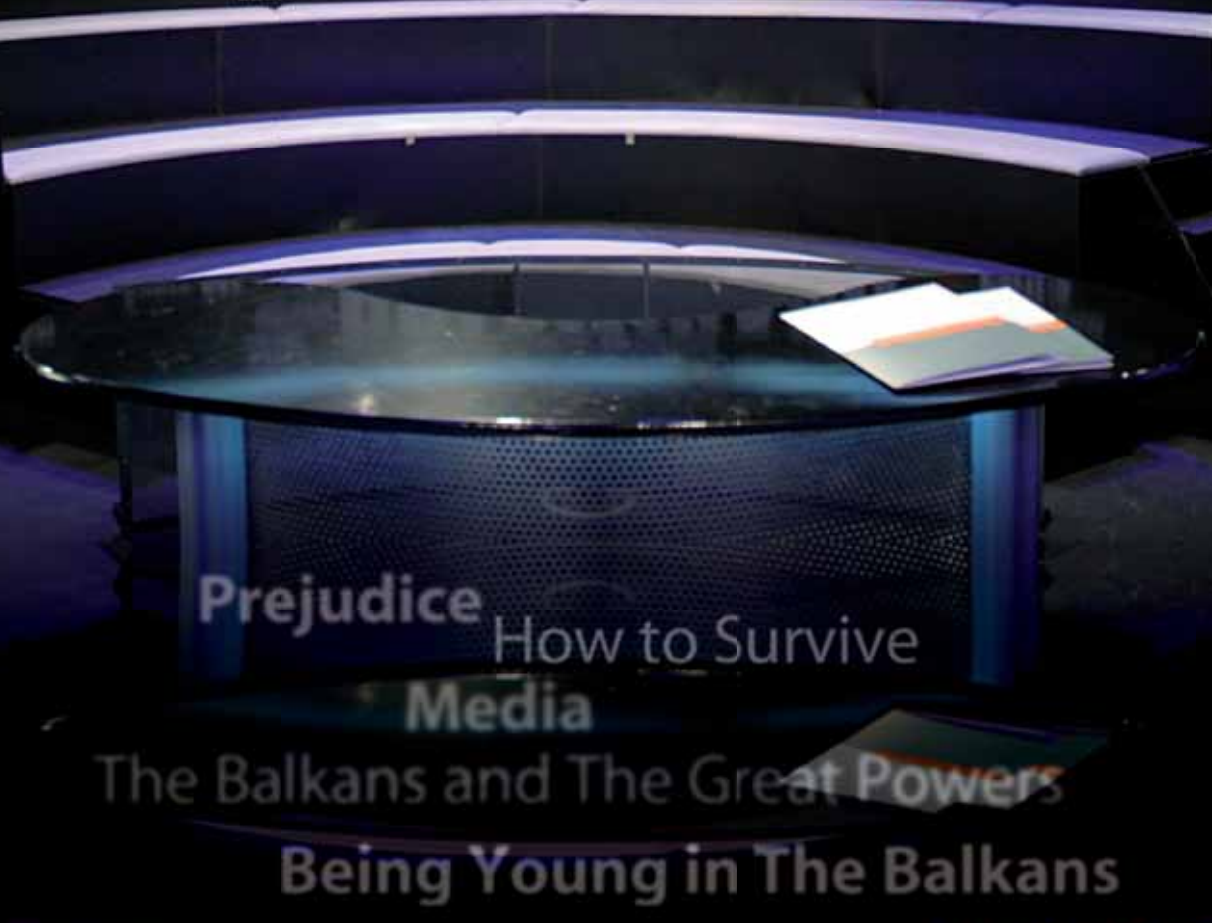


DUG SOVINIZAM
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 VOĐE
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POLEMIKA
 NOVINE
 EVRO
 BANKA
 DOLG
 PATRIOTIZAM
 Partija

SUKOVICINITIES

FIRST REGIONAL NEWS TALK SHOW

PERSPEKTIVA



Prejudice

How to Survive

Media

The Balkans and The Great Powers

Being Young in The Balkans

First Regional News Talk Show

VICINITIES

EDITED BY ZVEZDANA KOVAČ

VICINITIES

First Regional News Talk Show

Editor

ZVEZDANA KOVAČ

Publishers

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Bringing the Western Balkans closer to the European Union

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INTRODUCTION

The publication before you is a print version of the TV programme called *Vicinities*. The cross-over from one medium to another is not the only feature that distinguishes this publication or the TV programme from others. Namely, this is the first time in more than 20 years that a news talk show series was broadcast (in April and May 2012) on eight TV stations, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, the FYR of Macedonia and Serbia.

