well known American technology websites with thorough hardware tests and a network of websites for different audiences. They also have a discussion forum with a lot of users and recently started a blog on which posts are written by staff members and readers. And related to IT is a web/PDF magazine called *PC igre* ([www.pciigre.com](http://www.pciigre.com)). They created a combination of a website with fresh gaming news each day and articles about games for online reading as well as a monthly PDF issues which can be freely downloaded and is often distributed on DVD supplements of printed IT magazines.

Connecting IT and gadgets with other topics of interest to Serbian Internet users is



Illustration by Aleksandra Petkovic

*Domino Magazin* ([www.domino-magazin.com](http://www.domino-magazin.com)). They publish stories on many different topics and are one of the rare examples where users can generate content which is published in the same manner as the content written by magazine staff. Since it's the first magazine of that type in Serbia, the concept still has to prove itself. Another good web magazine is *Popboks* ([www.popboks.com](http://www.popboks.com)). It is created to resemble printed magazines that write about pop culture. Since local magazines market doesn't have an issue that can satisfy the audience which craves such content, *Popboks* is rather successful and almost only relevant issue. They didn't implement any web 2.0 trends, but have a stable publishing policy and fresh content every day so readers come back.

Since most Internet users in Serbia are high school or faculty students, it's only logical that there is also a

specialised web magazine called *Studentski svet* ([www.studentskisvet.com](http://www.studentskisvet.com)). They cover topics related to education as well as topics of general interest. And magazines presented here are only a tip of the iceberg. There are many more good examples, and also a lot of bad ones.

#### Media 2.0

The Serbian blog scene is a world in itself. Since most magazines, whether traditional or web oriented, didn't pay much attention to readers' needs, they started writing for themselves. Yes, blogs did start as personal diaries, but nowadays they are a form and a concept of publishing different contents.

The best place to start exploring Serbian blogosphere is *Blogodak* ([www.blogodak.com](http://www.blogodak.com)). This is an aggregator with blogs sorted by topic. Not all blogs are Serbian, but all of them are written in one of the similar languages spoken in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro. Most of the blogs are per-

sonal, or written from a personal perspective, and couple of good examples are *Blogowski.eu* and *Artmistakes.com*.

There are also blogs related to specific topics which are rarely written from a personal perspective. Or when personal perspective is there, it is the perspective of a virtual character. One of such blogs is design related *Dizajnersi.com* with not too much posts, but with content relevant to those interested in design topics. Similar to that one (by concept) is *Tracara.com* (Gossip Girl), where a virtual girl writes about local and world celebrities. This is also one of the rare blogs to implement a micro blog ([www.twitter.com/tracara](http://www.twitter.com/tracara)) with short celebrity information into its content. And that web 2.0 trends do have good ground in Serbia prove a couple more micro blogs that are not personal. *Kursna lista* ([www.twitter.com/kurs](http://www.twitter.com/kurs)) and *Vremenska prognoza* ([www.twitter.com/vreme](http://www.twitter.com/vreme)) provide their followers with new currency exchange rate, and weather information. ■

## Media in Serbia and the Idea of the Network

*Between the "Internets" and the handouts-for-free*



By Vlada Jeric, Student, FMK

The title of this article deliberately borrows the expression from George W Bush and his "take" on how the Internet may be (mis)understood, which was delivered in public debate as late as 2004. This is in order to introduce the perspective from the very start - what we will observe here is not a unique "misunderstanding" of what the Internet may be, and something inherent to Serbia only; but, it is fair to say that in Serbian society, more than in most of the other places it may be comparable with, the very idea of the Internet is still 'under construction', and during this process is a subject of numerous misconceptions and manipulations.

#### We need those wires. And cables. A lot of cables

The wider awareness about the potential of the Internet in Serbia came fairly recently (some would say that we are still waiting for that to happen). This 'slip' from the global mainstream is being explained by the distinctive local history of 1990s, which for Serbia would be marked by the

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### Reportage on web radio [noviradiobeograd.com](http://noviradiobeograd.com)

#### New Kids on the Cyber Block

When on one occasion I read about audiophile shelter on the Internet, full of free spirit that wasn't felt on the Serbian media scene since the beginnings of B92, I was very interested in listening to New Radio Belgrade. And when I first tuned to their programme the intention of those editing and broadcasting (streaming) the station - to offer the alternative and a place in the (cyber) community where listeners can enjoy all the things that didn't find their place in the dominant media.

Although it was experimentally streamed before the official start, on 6 October 2008, the shaking up of the sleepy Serbian scene started, as the Editor-in-Chief Milutin Petrovic put it. This date isn't randomly selected. 6 October is the day after the famous 5 October 2000 revolution, when Slobodan Milosevic regime was thrown down. Although people expected that changes would be very deep and implemented in all areas of social and political life in Serbia, most people feel that many things remained the same. Therefore, 6 October is often referred to as *the day that never happened*. That is why this date was symbolically chosen for the birthday of New Radio Belgrade as a reaction to the lack of interest of other media to improve Serbian (primarily music) scene.

After only couple of months of broadcasting, NRB is one of the most popular Internet radio stations in the country. The audience is won over by the fact that this

### \*New Radio Belgrade

is a radio without traditional genre forms that strives to improve the culture of dialogue, promote reconciliation and tolerance, establish contacts with Serbia's neighbours, as well as to positively 'provoke' sleepy Serbian musical and general cultural public scene.

Through almost 30 different shows, (mostly) young staff addresses the topics related to popular science, culture, sport, social minorities, and at the same time clearly broadcasts the message that they are against any form of government controlled arts, stereotypes and prejudices.

New Radio Belgrade clearly represents refreshment for Serbian media scene. Although they were challenged by many problems such as lack of offices from which the programme could be broadcasted, inability for listeners to access their stream, errors that prevent the official forum to work properly, listeners' comments are mostly positive. And staff members don't give up in spite the problems. Even more, they plan to expand broadcast to TV and radio frequencies.

Relevant links

<http://www.noviradiobeograd.com/>

<http://www.last.fm/user/NoviRadioBeograd>



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violent appropriation of 'public' by advancing 'private' (in all possible meanings), several lost wars it never 'officially' took part in, reverting to the political ideas and social values of previous centuries, and finally by the international isolation and embargo on anything and everything. Including the Internet? Well, in some respect, yes. During 1990s Serbia was "allowed" to have a narrow "tube" or two (I cannot resist quoting senator Stevens here, to properly accompany G.W. Bush) to connect it with the rest of 'The Network'. After all, it was the Internet which still was below the radar of regime's media police but which immense potential to connect and communicate 'tremendously contributed' to 'democratic changes', right? Anyhow, the result of such policies from the side of both the regime in question and 'the international community' is that Serbia entered 21st Century pretty much disconnected, with analogue modems here and there just to make the picture more grim. And after several additional years required by the new establishment to 'reposition', Serbia finally entered the world of "wider tubes" sometime in 2004, but again, 'not for real' - the service was and still is significantly lagging behind the average bandwidth of Europe today.

And the prices... Serbian state-owned Telecom remains to be a so-called "last mile" monopoly - one of the few left in the world of telecommunications. It may not necessarily be a bad thing - where this monopoly from the side of society or a state is being lost and the "free market" completely took over, we already saw quite a few challenges to the idea that all information going through "the tubes" should be treated equally, and some businesses trying to grab the piece of other businesses at the expense of 'network neutrality' - which would be, without any doubt, at the expense of 'democracy', 'the right to public speech', 'truth', 'transparency' and other 'pillars of the society' - such an attempt should be defined, prevented and



Between Internet and handouts-for-free

Photo by Igor Marovic

punishable by the law of any contemporary society. On the other hand, there is no guarantee nor mechanism set in place not to see this position being exploited by the state monopolists in a similar manner. If a national public service like Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) sees no problem in being backed by the budget, funded from the mandatory subscription and by selling a commercial space all at the same time, there is no reason for the state-backed telecom company not to try to do the same. This is especially true with the forthcoming financial crisis, which everybody is getting more and more worried about, but which seems that nobody really understands, which gives a tremendous opportunity for (any) state or business to bring decisions which it does not have to explain or argue at all - so, 'recession' and 'crisis' may become some sort of 'magic' words, and something you are not really expected to discuss.

Back to the story of the Internet - the result of such a recent local history combined with the existing monopoly in Serbia is that the prices of Internet access remained very high compared to the Europe and the region, and extremely high compared to the average local income. Obviously, infrastructure-wise, Serbia is still one messy place - it is not easy to get the connection at all, and once you get it you find yourself paying more-for-less, compared to everybody else around; but, if compared to the situation

before 2004, there is at least something in terms of connectivity, and it is getting more and more wide-spread, if you are lucky enough to be in Belgrade or a few other (for businesses and politicians more interesting) places. The first serious landmark number was reached in the spring of 2008, when, according to some surveys, Serbia had 250,000 broadband users. Some sources state that we are operating with the number of around 500,000 already, some would mention much more, but the statistics would come from different sources of which none should be considered as absolutely confirmed and 'objective', in a scientific way. This kind of disorientation is illustrative of the lack of a more mature social infrastructure in the field, as still we wait for clear government policies (and then to fight with the consequences of it), still most of the government and businesses and other institutions have sloppy and dysfunctional websites, still e-mail is not something widely considered as a valid sort of communication, and still there are no means of online electronic payment and related services emerging. And yet, some of us enjoy the marvel of the lack of over-regulation in the field, and hope it will stay that way.

**Broadening "the tubes"**

So, it can be said regarding the infrastructure, however expensive, slow and sloppy it may be, that it became available for quite some number of people now; what is with the 'cul-

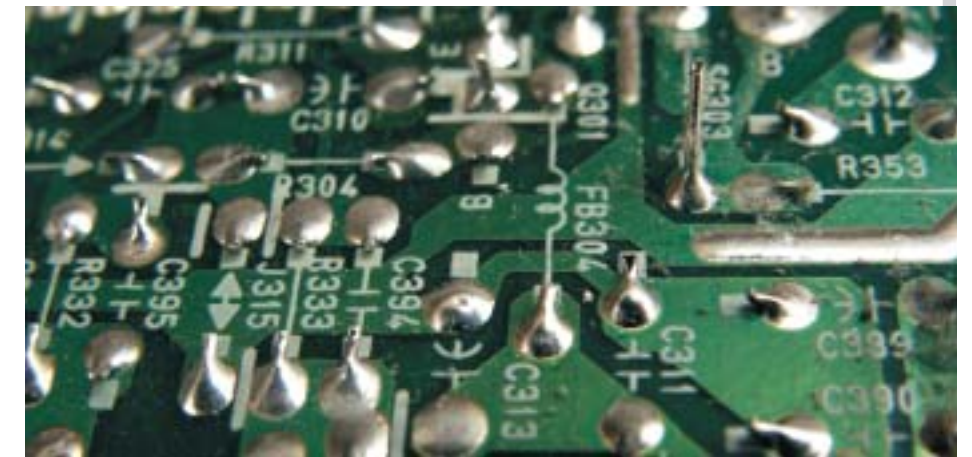
ture of using', which would be 'the second stage' in introduction of a certain new social paradigm (of technology, of media, etc)?

According to the previous government and the Secretary of the former Ministry for Capital Investments, Dragana Djurcic, the fact that Serbia is still at the very bottom of the European list of 'penetration' of computers and Internet is not the fault of government but of citizens themselves. She was quoted saying the following, at the *SEE Broadband 2007*, a regional 'broadband conference' of the countries of South East Europe held in Belgrade: *"The reason for not using the Internet enough is definitely not the price because [in the survey probably commissioned by government] only 9.6 percent of households consider the price of broadband Internet too high. Most of the households - around 44 percent - say they don't want the broadband Internet, don't need it or don't know how to use it."*

*Traditional media in Serbia at the moment do not see the Internet as a friend or as an ally...Combination of misunderstanding and fear would guide owners, managers and editors of 'big media' into the campaign against the Internet.*

But why would all those people think that they neither need nor liked to be connected, how would they decide about it? And why would the government say that it has nothing to do with its society's attitude towards what is being considered a global 'revolution' in communications? The culture of using and promoting the usage of the Internet, as we all know too well and as is the case with anything else, does not happen 'by itself'. It is not that millions of citizens will wake up one morning, 'feeling the

need' to be connected, and then rush to local providers and enlist for a line - it comes as the consequence of the set of strategies and campaigns to 'create' that need and/or desire. The interest of society to participate in The Network needs to be clearly outlined and articulated to everybody involved; of course that the role of media would be crucial in creating this kind of public awareness and consent. The problem is, the traditional media in Serbia at this moment do not see the Internet as a friend or as an ally; so it would be the combination of misunderstanding and fear which would guide owners, managers and editors of "the big



media", and consequently the entire public sphere, into either rather pretending that the Internet is not really happening (or that "the whole thing is overblown" and does not deserve much attention) or into the very campaign against the Internet, presenting it as not just insignificant and meaningless phenomena, another fashion-of-the-moment to fade away tomorrow, being replaced by something else, but also a potentially very dangerous place to be.

This is something which was also characteristic for the lot of traditional media in societies which were going to this kind of 'media transition' and which came to use digital networks before, and on a wider scale, and still the process is unfolding in many different places - as 'the tubes' got broader, not only printed media, but radio

and then TV came challenged; but precisely of it being the matter of time, and also of scale, now the media in those societies would have already a certain position towards the Internet - they would be pretty much clearly divided on the basis if they somehow are trying to merge or intertwine and eventually become the part of One Network, or if they have embraced the approach to 'fight back' and resist. And none of them could ignore that the Internet is already here and constantly emerging, becoming more powerful and 'unavoidable' in each circle of its permanent expansion. Still, nobody is sure what

it did to us exactly, and it is understandable that a lot of people may go through the period of disorientation and confusion.

Obviously, there is some kind of 'half-generation split' happening among the population in their 30s and up. There is already some research on the possibly growing cultural differences and the phenomena of 'misunderstanding' and 'miscommunication' between those involved in transformation and those who are not; but there is also something which should be viewed as coming from the entirely different angle. It is the willingness to understand, the trust to 'others' and especially 'younger others' from the side of skeptics, and an honest and (however 'painful' it may be) realistic attitude towards what is already happening

Continued on page 30

Computer Main Board  
Photo by Igor Marovic

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and what is emerging as 'ubiquitous', which elevates the idea of Internet, or anything 'new', to the tipping point, making it not 'the phenomena' of the avant-garde and 'experimental' practice of one society anymore, but a common, not-a-big-thing and default social infrastructure. The 'tubes' have to become transparent, to the point it makes them almost 'invisible', before we can consider that people finally accepted it - but never, ever, we should forget the material practices and material character of it.

It is not that Serbia is that late in this queue to reach 'the tipping point' - as we have seen, even in the very society in which this 'paradigm shift' of media was introduced, the United States, up to now there is still both tremendous wide-spread use of the Internet among the population and a generation of 'resistance' to it, involving some of the 'big media' as well, and symbolically represented in the idea of Internet as 'internets' by the former president, or the even more amusing idea of the Internet as 'the series of tubes' as explained by senator Stevens. The recent electoral victory of President Obama was widely attributed to the success of his media and fundraising campaign relying heavily on The Network. This replaces this symbolic resistance with symbolic acceptance, clearly demonstrating that it is not the matter of opinion but of recognising the material practice to accept the new power of the Network, finally disarming the remnants of the generation of 'sceptics' and rendering any 'offline' approach to oblivion. It is important to add that it is not just the idea of the Internet-as-technical-infrastructure for the exchange of digital archives and communication, and for creating 'virtual' social networks, which relates to that change, but also different other social processes, the daily practices and modes of organisation (and of collaboration and communication and exchange) in what we traditionally

called 'real life', which both become visible or emerged as we started to use the Internet more, changing significantly not what we think about or do 'online', but our understanding and material practices of 'offline', as well.

*If the Internet is mentioned at all, it would be in specialised columns and TV shows, or small pieces of news reporting from 'out there'...where we follow the activities of "them", a group of people who are 'different', and who decided to spend time "there". It will almost never be about "us" and "here".*

Regarding traditional media in Serbia, there is no doubt that both 'online' and 'offline' aspects of this change are happening as we speak - most, if not all 'the big media' would have or are in the process of building the extensive digitized and networked presence. There is a vast network of 'smaller' media, which are already exclusively based on the 'online' approach, and the world of print media increasingly resembles the looks and practices, 'the interface' and 'the content' of their online siblings. But, the shift in culture, 'the tipping point' or the symbolic acceptance still does not appear to be around the corner - despite all the practices we are undeniably witnessing happening. The 'official' attitude of the 'official' media remains at best in denial, and at worst quite defensive. If for this is already being said that it presents the 'expected' phase in this process of media (and social) transition, and something most of the societies experienced or are about to experience as the one (for some social groups) quite painful aspect of 'evolving' towards the networked society, then in Serbia this process may be more

bold and more the 'caricature of itself' than elsewhere and before, as the consequence of the historical and political circumstances outlining it.