The very title of the programme illustrates another unique feature of the series – it answers the questions ‘who’ and ‘where’ with just one word and suffices to provoke the interest of the viewers about ‘what’, ‘when’ and ‘why’. There was, however, nothing odd in seeing people from the five states talk to each other without interpreters.

Language, like water, always finds its way. This is precisely what the **Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe (CDRSEE)** and the **European Fund for the Balkans (EFB)** had in mind when they launched a TV project enabling viewers across the Balkans to hear that they shared almost the same problems, that their living standards were more or less the same, that their media faced the same difficulties... Not with the intention of making them feel better because they now knew that they were not alone in their plight, but to help them exchange ideas and opinions and maybe find a way forward.

Vicinities has no hidden agenda, and one should not perceive it as an attempt to create a new Yugoslavia or go into examining the authors’ emotional attitude towards this idea. Their intention was to turn communication, which over the past 20 years or so had been boiled down to only the necessary minimum, into something normal and desirable.

If you have not had the opportunity to follow *Vicinities*, this book will help you make up what you missed. The five TV shows are presented in five chapters, in

the order in which they were broadcast. The words of our eminent guests are presented in a slightly altered order and format adjusted to the specific features of print media. The last chapter, the sixth, includes statements from the media chiefs of the TV stations that broadcast the series, as well as statements by the editors-in-chief of the papers that carried the most interesting excerpts of the shows week after week, in a manner similar to the one we have used in this publication.

Let's go back to the specific features of *Vicinities*. The beginning and end of each show belonged to Marina Orsag, a stand-up comedienne from Zagreb ... that is if we, of course, disregard the first few sentences of the authors and anchors: "*My name is Nenad Šebek, and this is my colleague Petar Lazić. The guests of today's show are...*"

The next series of *Vicinities*, which is sure to follow, will be authored and anchored by others, who will also have ties with the "vicinities". The guests will be just as eminent and inspiring, and there is absolutely no doubt that the topics of the first series – prejudices, the economic crisis, the media, influence of great powers and young people – will be interwoven in many of the topics on which the new series will focus.

We believe that you are the future viewers of *Vicinities*, so, since one needs to act with caution when one discusses future plans, let's limit ourselves to the publication before you. The following pages include most of what was said in the first series. If you wish to complement words with images, the most interesting excerpts from the shows are available at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/Okruzenje>

Zvezdana Kovač

What has prompted two NGOs, the European Fund for the Balkans (www.balkanfund.org) and the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe (www.cdrsee.org), to produce a TV programme?

Civil society in the Western Balkans has for more than two decades now been trying to heal the wounds of the wars and the childhood illnesses of democracy, to prepare our part of the world to truly embrace European values, not just for EU membership. CDRSEE and EFB have been contributing to the accomplishment of these goals, this time by co-producing the TV show *Vicinities*.

We believed that we could do a better job, that we could go a step further than the ‘pros’, that we knew the form and the essence needed to achieve real results. We have accumulated some media and project experience over the years, hence our excursion into the “vicinities”. Eight TV stations in five states supported us, more than we had hoped for. They took us at our word, without pilot shows and without rehearsals. Our two organisations could not have asked for greater appreciation and acknowledgement of their work to date and enthusiastically embarked upon the great challenge of producing *Vicinities*.

One year has passed since we first discussed doing the shows. We completed one cycle and are about to launch another one precisely because our partner TV stations want to have more such programmes, because they believe in the concept and trust CDRSEE and EFB as partners and producers who deliver what was agreed upon.

We dealt with “difficult topics” and will continue to do so in the future, but we will not forget the “sunny side” of our Balkans either – the richness of its music, the cooperation among artists and other professionals, sincere efforts to step out of the past and finally head towards the future. *Vicinities* will be back this winter, we promise you that!