#### The politics of fear

A small survey made to illustrate this claim was done researching the excellent media archive of Ebart Media Documentation, who provided a support to FMK in data-mining media for this issue of *deScripto*. It did confirm what is already suspected and 'perceived' from the experience - the traditional media in Serbia would rather ignore mentioning the Internet at all (being in denial), by not attributing the online sources from which they predominantly aggregate news and information from, and, even more importantly, by avoiding any discussion on the Internet and its omnipresence in the life and work of the growing number of people. In other words, you will not find many reports or discussions from, or about, the Internet in the traditional media of today. It appears as if nothing really important happened since the 1990s, and that it is still considered quite normal to accept that public communication and journalism, culture and politics, entertainment and science, and everything really, still happens on the pages of printed media or at the other side of TV screens. In most of the cases, if the Internet is mentioned at all, it would be in specialised columns and TV shows, or small pieces of news reporting from 'out there', from some distant and still curious and dubious, not-that-significant-at-all place of 'internets', where we follow the activities of "them", a defined and finite group of people who are 'different', and who for some reason decided to spend time "there". It will almost never be about "us" and "here". The second approach, which is much more aggressive (or, perhaps more accurately, a defensive one), is being used in the cases in which the existence and influence of the Internet can not be ignored, or in which the aim is to spread the atmosphere of fear and doubt towards the very idea of it. Headlines and news ex-



Street Graffiti

Photo by Kornelija Szabo

cerpts confirm that those are still the two dominant approaches used by the mainstream media, and here are some amusing and characteristic examples, all from daily and weekly press during 2008:

*Mass murderers buying arms over the Internet (Blic, 17 February 2008), A modern thief sits behind the computer (Glas Javnosti, 3 February 2008), Hackers from Kosovo attacked the web-site of the youth organisation (Danas, 18 August 2008), Albanians blocked Serbian web site (Kurir, 15 August 2008), Civil servants banned of using Facebook (Blic, 19 December 2008), Another robbery on YouTube (Blic, 27 February 2008), Electronic thefts (Ekonomist, 10 March 2008), National Agency for Telecommunication invades the privacy of citizen (Glas Javnosti, 30 July 2008), Cash machines under the attack of cyber criminals (Biznis, 3 March 2008), Cyber criminals arrested in Kraljevo (Politika, 5 June 2008), Online sexual maniac got caught (Kurir, 30 May 2008), Charges against Internet paedophile (Press, 18 June 2008), Videos of orgies involving horses available online (Glas Javnosti, 18 June 2008), Protect your identity while online (Pregled, 22 August 2008), Laws needed against online violence (Danas, 9 September 2008), How to prevent the misuse of Internet? (Narodne novine - Niš, 9 September 2008),*

*Parents don't know how to control the online content (Danas, 8 May 2008), Internet makes you dumber (Politika, 12 July 2008), Prostitution flourishes over the Internet (Blic, 9 November 2008), Internet addiction on the rise (Glas Javnosti, 30 November 2008), Manipulation of public opinion on the Internet (Glas Javnosti, 18 January 2008), Indecent proposals in chat rooms, parents misguided (Politika, 25 February 2008), Children are the target of Internet maniacs (Blic, 3 June 2008), Drugs and prostitution in the virtual world (Politika, 6 December 2008), Facebook addiction surpasses the addiction on computer games (Politika, 6 December 2008), Internet more expensive, e-mails under control (Blic, 26 July 2008), Inspectors chasing pirates (Politika, 14 November 2008), Computer viruses replaced bombs (Nedeljni Telegraf, 21 May 2008), A law on electronic communication is necessary (Danas, 3 March 2008)...*

Hope you had a good laugh. It is important to remember that this is just a tiny portion of the headlines referring to the Internet, and there is much more; so what the average citizen reading newspapers could conclude on 'this Internet thing'? This is one dangerous place, in which terrorists, pirates and maniacs of all kinds operate, and children are the prey of an army of pedophiles; it is not just your

money they steal there, but also your entire 'identity'; and if by some chance it doesn't get you addicted to it, surely it will make you dumber.

#### Now press 'enter' if you dare

This is not to say that some of the things mentioned in the headlines do not happen. Of course that there is a lot of 'criminal' behaviour online - but, more-or-less in the same ratio as in 'real life', and it is expected - as the Internet and related digital communication tools expanded our reach much beyond the possibilities of our body, or beyond the place we live in or the social circles we can be the part of - it did so for all the aspects of 'us'. Also, this is not to say that there is no positive and affirmative coverage of the Internet, and that there are no specialised magazines and columns dedicated to promoting all things Internet, albeit most of it would be promoting the products and services, quite possibly connected with vendors or distributors and acting as advertisement, without real critical and scientific discussion about the Internet, besides on the Internet itself. However, most of those would be confined to 'specialised' places and addressing the audience already aware of the Internet and its ever expanding potentials and problems. In the general picture, the 'popular' press, the one addressing just 'the people', in the situation where there is no immediate knowledge and experience of the topic, is still producing more fear and confusion than critique and curiosity; without having a clear social consensus, reflected in the media, that The Network is here to stay, with all of the gains and losses it may bring, it is quite possible that almost 50 percent of the citizens will continue to say: *Internet? No thanks, I don't think I really need it...* No matter how much is invested in infrastructure, or not, from this point on it is the culture which decides on the further progress in the field. And this is where traditional media should play a very important role. Once they are clear about what that role is supposed to be. ■



# The Art of Rationalisation in the Age of Crisis

Interview with Milos Rancic - a linguist, computer programmer, Wikimedia Serbia, Ebart media archive

By Vlada Jeric, Student, FMK

Milos Rancic is the expert in linguistics and one of the founders of Wikipedia in Serbian, one of the fastest growing local language Wikipedias with more than 70,000 entries so far, and a computer programmer working in Ebart media archive. In an interview for *deScripto*, he talks about roles of traditional and Internet media, Wikipedia projects and other issues related to the development of the Internet scene in Serbia.

The small research I did using your media database confirmed that the 'traditional' mainstream media would rather not mention "Internet" at all, or would report on it in a context of paedophilia, identity theft, terrorism... As somebody who worked on "internets" for almost 15 years now, would you agree with that?

**Rancic:** Well, considering Wikipedia, we are aware of it for quite some time. A lot of media would be reporting very negative, some even in a hilarious way, I can remember *Press daily* and how much we were laughing, but some were more serious in their accusations, like *NIN weekly*, who actually called Wikipedia "the Orwellian project" - which is interesting, in a way that the consequence was that *NIN* itself became repulsive for quite a few of Wikipedia people who used to read it before. The most positive experience so far we had with *Vreme weekly* - there are always problems with being precise in modern terminology, but the overall approach would be positive. I have to say that I do not follow mainstream media that much, or at all - I haven't been watching TV for years, for example... It was just a few days ago I tried this new 3G feature on my mobile phone, so I watched TV on this tiny screen for some minutes - interesting - but in general, television appears to me as some sort of the 'amusement park' of today, and if occasionally I sit in front of TV I just can't stop watching, everything appears so unusual, to say... I guess I grew estranged from it.

Quite a few of the local journalists and different "experts" would still feel the need to speak in public about Wikipedia as unreliable, insufficient, amateurish, even 'dangerous' or 'dam-

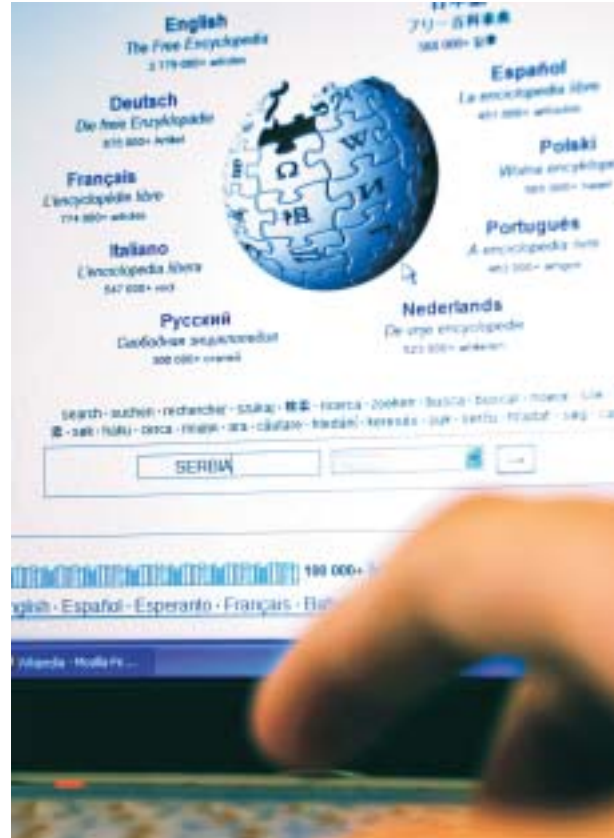


Photo by Igor Marovic

Wikipedia screenshot

aging', although we all know for quite some time now, backed by all the relevant surveys and analysis, that it is completely the other way around. Where, according to your opinion, does this need come from? Why do those people not accept it for what it is, and not try to benefit from having Wikipedia, instead?

**Rancic:** You just reminded me of a thing I was contemplating for some months now. Let's think of the profession of being a journalist, for example. Today, it is a very demanding job to be one, and even for some 'simpler' tasks, like covering the events around the city on a daily basis (for example, the daily shows like "The Belgrade Chronic" are covering zillions of different things) - it requires, besides acquiring the information itself, a high degree of diverse knowledge on different topics. What I realised is that it is precisely the Wikipedia which provides the education of the future journalist in an adequate way, as it makes you to 'broaden' the scope of your education, it teaches you how to search for 'sources', it learns about the methodology of searching for 'relevant' information, and the methodology of 'digesting' and representing the information in an understandable and transparent way, and in a style which would be not that much different from a journalistic one - we can say that a lot of young people who decide to write for Wikipedia are by that very act showing the interest in journalism, anyway. My personal experience is that the average Wikipedian (which would be a prominent member of community or an administrator) has a broader scope of education than the average journalist.

In the previous issue of *deScripto* dealing with local media landscape, published in 2006, still there was some criticism on Wikipedia coming from the people considered to be the experts, similar to what would be a popular misconception of

the Internet in general, claiming that it is 'unstable', 'unreliable', 'over-simplifying', and repeating other common stereotypes?

**Rancic:** It is quite clear that the 'rules of working' are much 'harder', defined in more details and more transparent in Wikipedia than in all of the local encyclopaedia projects...

...and we had a flood of "new encyclopaedias" recently...

**Rancic:** Yes, right. In Wikipedia, there has to be a relevant source, and preferably more sources, referenced; then the 'tone' needs to be neutral, and you can not play on the 'authority' card - in a lot, a lot of the other projects it is just one 'authority' figure which is referenced, somebody who wrote on something for which there are no other sources, no confirmations, and in that respect it is very problematic to state that Wikipedia doesn't come up to the standards of any general encyclopaedia. I am not really following all the new and different projects developing around, so still I take as the examples and references the never finished *Encyclopaedia of Yugoslavia*, then *The Military encyclopaedia* and a *Little Prosveta Encyclopaedia* (so-called *Mala enciklopedija Prosveta* - officially: *Op(ta enciklopedija, trece izdanje, Prosveta, Beograd, 1978*, which used to be a very popular and referenced one). Realistically speaking, compared to *Prosveta* edition, for example, almost each entry in Wikipedia is just plainly better. And, one more thing - Wikipedia is not a 'wonder' anymore, so that the people would be excited to speak and comment on it, nor we from the local branch of Wikimedia feel much need to campaign and 'popularise' it around - most of the people I meet these days know precisely what Wikipedia is, and are in general quite positive about it. People use it. It is here to stay.

So we hope that those "early adopting" problems marked with suspicion and fear will fade out, replaced by focusing on the "real" problems of Wikipedia, on about how it works and in which direction it develops. What kind of problems should be discussed regarding Wikipedia today?

**Rancic:** The real problem of Wikipedia, and I am talking about the 'big' one here, the one in English, would be that it is still "thin" in those fields where, in general, there is not yet a critical mass of people who are also prominent in computer sciences, and in average that would be social sciences. Wikipedia is 'thinnest' there. For example, as somebody educated in linguistics, I can say that Wikipedia is pretty 'thin' in the field - of course, the main things and basic terms are there, but compared to, for example, astronomy, which is covered in tremendous details now, it is not much. But people around astronomy are familiar with computer technology and computer culture for decades. Wikipedia in Serbian would have slightly different problems, which would be similar for all the communities from the smaller-in-population languages, and that is that the certain individuals can still influence a lot; a good example of that would be socio-linguistics, where I launched the ini-

tiative together with professor Jelena Filipovic from the Faculty of Philology and students contributed with three entries each, so the field is decently covered, I would say better than in the Wikipedia in English. But, in general, this is what I see as the real problem, still there is the lack of people from certain fields who are also prominent in using and understanding computer networks, and it is reflected in Wikipedia.

*Wikipedia 'broadens' the scope of future journalists' education; it teaches you how to search*

What is the mainstream journalism re-publishing from Wikipedia (as a consequence of it being 'open' for public use), what kind of 'content' in average is of interest to the press?

**Rancic:** Oh, I don't know what they (the mainstream media) did recently; I'll need to search the Ebart media database to update myself on it (laughing)... But we've seen everything - really everything - piracy, the 'real piracy' - popular daily papers taking and using the photographs, for example, or quoting the verbatim pieces of certain articles, and if all what they should do is to attribute it, but they don't do even that, it just shows... Well, a bad attitude. Bad taste. But with some news agencies we have a wonderful collaboration. For example, local *WikiNews* is re-publishing the news-stream from the Beta News Agency, and it works great.

I see the potential for collaboration with traditional or mainstream media, and I don't think Wikipedia presents any kind of threat to traditional journalism. Still there is the public demand to have an extensive and permanent, 24-hours per day coverage (and also the space to sell adds), especially in smaller and mid-sized environments, like this one here - and I don't think that the traditional local news services are in any state of immediate danger to be extinct. Still they provide the service some self-organised entities can not - they produce the news which are systematically covering all fields, deliver on regular basis and in time, and without much if any oscillation - in other words, I don't see any treat to Beta, Tanjug, Agence France-Presse or Reuters. But with daily newspapers, it is different; it becomes obviously an obsolete thing, to say.

Well, the local numbers disagree - the circulation of traditional press is not growing, but not shrinking, yet; and just 30 percent of regular hardcopy readers do read the online version of the dailies here and there. On the other hand, all the newspapers have online editorial boards and are 'competing' to build extensive web-sites and archives, and the concept of the newspapers-for-free, introduced by 24 sata, provoked some response by the biggest and most traditional - *Politika daily* re-

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cently begun handing out *Politika.zip*, a free digest of the 'real' issue. But I agree that it seems that this sort of publishing is fading away, and is being growingly replaced by the Internet - and I also think that we haven't even begun to explore the full potential of mobile phones in this respect, for example - so the monopoly to find, produce and disseminate information or a piece of news is definitely lost for daily newspapers. It is already over. Where the potential of professional journalism remains may be actually in the journalism itself, not just in standing in between the news and the public, but in commenting, criticism, analysis, contextualising, predicting, joining the dots - in 'interpreting' the news, to say. The 'news-as-the-information' is already omnipresent, in real time and in all the formats and media we may use, but as a fast and short, bold and dry, somewhat disconnected 'piece of data'. Journalists should be the people who are there to "interpret" the data, to analyse what it means and what are the possible consequences of it.

**Rancic:** There are a few paradigms there. One is about the content, and what the nature of that content is. Another is the question of media, in a technological sense. When I am not behind the computer (and that is almost never), I am following the news on my mobile phone. The point is, the technology of such access to news is not in that widespread use yet. Still a majority of the people will grab newspapers on their way to toilet. Me, I take my mobile. I've done that ever since I got a first mobile, which was able to do so. But this technology seems to be still emerging, and I am sure once it takes over people would feel no need to revert to carrying a bunch of papers around. The previous year may be characteristic by announcing the technology of paper-like computer display. That means that soon we will read from such displays, and you'll have only a few displays around, which will show any content from any source on your demand, so for journalism I do not really see the option of not publishing online. What would be a revenue model for journalism is one entirely different story - I don't know, probably advertising... And also, when occasionally I go through a paper copy of the newspapers, most of the times I find myself reading the news I read yesterday online; since I already read the yesterdays news yesterday, I go online and read the news of today. But I think that aggregating news is still not that easy, and I think news agencies like Beta are still much 'stronger' than the Internet, to say; especially considering the local news, they have people who do that all the time, they gather the news, filter out the noise, and organise these streams into categories which may be of your concern, otherwise you would have to cope with that. But a very small number of people is sufficient for this job, so it would be just a small portion of the people working in 'journalism'. Journalism is becoming different now. I think that today there is too much people in media and journalism. Similar to software - also I think there are too many computer programmers.

Simply, there is no need for that many programmers. Society does not require that much. Especially when free software becomes dominant, it will prove that there will be no need to have, I don't know, 15 or 150 different and competitive pieces of software to do the same one thing you want; what for? Why would you need it? On the other hand, it doesn't mean that there will no job for programmers, a lot of things are there to be done, but still it will require less programmers. And the similar is with journalism; there I expect even more of a specialisation.

### *News agencies remain 'stronger' in aggregating the news*

Some of EU Member States, or in some cases the certain municipalities, already require by law using of free and open-source software, and the trend is to go towards an open licensing approach regarding the 'content'. What is your assessment on the current situation with using open-source software in public services and introducing e-government services on those principles here? It may be a bit far-fetched, as still Serbia is lagging behind what is EU or regional average in basic categories considering using of computers and digital networks.

**Rancic:** There is something which is not reflected in the statistics. Statistics can be often misleading. Belgrade is significantly different then the rest of the Serbia. Belgrade is not that much behind in Internet then most of the cities its size, in average; but everything south of Belgrade is almost completely disconnected. The other thing is, you know, our position here, the position of the society, it is still like that the "pirated" software is one perfectly acceptable thing - and this is also my personal position - of course, there are other problems with it, as it is based on the technology which is "closed", the code is closed, and precisely because of it being based on that kind of technology, you could have a lot of problems. Not just once it was proven to be the case. On the other hand, people use what is available, they do with what they have and nobody should condemn it - but the global trends are slowly being replicated here, as well. On this small laptop of yours you now have Ubuntu, I see. More people I talk to are considering to switch to Linux, or to at least try it.

Regarding the government policies, I don't see any of this reflected there. There I see nothing happening really. I see some initiatives, even from the places which are close to the structures of the government, but in reality and within what we consider as 'official', nothing is happening yet.

Back to the story of local media and the Internet. The latest horror story I found in December spreading around traditional media was that the 80 percent of computers in schools in Serbia are found to be infected with some sort of malware.



Milos Rancic

Photo by Vlada Jeric

But it would always appear de-contextualised from the real source of problem, which would be the security issues of Microsoft products and the lack of education by the users, and it would somehow be attributed to the very idea of the Internet and computers themselves, as being inherently problematic and dangerous.