Hedvig Morvai, Executive Director, European Fund for the Balkans

Nenad Šebek, Executive Director, CDRSEE

If I ever had any doubts about the potential for a current affairs TV programme to tackle the thorny issue of reconciliation and battle for prime position in viewers' minds, these were dispelled during the recording of the series. When placed side-by-side, each episode offers a unique angle into the constructive potential of the peoples of the region illustrating how diversity and honest communication can actually be the driving force behind open-mindedness and tolerance, and how one should never underestimate the importance of youth with its clear vision and re-imagination of the future. This series is more than just a snapshot of life, experiences and opinions; it is the flagship of what is yet to come. So this momentous project is finally complete, and I would like to personally thank its many contributors who wholeheartedly and relentlessly dedicated their time and efforts to helping the extraordinary peoples of the region to rekindle the amicable relations of the past which are badly needed for the future. With a public turning again towards the merits of regional cooperation, it is reassuring to know that there are people out there who, with the silent dignity of those who have suffered, are willing to discuss deeply ingrained misconceptions and to move forward for the good of all. Most importantly of all, next time I am in the region, having seen the potential captured on screen, caught the vibrancy of the youth of the region and listened to languages that have so much in common, I can look around and feel optimistic that communication efforts have begun, opinions are being expressed, ideas are being shared, and thoughts can be joined into a single vision of cooperation.

Dr Erhard Busek,

Chair of the Board of Directors of the CDRSEE

“Vicinity” means neighbourhood, but also closeness with a certain sense of familiarity. This closeness and familiarity have not always had a positive ring in the countries of the Western Balkans. For that to be the case, we believe that it is important to use creative means to “manage” relationships between societies that have been historically and traditionally very close together but not always so out of their own free will. With this series of TV discussions, involving people and groups outside the “usual suspects” who would typically appear on the screen on this type of occasion, we hope to help create understanding and a certain sense of togetherness and cohesion. This sense will be vital for mastering the challenges ahead of us: we must specifically involve young people in creating perspectives and open new ways for their societies to move into a new and difficult era. With the format of TV discussions, we hope to reach as many people as possible, contributing to a public debate and reaching out to people of all walks of life, encouraging them to participate actively in the shaping of their own future.

We would like to congratulate the teams of the European Fund for the Balkans as well as the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe for a very successful and inspiring first series, and we hope to see this continue and, become an open forum of public debate in the countries of the Western Balkans.

Franz Karl Prüller and

Knut Neumayer

Joint Chair of the Steering Committee

European Fund for the Balkans

PRODUCERS AND AUTHORS

The first regional TV news show series, aired in April and May 2012, were authored and anchored by **Nenad Šebek** and **Petar Lazić**, under the watchful eye of Director **Nebojša Radosavljević**. Instead of the classic ‘hellos’ and ‘good-byes’, each edition of *Vicinities* was opened and closed by Zagreb stand-up comedienne **Marina Orsag**, who offered humorous and satirical views on the topics at hand.

Experience and professionalism, spiced with the youthfulness of the European Fund for the Balkans alumni and the EFB’s and CDRSEE’s years-long mission, left room for nothing but success!

CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY AND RECONCILIATION IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

WWW.CDSEE.ORG

The CDRSEE is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation headquartered in Thessaloniki that seeks to foster democratic and pluralist societies embracing European values and a market economy, advocating the principles of the rule of law, social responsibility and reconciliation among the peoples in the region. Its Board of Directors, chaired by Dr. Erhard Busek, brings together eminent regional and European figures.

EUROPEAN FUND FOR THE BALKANS

WWW.BALKANFUND.ORG

The establishment of the European Fund for the Balkans was initiated by four European foundations (Robert Bosch Stiftung, the King Baudouin Foundation, Compagnia di San Paolo and the ERSTE Foundation), with the goal of bringing the Western Balkans closer to the European Union, and facilitating their accession to the EU. The EFB, which has succeeded the International Commission for the Balkans, has been involved in strengthening the capacities of state administrations.



NENAD ŠEBEK

Executive Director of CDRSEE. Before joining the CDRSEE, he worked for the BBC World Service for 16 years as its Balkans and Moscow correspondent, reporting on the wars in the former Yugoslavia and Chechnya. He spent his first ten years in journalism – much to his great satisfaction – working in Radio Belgrade. He has also written articles, worked on TV and lectured on journalism at the American College of Thessaloniki. He has moderated a large number of events for the EU. His columns are published on the Serbian e-portal Mondo.