**Rancic:** But, regarding those issues, again I don't find the situation here much different then in most of the other places. I consider myself pretty well informed about the topic, as most of the time I follow *Slashdot* - it is my main news source, as at least 20-30 percent of the news on *Slashdot* feeds I find I am interested in, which for me makes it by far the most relevant source compared to anything else - and there I see the similar problems being reported from more or less everywhere, including the United States. There are people everywhere who are afraid of the Internet, who scare other people with the Internet, and there are numerous different horror stories about the Internet emerging all the time; I am online since 1995, so pretty much from the beginning of the Internet as we know it, and in my immediate environment I never ever experienced any of the "horror stories". It is obvious that there is a campaign against the Internet among some social circles, or by some individuals; I attribute it to fear. Once some people used to be afraid of the soap, remember? It is the matter of understanding, of knowledge. Just look how the horror stories about the launching of the Large Hadron Collider in European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) this autumn emerged. People really thought that when they switch it on, the whole planet would collapse into itself, and whatnot. In some places on the Far East still people believe that if the fan cooler is switched on, you should not spend any time in the room where it is working, as it may "suck all the air out" and you may suffocate. Some Somali tribes believe that local men can become impotent only by shaking hands with white men, so they will be afraid to touch you. Of course, a certain level of rationality and rationalisation is always required. There are paedophiles around. There are people who would rape a 5 year old kid. These things may happen. But are not usual - how many people you met in your life which may do such a thing? None, I guess.

Similar chances you have to meet one on the Internet, then - it is not much different, really. But you need to rationalise.

I started this small survey with the premise that Internet infrastructure, however expensive and outdated, became finally available in Serbia, and that the society entered the phase in which the wider social acceptance of the Internet depends much more on promoting and researching the culture of using it, living with it, working with it. It is only this way that it may become both ubiquitous and transparent, a common thing, something which should be taken as default. Would you agree?

**Rancic:** Well, infrastructure remains to be the problem. I myself had to pull a very strong "connections" in Telecom in order to be "switched" from the notorious Puls-code Modulation (PCM) telephone line in my previous apartment to something which would be able to transmit data. But OK, let's say it was a remote suburb, and that it was not the 'priority' to upgrade the lines there. Some parts of Belgrade still have a lot of issues regarding connectivity. Then I moved to the city centre, and ended up making the improvised connection using the line from the apartment next door, as my line again was not 'modernised' and couldn't be used for data. So infrastructure is definitely still something to deal with.

Regarding promoting the culture of using the Internet, I quite agree that any sort of coordinated activity from the side of government and institutions is yet to be expected. There are some new people around now, so we will see. I had the opportunity, by chance, to meet most of the people who were officially in charge of the Internet by now. It has to do with the Computer Center of the University of Belgrade (RCUB), and with Faculty of Electrotechnics. This would be the profile of the people involved, they will be predominantly engineers. And it appears to be the problem. There are always two aspects of the technology, but the average local politician would not be able to distinguish between the two, and would see it appearing as one. One aspect is the technology as in what engineers do - determining, planning, creating and maintaining the technical functionality of one system. It has a lot to do with hardware and software issues. There, without any doubts, the Faculty of Electrotechnics is producing a competent people. And this is what most politicians are able to recognise as "technology". But, there is another aspect of technology, which for politicians and those in charge is not articulated yet, and because of which having those new people around is very important. You need people who know how the Internet is working. I have no doubts that engineers would continue to make great functioning and very redundant systems for electrical distribution, or land line telephony. But the Internet is different, as it requires all what an engineer does, and beyond, in order for it to really work. This is not to say that engineers would not be a perfectly good choice to deal with the Internet - only, additional education is required, and one that goes beyond engineering. And I think that there is a big lack of this kind of peo-

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ple. I met engineers who can code in complex languages just like that, and who are able to program micro-controllers to do wonders, anytime, but who just happen not to know how to format the text in Microsoft Word. Probably it is different by now, and I think the situation among young people is much better in that respect - I am talking about some previous generations - but those generations would be precisely the people who grew up to be of influence in certain institutions today. The problem is if you try to learn about the Internet issues from some sort of 'external' position, you will always be lagging at least a generation behind. You need to be 'on' the Internet in order to know about the Internet. This is the profile of people required, and those people would be able to "push" things. But still we have politicians who think "OK, this is something connected with computers and Internet, we need an engineer here". This I see as one serious, core problem.

And, for the end: as somebody who lives and works on and from the Internet - Wikipedia is voluntary affair, of course, but before Ebart, you have been working with regional VOIP providers, so professionally and financially you have depended on the Internet for quite some time - how do you access the consequences of forthcoming recession on Internet, on the people who depend on the Internet in their daily activities and those who are directly employed on the 'internets' - what will change for you?

**Rancic:** Well, there are a few aspects there. The company I work for is data-mining and archiving media. A lot of companies, institutions and political parties are depending on exploiting these resources in order to analyse and decide what to do next. Whatever crisis is coming, I think this is the last service they would decide to deprive themselves of. So I think my position is pretty "safe", to say. On the other hand, I expect a lot of rationalisation to happen around. There will not be much funding around for developing this and that anymore, and a lot of things would go under the process of rationalisation. This rationalisation should also include accepting the open-source and free software on much wider scale, and I actually think that people able to work with free software may be in growing demand. It also may mean even more of using the 'pirated' software. But I expect that a lot of programmers would lose their jobs and contracts. When a bank goes down, for example, it does not require the developing of any software applications anymore. So, as in any crises, those who have more options would have much better chances to "get through" - and it is true for programmers, as well. If you can code in several different languages, you have much more chances than if you know to work just with one; if you can port for different operating systems, you are better off than if you are connected with just porting for one. We can also see more of the outsourcing in one scenario I can think of, and much less in another; it is very uncertain which way it would go. But living in Serbia, one thing proved to be constantly true: anything is possible. ■

## Devastating Status of Roma Media

Interview with Dragoljub Ackovic, the Vice President of the Roma Parliament

*Media that talk about Roma people the most are those who have a sensationalistic approach towards the Roma population, for example reporting on Roma persons who stole a chicken, or got into fight half-drunk, or an under-aged Roma child smoking. On the other hand, they don't have the opportunity to write about Roma men or women who have brought important changes or have developed something or saved the ship from sinking.*



By Andrea Perunovic, Student, FMK

Over the last years, the Serbian public have witnessed a number of awareness raising campaigns promoting the rights of minorities and marginal social groups, as well as number of appeals focusing on the alarming status of the Roma population in Serbia. Still, the prejudices about Roma citizens are visible within the Serbian media. Their language is rarely heard on Serbian radio and TV stations even in areas with a larger Roma population. As for the Romani media, the status is as difficult, since the number of media outlets in the Romani language is decreasing. Dragoljub Ackovic, editor of the Romani programme in the Radio Program I of the national broadcasting service Radio Television of Serbia since 1978, the founder of Romani news agency *Rominterpres* and one of the



Dragoljub Ackovic

Photo by BETA NEWS SERVICE, D. Antonic

founders and the Vice-President of the International Romani Parliament considers shutting down of media in Roma language 'to be systematic'. Since 2006, the Republic Broadcasting Agency has been implementing new broadcasting legislation and has been licensing radio and television outlets on local and national level in Serbia. Several Romani media were not awarded a licence and have shut down in the process. In an interview for *deScripto*, Ackovic explains why:

*"There were, in fact, a lot of problems in the area of electronic media to be solved such as large number of illegal radio and TV stations. However, I believe that none of the Romani media should have been denied a license because there were not that many. In Belgrade, two Romani TV stations were shut down - Amaro Drom and Khylo e Romengo. The radio station under the same name as the latter has been shut down as well. Now, when you shut down three out of four Romani media on the territory of Belgrade, one has to wonder if that has been done on purpose. I believe it was. Even more so as none of these outlets ever received a penny from the public budget, but all were supported by private funds.*

*The Decade of Roma Inclusion Presidency is currently held by Serbia under Deputy Prime Minister Bozidar Djelic. He recently spoke very affirmatively about the development of Romani media. When I asked him why they shut down three media stations, he had no answer. I do not think he even knew about it.*

*One thing is for sure - our language is our state. If you shut down Romani media, you are seriously impacting Roma national awareness, culture and everything that constitutes being Romani."*

*In Belgrade, three out of four Romani media were denied broadcasting license*

How would you describe the way media are addressing Roma citizens and issues that concern Romani population in Serbia?

**Ackovic:** Media that talk about Roma people the most are those who have a sensationalistic approach towards the Roma population, for example reporting on Roma persons who stole a chicken, or got into fight half-drunk, or an under-aged Roma child smoking. On the other hand, they don't have the opportunity to write about Roma men or women who have brought important change or have developed something or saved the ship from sinking. Roma people are not on the governing positions and nowhere in the world do they have such opportunities. I wish these media outlets could leave the sensationalism behind and start reporting on real issues.

As the Secretary for Information of the International Romani Union I have struggled a lot with main international news agencies to persuade them to use term Roma instead of Gypsies. Some of them would even claim that we made it up to be different. We did, but a couple of thousand years ago. That is what we are called and what we will always be. Will mainstream media do something to change it? I don't know...

I remember that in 1969, one of the biggest Yugoslav dailies at that time *Novosti* was running an initiative to support Roma people and it was very well received by public. Since then, I have not seen any similar initiative ever. Last December *Politika* daily was publishing feuilleton and that was good. But, not enough.

Do you think that treating Roma people as a minority in the media is helping or hindering their status?

**Ackovic:** The minute that you start dividing people into a majority and a minority, there is a problem. Receiving the treatment of a minority in the media can only be harmful for us. What is the difference between TV show on Serbian culture and TV show on Romani culture? You can't divide the culture, and life for that matter, on a majority and a minority in any period of time.

How effective could media be in resolving problems of Roma population?

**Ackovic:** You will be surprised to hear that it is the media who created most prejudices about Roma people. Also, encyclopaedias very much produce stereotypes and then influence generations of readers.

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Roma children in front of Belgrade Gallery

Photo by Aleksandra Petkovic

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You were talking about the shutting down of the Romani media. What is the situation in Serbia today?

**Ackovic:** Romani media in Serbia are in a devastating position. When define Romani media as those who broadcast programmes in Romani language or whose owners are Romanis. There is one local television and radio station in Nis, one radio station in Krusevac, and one in Obrenovac broadcasting only commercial announcements. I am the editor of the *Roma world*, which is Romani programme on national radio service RTS. Regional TV in Novi Sad is broadcasting *Amen Adjes* show. There were in the past random broadcasts on the TV stations in cities Kikinda, Pristina and Smederevo. Now, the question is why on TV RTS, which is national public service, we do not see any programme in Romani language. We wrote tens of times to the CEO of RTS Aleksandar Tijanic but received no answer.

What about Internet media? Do you have any presence there?

**Ackovic:** Yes, Roma people are using the Internet a lot, and the majority of Romani organisations have their own websites. Our organisation *Rominterpres* has a website and I noticed that there were around 12,000 visitors in just a couple of months. That's a very positive statistic, and there certainly are much better websites than this one. My colleagues and I thought of something useful for Roma people, to build a Romani nation-state on the Internet - Romanistan. It is very popular among "Romani hackers" and people using the Internet. Romanistan is housing our national library, the Bible translated in the Romani language, and daily news as well. For Roma people it's a source of information, but also source for so much more that concerns our being. ■

## Mediating the Past

*(Don't) look back in anger*

### Born in a Cross-Fire Hurricane

Almost 17-years ago, at the very start of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), which will become inextricably linked with terms such as "ethnic cleansing," "genocide," and "war crimes," a child, not more than a year old, was taken from a village near Tuzla-where the father happened to have been away on business-along with her older sister and mother. The latter two have never been found, nor have they so far been identified among the remains exhumed from any of the mass-graves which Bosnia and Herzegovina is littered with. Yet the child survived, and, through ways, which can at best be described as "murky," ended up being raised by an older couple in Belgrade, coming to know herself as Mila Jankovic.

In her teens, the awareness of adoption and her origins prompted an identity crisis and some trouble at home, which led to employing the Red Cross to try matching up Mila's DNA with any of the samples volunteered by the survivors of the war. This is how Mila found her biological father, Muhamed, alive and living in Germany, having fled there in 1995. She also learned of her birth-name: Senida Becirovic. One article reports her nearly fainting upon seeing it inscribed into the commemorative monument to "THE MISSING". In the traumatic events that took place afterwards, however, hers is the first name that can safely be taken off that board.

Or perhaps not so fast. For, as we are to learn by just scanning the headlines dealing with the story, Mila/Senida is still split in two by war, and she is not the only one. So are the formed nation-states and citizens within them divided; peoples who were, after decades of living together under the communist system of Tito, separated by ultranationalist propaganda, machine-gun bursts, barbed wire, mutually inflicted wounds, and borders drawn in red ink. Long after charting desirable territories on the map and besieging of cities, the war-mongering regimes dismantled, respective dictators safely in their coffins, it is in the realm of *naming* that the struggle for interpretation, and thus identity, is waged.

The Sarajevo's popular daily *Dnevni avaz* broke the story of reunion as "How Senida Became Mila." Its Serbian and Croatian counterparts followed, each with a piece of their own. "They told me: 'You are not Mila, your name is Senida,'"

read the headline in the Croatian *Jutarnji list*. "More Mila Than Senida," countered Belgrade-based *Vecernje novosti*.

While *Dnevni* and *Jutarnji* could afford to state explicitly that it was the (Bosnian) Serb forces that stormed the village and snatched Senida, the reportage in *Vecernje* plays it down. Perhaps so as not to disturb the Dickensian aspect of things, it emphasises the merciful 'soldier saviour' angle, and speaks rather of her being 'swept by the whirlwind of war,' as if one is swooped into a new home and into a new name by a force of nature, or of fate; or by an overused, worn-out metaphor.

Years ago in a Belgrade's quarterly *Genero*, a political sciences professor and media theorist, Snjezana Milivojevic, examined why "the media are the ideal site of opening up the facts of the past and critically examining them," upon which "it is discovered that the past was and is-an ideological battlefield." The past may seem to us dead and buried, but its ghosts are haunting by the very way we speak of it, or, rather, the way we don't. And if a story of a most innocent war-survivor yields such disparate press accounts, the polarity which severs the public each time a controversial fig-



By Gavriilo Petrovic, Student, FMK

ure or a past event re-emerges into the media spotlight can easily be imagined. Instead of the victims or the missing, it's the war crimes and the fugitives charged with them that have become the symbol of Serbia's division.

### A House Divided

"I'd name Ratko Mladic supreme commander of the army," said Mladen Obradovic of the extreme right-wing organisation *Obraz* last year, in a Question and Answer session with the private TV B92. "There's a long lineage of Serbian heroes, embodying sacred Serbian values. Novak Djokovic [top-world tennis player], Ratko Mladic..." he enumerated, a defiant smirk on his face. In his world, and that of many of his compatriots, arguing otherwise is considered treason, 'anti-Serbian'. Wartime Bosnian Serb general Ratko Mladic happens to be indicted by the Hague-based International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for crimes against humanity, genocide, and other atrocities committed during the 1992-95 war in BiH.

*Instead of the victims or the missing, it's the war crimes and the fugitives charged with them that have become the symbol of Serbia's division.*

Still on the loose and widely believed to be hiding in Serbia, Mladic is by all sides agreed to be 'the most wanted fugitive'. But whether this makes him a national hero or a barbaric murderer depends not primarily on the nature of the acts committed (or solely on one's daily paper of choice). The facts have to be weighed up, debated, and, ultimately, obfuscated, by tactics ranging from the often employed cry, 'But what of the crimes committed against us?', abstract historical justifications, to the detached lingo of jurisprudence. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that one could have seen in January 2009, on the same network, Oliver Antic, an esteemed professor and ex-dean of Belgrade's Law faculty saying that, no, he would *not* report Mladic to the authorities even if he knew his whereabouts. He also argued against extradition to 'foreign courts' on the basis that the much-disputed, constantly criticised (sometimes rightly so) Hague tribunal is 'illegitimate' and 'unjust'. His words echoed the attitude of the previous Serbian government, which has considered cooperation with the ICTY often only under severe international pressure. But he went even further, wondering: "Imagine if Martin Luther was extradited into the hands of the Inquisition. Would he receive a fair trial?"

Sitting next to him, prominent human rights activist Natasa Kandic seemed stupefied. "Is that the kind of message you want to send to Law students?" All this, and more, in a primetime political talk show aptly named *State of the Nation*. If you can guess the right percentages of the public's opinion divided upon the issue, start text-messaging now, for you may win some money. The question of the day was delicately phrased as "Would you report Ratko Mladic for a million euros?", that being the sum Serbia has offered to anyone who provides information leading to his arrest. The spokesperson for the polling agency explained the staggering 65 percent of 'No' answers by the way the question was put to the polled. "It sounds a little like, 'I'd sell him out for a million bucks.' You don't get a clear message from the officials what he is indicted of and how backed-up the indictment against him really is."

The article follows with a high-government official in charge of cooperation with the ICTY depressingly declaring the "battle already lost," since "the attitudes are already formed."

Possibly still the most reviled person in Serbia, thanks to her relentless efforts to unearth the evidence of atrocities, coupled with the equally relentless demonisation campaign waged on her by late strongman Slobodan Milosevic's media, Natasa Kandic of the

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Humanitarian Law Centre is well-aware what an attitude-shaking effect a mere media event can have. It was her, after all, who got hold of, and submitted as evidence to both the Hague's and Belgrade's war crime prosecutors, the infamous 'Scorpions' video-tape. Initially presented at the Milosevic trial, just a month ahead of the 10th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre, the Serbian public has been confronted with a video showing members of a Serbian paramilitary unit executing Muslim men in plainclothes, by forcing them to lie face-down, hands tied, in a roadside ditch, before shooting them in the back.

The showing of the tape was simultaneous with the Serbian war crimes prosecution charging the soldiers identified from the video. Two years later, in 2007, it secured convictions for four of them (the verdicts almost invariably rendered in opinion and commentary pieces either as 'unpatriotic' or 'nowhere near harsh enough'). Citing a government-ordered survey, the prosecution claims 70 percent of the population was informed about the tape. Its office has received a steady soar of coverage ever since, the total number of segments and articles devoted to it in the past year being, by their account, about five times bigger than in 2003 when it was first established.

The prosecution judges its overall cooperation with the media as "positive, especially with those whose editorial policy is open to a more complex examination of these issues." Noting various "precious investigative programmes dealing with war crimes" borne out of this cooperation, it still reserves a critical glance at how the media have reported the 'Scorpions tape' affair. "The footage was shown on 1 June 2005 as part of a live coverage [of the Milosevic's trial in Hague] on TV B92. By the time for the evening news, however, it was only B92 and another local TV station that deemed it top story. The day after, the killing of Srebrenica's young men was only on the cover of [independent] daily Danas, while the highest-selling Vecernje novosti reported about it on page 17," the prosecution says.

Since then, Serbia has experienced a surging proliferation of tabloids, mainly of an openly nationalist persuasion, but what else? What say the watchdogs themselves? "The key change since the fall of Milosevic in 2000 is that war-crimes committed by Serbian forces are, for the most part, no longer being denied," says Milos Milic, editor of TV B92's main news programme. "But the nationalist part of the public often counters with unconfirmed reports on Serbian victims, the goal of which is to equate crimes against non-Serbs-such as the genocide in Srebrenica-with Serb sufferings". Milic estimated that most of the media report neutrally on crimes committed by Serbs, but lacking analysis and investigative methods.

Since tabloid dailies deal with Hague-indictees in much the same way they do with celebrity gossip, the sudden arrest last July of Radovan Karadzic, former Bosnian Serb political leader, was followed, after the first couple of days of 'hard news', by a sure fire 'whirlwind' of intrigue and trivia. Thus the line between reality and fiction was once again blurred. Living in, granted, a bizarre disguise among Belgrade residents for years, practicing alternative medicine under an alias Dragan David Dabic, this 'other' Karadzic resembled more a mix of a John Le Carré spy and a spiritual guru.

*"Alleged satisfied patients, presumed lovers and soap-opera elements attract readers and viewers. Which is fine in terms of circulation, but it is a duty of journalists, nowadays mostly forgotten, to inform and not to entertain."*

The Independent Association of Journalists (NUNS) published in its publication *Dosije* (No.25, July 2008 - September 2008), a scathing critique of the media coverage following the arrest, pinpointing the exact moment when 'Radovan Karadzic fell into oblivion' behind media-friendlier Dabic. Along the same lines, the war crimes prosecution offered its critique: "Each medium reports about it from its own angle, but what is unfortunate is that often they are more eager to deal with side-details... than with facts that brought an indictment upon those people."

"Hard-news facts, it seems now, can hardly keep the public's attention for long," estimated Aleksandra Niksic of Belgrade bureau of Agence France Presse. "Alleged satisfied patients, presumed lovers and soap-opera elements attract readers and viewers. Which is fine in terms of circulation, but it is a duty of journalists, nowadays mostly forgotten, to inform and not to entertain."

#### A Tale of Two Cities

"Language is, of course, a diabolical thing. It reveals everything," starts a prominent human rights activist Borka Pavicevic, hunched over her antique office-desk in the Center for Cultural Decontamination, where various panel discussions, workshops, plays, ballets and operas are performed. "I don't know of anyone from this 'Second Serbia'-the words 'second' and 'other' being one and the same in Serbian-who ever named something First Serbia. It's how a majority defines a minority." Reaching up for a collection of essays published at the eve of 1990s wars, she says, "Here it is". The book was indeed titled 'The Other Serbia,' and came about as a response to the leading Greater Serbia cause. Needless to say, the anti-war force had lost the battle. Ever since, along with Kandic, Pavicevic is more famous for the abuses that are hurled at her then by her statements.



Borka Pavicevic

Photo by FoNET news service - Bozidar Petrovic

And so is this 'Other Serbia' itself, it seems: liberal columnist Teofil Pancic argued that the term "lives in the [rhetoric of the] Right much more than in those who are this supposed Other Serbia." Thus, pundit Djordje Vukadinovic of the conservative think-tank New Serbian Political Thought, when asked which parties comprise the pro-European, liberal option, decreed that it is "All those who coincide with the current interests of American foreign policy."

"What happened," says Pavicevic, "is that these two positions became so entrenched that they exhaust themselves in arguments, and never do the arguments leak outside, to the people."

Niksic, a then-war reporter, who has covered the war in BiH for several foreign media outlets, remembers the different approaches in Serbian media to the stories she had witnessed at the time. "Sometimes only the dateline was the same in these articles."

"But such an attitude should not be forgiven nowadays. Maybe then the public in Serbia did not get proper information on the war in Bosnia, but glorifying or finding excuses for atrocities, persons and events that have been historically and legally confirmed-such as the genocide in Srebrenica-must be punishable in a responsible society," Niksic says.

What seems to have been the failure, according to Pavicevic, is "the lack of an original language, except in a handful of authors, a language which you use, here, to speak about the crimes committed here. By no means does it mean that you should speak more plainly, but that you should think better."

#### Enjoy the Silence

On 15 January 2009, the European Parliament adopted a resolution by which 11 July is designated, in the whole of European Union, as a day of remembrance of the Srebrenica massacre. President Boris Tadic, who had attended the Annual Memorial, called in 2007 on the Serbian parliament to adopt The Resolution of Srebrenica, but came under heavy criticism from all sides of the aisle. The right called for condemnation of all crimes, committed on all sides, rendering the whole thing meaningless, while the Liberals, supposedly a voice of the 'Other Serbia' in the parliament, barked how the resolution was not condemning enough. The matter of the resolution has yet to be resolved.

To feel compassion towards a victim not of one's own ethnicity, especially toward those made victim by one's ethnicity, it turns out, is to be engaged, self-consciously, in a political act. "The basic mistake with the concept of confronting one's recent past here was that it was presented as something self-explanatory, well-understood, and good for its own sake," muses psychologist Kaja Damjanovic. "I'm not saying it was intentionally botched-up, but it did allow for reconciliation to become just another political stance, ideologically optional." And so it did with genocide denial: wearing T-shirts with Mladic's picture printed on it - whether one likes it or not - a specific kind of punk-rock attitude adopted by Serbian youth today.

*To feel compassion towards a victim not of one's own ethnicity, especially toward those made victim by one's ethnicity, it turns out, is to be engaged, self-consciously, in a political act.*

Arguing that the media in Serbia are actively engaged in 'politics of oblivion', Snjezana Milivojevic in *Genero* is quoted: "Forgetting is a normal human activity... but a nation-wide act of forgetting is something else: a silent agreement to forget the shame." The stance of most political subjects in Serbia is similar when it comes to our war-crime past. The most prevalent phrase is, 'let's not look back but forward', in other words, let bygones be bygones.

While this may suit the majority of the population, Damjanovic warns, it can erase the identity of the victims. While Natasa Kandic piled up facts about the crimes, there should have been other realms for the reconciliation processes to occur. "It's obvious that can not be conducted without the political elites declaring it an interest of the society," says Damjanovic.

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“Let us imagine,” echoes Niksic, “that after Milosevic fell in 2000, top minds—whichever they may be—sat down and thought it through for six months, and implemented a new subject in schools, called something along the lines of ‘my neighbours, our conflicts with them and why they shouldn’t happen again.’ What the democratic government should have done was to seize control of the school history books.”

Changed in 2002, new history books in Serbia have only flipped ideological leanings, no longer favouring the communists, deeming the former Yugoslavia of Tito an imposed experiment on the Serbs. They have introduced another preposterous historical perspective, interpreting the 1990s wars as a continuation of World War Two. “The unfinished war has continued after exactly 50 years,” so conclude the writers of the history textbook meant for high-school children.

Damnjanovic is suspicious about the theory, taken for granted, that if we do not settle the disputes of the past, we are bound to repeat them. “Because, if you accept that current events crucially determine the future, then even the Battle of Kosovo seems like a valid argument, does it not?” ■

Taken from an article published in *Dnevni avaz* on 19 January, 2009, written by E.H.

## Senida Bećirović will stay in Sarajevo!

While the media pressure (which she was exposed to because of her unbelievable destiny) subsides, Senida Becirovic makes decisions about her future. A girl who grew up in Belgrade as Mila Jankovic, after one soldier carried her out of the house on fire, in Caparde, near Kalesija in May 1992, managed to find her real father after 16 years and decided to go back to Sarajevo.

She will live in the house of her mother’s sister Munevera and her husband Esnar Vrabac.

“I will stay with my aunt and uncle in Sarajevo. I will start going to school again and get into college there. I will of course go to visit *Djecije selo in Sremska Kamenica*, and people who helped me a lot while being in Serbia”, Sanida said for *Dnevni avaz* newspaper.

Most important reasons to stay in Sarajevo, as she said, were the love and attention she received, as well as understanding.

“It was up to her to decide. We have two sons, a year older and a year younger than she is. Everything we can do for them, we will do for her as well. We think of her as our third child”, Esnar Vrabac said.

In the meantime, the problems with her documents were solved. She got her ID card on the name Senida Becirovic, but she decided to keep the name Mila, as well. She said she wanted to find the truth about what had happened to her mother Senada and her sister Sanda.

## Between Urban and Rural, Global and National

### How Mainstream Media Construct National Identity in Serbia

The building of a civil society and the principles of citizenship in the post-Milosevic Serbia have made the informative programme much more flexible and less partial, so that, at least formally, different political options get approximately equal media space. However, since in Serbia in this moment there is a polarisation between the retrograde forces of the retro-nationalism and the corpus of pro-European options more ready for a dialogue on Euro-integration, this bipolar discourse can also be recognised in the media content not strictly related to politics. Observing the most popular media content in Serbia at this moment we can discover how strong this dichotomy is, and how, through different approaches to creation of these contents, different constructs of national identity intended for the media consumers are developed.

We could easily predict what kind of media image awaits us this year right at its very beginning. Traditionally, the New Year’s Eve programme on Serbian television, apart from an air of festivity, has a certain patriotic note. On the public broadcasting TV channel, precisely at midnight, about a hundred accordionists started playing Serbian folklore dances, and in this way, with the national music, wished the citizens all the best in 2009. As for the music programme, the prevailing sounds were those of traditional folk music, but also those of the newly composed commercial folk. On the two most popular channels, the public broadcaster Radio Television of Serbia and Pink TV that insists on entertaining programme, mostly the same performers participated in the shows recorded beforehand.

Far behind were televisions that offered significantly less content that could be considered “national”, so B92 television had only 5 percent of viewers that night. On the other hand, almost four million citizens watched a part of Pink TV’s “Grand’s Folk Festivity”, a very popular TV show in which, in the prime-time, commercial folk music by both anonymous and popular performers is aired. In the New Year’s Eve prime-time B92 aired one of the final evenings of the “Operation



Living in the media

Photo by Igor Marovic

Triumph” reality show, with participants from all over ex-Yugoslavia. Although people-meters may not have registered a big whole-evening viewer rating, people at the “Operation Triumph” management have to be satisfied with the fact that during New Year’s Eve over one million people voted for their



By Nikola Benderac, Lada Paunovic, Ranko Stojilovic, Students, FMK

favourite contestants at the “Musical Academy”. Since this autumn, the most expensive and the most ambitious reality show has been shown in Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. The Emotion production succeeded in gathering almost all of ex-Yu republics in what is the most complex TV project in this region, something that no one

before had accomplished. Students of the “Academy”, scrutinised by domestic and foreign experts, learn to sing, to dance, to act on stage, overcome stage fright and become favourites of the public from all over the country and the region while at the same time performing next to international music stars. This project is particularly interesting in terms of the internationalisation of media in the region, and together with the increasing trend of popular TV series, made in ex-Yugoslavia states co-production, announces the tendency of an inevitable international cultural and media dialogue.

The peak time in the New Year’s Eve programme belonged to the episodes of the most popular TV series in Serbia at the moment. Judging by their titles (“Peasants”, “Village’s on Fire while an Old Woman is Combing”, “My Relative from the Country”), it is obvious that the intention is to bring back small remainders of the urbanised society to the “rural parts” as well. Viewer rating of this series is measured in millions.

By creating an appealing and likeable image of Serbia, not perfect but easy to become fond of, and by having access to so many homes, the media construct a national identity that is, according to the viewer rating, readily accepted by public. The current serial “Village’s on Fire while an Old Woman is Combing” arouses

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nostalgia also in the city kids who had spent the most beautiful moments of their childhood in some relative's countryside home.

The image of a village in this series actually depicts real Sumadija (central part of Serbia) and Serbia in general, "the way it is", in other words, the way it is presented by those who create "reality". The way people talk, their faces, clothing... it is all completely authentic and easily recognisable since it had already been shown and seen in the media that way, and thus became familiar to the public. The public now recognises it as real. Those country people from the series are warm and sincere, but also critical, even envious towards their neighbours.

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However, in difficult situations, no matter what, they are always ready to help. They have gone through the World War II, the nationalisation of their possessions with the purpose of "denationalisation", that affected them in the first years after the World War II, disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991 and the bombing of 1999. It all left traces on them, the whole village was on fire, but still, at the end they move ahead without making much fuss, so it is good, as a misogynist saying - considered a popular wisdom - goes, that "the old woman was combing".

In this series we can also recognise the huge importance of family as an institution and its internal relations that are certainly not ideal. In a family people argue, command, cheat, but above all, they love each other infinitely, with all the purity of heart of a simple soul, and even when doing harm, they do it unintentionally, simply because they know no other alternative.

Father is the head of the family, but it is the woman who puts an effort without indispensable for progress. She assembles everything and everybody. The man is proud. He would give up his own son because he thinks that he hasn't managed to turn him into a man. His son is a deserter, a fact he couldn't forgive neither of them. But he still suffers for his pride, he is hurt, and he secretly hopes that his son will eventually come back, and when he does... it is as if he had never left. Here we can recognise how the series promotes the 'patriarchal-heroic' morality that, in fact, is a pure demagoguery.

If this suits the rural type of construction of national identity imposed on us in the media, we certainly have to take into account also the population for which other type of content is placed; content that produces a different national identity considered real by that kind of public. Some of them may identify with characters from the "Bitter Fruits" series or from the films like "Obituary for Escobar" that present an urban environment in which the main character is usually a guy who becomes a criminal because of the ill-fated circumstances but at the end he falls in love and changes from the core. That kind of content, the same as the 'rural series' arouses big media attention and gets sympathies of the viewers.

If we are not rural, then we are urban, but in any case it has to be in the way the media present us, while we only have the possibility to choose which image to incline to. Who are we actually? The community is divided into two fractions. Two ways of thinking are formed; both created and placed by the media.

On the one hand, there is an idea of a quasi-urban part of elite disgusted by anything domestic and turning to someone else's, rejecting its own roots and everything related to the past. It is argued that we should look to the future and invest in it but we shouldn't by any means be ashamed of our roots. It is a good to approach the world, of course, our goal is to become a true part of it, but in doing so we could definitely use some of Radasin's wisdom (Radasin is the protagonist of the aforementioned serial "Village's on Fire...") and some of that almost philosophical tranquillity with which one bears all up's and down's, fortunes and misfortunes of his little ordinary life.

We should think seriously about the way we try to present ourselves to the world, how to catch everybody's fancy, and do we, in trying to do so, lose ourselves? What is the message we send to the world? Can't we be part of a community? How does the world see us based on what we convey?

Belonging to a nation is determined by the national will, sentiment and consciousness. Undoubtedly, the national will is a move towards the European integrations, but to do so, it is necessary that every individual has national consciousness. The national being is expressed through mentality, through typical reactions to everyday life situations, through the way general human values are accepted and expressed. We should join Europe, we should join the global world, and we should accept its values but without losing ourselves. We should walk proudly towards Europe, with sincerity and simplicity, neither ashamed of our patron saints and festivities (days and celebrations dedicated to family's patron saint) nor of our popular wisdom. We should present all this to the world and, eventually, bring along even that



Installation on 13th ART EXPO in Novi Sad titled "From Picasso to Marina Abramovic"

Photo by Kornelija Szabo

press individuality. They develop xenophobia in us, the fear of everything outside our little world. Do they do it on purpose and influenced by those who actually want an old woman to be combing while the village's on fire?

Do the productions that basically represent 'the story about us' just try to sell the well-branded product with the secure market i.e. viewer rating? It is obvious that the domestic media production fails to show that the people in the immediate surroundings live the same problems and similar and simple lives just like the people in Serbia.

life attitude of "an old woman that is combing while the village's on fire" and in that sincerity and simplicity we will be recognized, accepted and esteemed.

And what if it was not that simple, what if the media placed just a likeable and appealing image of what we could be, of what we could identify with? What if it was just a simulacrum of our national identity, created by the media? When we adopt that imposed image, we become exclusively self-oriented, oriented towards our immediate surroundings, our little needs... In doing so, we are given amnesty for the possible guilt of not reacting to the wrong moves of the individuals we had given the power and the right to lead us. They deprived us even of the right to feel anger and rage for the narrow-mindedness. They lull us into a narcissistic image. They emphasise spite as a prevailing national characteristic. They pacify possible individual efforts, they sup-

Is it aimed to stir stereotypes to political effects, with the idea of 'being national as opposed to global' and with the typical messages like "so what, if the world doesn't want us, we are self-sufficient, our wisdom and honesty are enough; all the bad things come from outside..."

Or, in lyrical colour, with the nineteenth century style romantic rapture, they want to arouse sympathies in the public for their fellow-countrymen, consciousness that this is where we belong, which represents a certain deviation from the onetime emphasis of epic, warrior and "divine" elements. Leaning on the stereotype of a 'Serbian soul' doesn't call any names, doesn't provoke and, above all, it is politically neutral. The viewers like to identify with positive characters, and those who can't recognise themselves there, are left to other TV channels. ■