PETAR LAZIĆ

Writer, publicist and journalist. He has been Editor-in-Chief of the Belgrade daily *Glas javnosti*, of *Bre* magazine and the satirical paper *Naša krmača*, as well as the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the daily *Blic*. He has authored a large number of radio and TV programmes and regularly written columns for the following papers: *NIN*, *Blic*, *Ilustrovana politika*, *Glas javnosti*, *Marka*, *Crta*, *Liberal*, *Omladinske novine/NON*, *Književna reč*... He has written 15 books and teaches at the Faculty of Media and Communication, Singidunum University, Belgrade.



MARINA ORSAG

Marina has performed over 1,000 times in her seven-year career, cheering up both her audience and herself. In addition to her fans in Croatia, she has won the hearts of lovers of stand-up comedy in Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, Great Britain and more. Her cynicism, irony and simple facts throw her audiences into paroxysms of laughter. She says she is about one metre tall and hopes to keep on growing.



NEBOJŠA RADOSAVLJEVIĆ

Nebojša has tried his hand at directing all TV and film forms, from music and commercial spots to TV series and movies. His film *Miloš Branković* was qualified by film critics in Serbia as the first movie that opened a new chapter of Serbian cinematography – *the New Serbian Movie*.

CHAPTER I

PREJUDICE

Manipulation of prejudices is rife in the region of Southeast Europe; prejudices are blown out of proportion and persistently used to sideline other much more important problems. The existence of prejudices can often be attributed to a greater occurrence of similar circumstances, wherefore they serve as an adequate tool to categorise, generalise, extrapolate...

Closed-minded people welcome prejudice, which is often their only orientational perception, although it is essentially a wrong value judgment and a simplified view of the world. Božena Jelušić, Dubravka Stojanović, Šaćir Filandra and Sandi Blagonjić discussed these and many other aspects of prejudice in *Okruženje (Vicinities)*.



DUBRAVKA STOJANOVIĆ

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, HISTORY DEPARTMENT,
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, BELGRADE UNIVERSITY

PREJUDICE AS A NECESSITY

Communities, parts of communities, even very small communities, have their own cultural models and specific value systems. For instance, you have the poorer segments of society; they have to live more frugally, so saving becomes a value and they end up being the butt of jokes about cheapskates. Examples include the residents of Pirot in Southern Serbia, or the Scots. Or, for example, you have someone who was poorer, who was not educated and who had to work the lowliest jobs; then he is portrayed as stupid in jokes, like Poles in American jokes, or all those considered stupid in our region.

We have the need to think in such simplified categories, because we are constantly confronting specific challenges and we are constantly bombarded left, right and centre. It is easier to simplify things, to generalise, and to think that way.

PREJUDICE THROUGH TIME

One thing that we have to bear in mind when we talk about prejudices is that they include specific constants. You need a nation that is attacking you and stabbing you in the back when you are down.

You need to victimise yourself in that way so that you can feel like the historically righteous nation. This prejudice moved from one nation to another through history, depending on who our enemy was. It applied to the Bulgarians in the early 20th century. It turned towards the Croats when Yugoslavia was set up. It now appears to apply mostly to the Albanians. It is extremely important to understand the mechanism by which prejudice moves: its matrix remains the same but it turns towards the present-day enemy, which actually demonstrates that we are in need of stereotypical thinking, but it is then up to the political elite to point the blade at whomever it needs to in the current political situation.

SERBS ABOUT THEMSELVES AND OTHERS ABOUT SERBS

Some elements are, of course, insurmountable, but there are some things that Serbs accept and then reprocess. In response to the stereotype that Serbs are braggarts and overbearing heroes, the Serbs say: “Well, yes, we are”. So, you have the same stereotype with two different functions. Or the Balkan stereotype – some may shudder at the very thought of being associated with the Balkans and claim, “No, we are not Balkan in any way”. But at times of conflict with the European Union, they can bang their fist on the table and say, “We are Balkan, we don’t care. We’re a powder keg and we like being one, and we brought down five empires and caused three world wars”. None of which is true, but it comes in so handy...

The generalisation that Serbs think that Al Qaeda is a pacifist organisation is an external stereotype about the Serbs. But we have to say something, and I personally find this much more dangerous, that part of our society also thinks that, and attaches a positive connotation to it. They also perceive themselves as

great warriors who have never lost a single war. This is even something that is learned in school, to an extent. I worked on those analyses of textbooks, and that is the main image portrayed in our history. And then, all at once, you find yourself in a specific situation, such as the wars in the 1990s, and you lose all those wars. And you lost them, among other reasons, because you were so self-confident, arrogant, and conceited, and you had been brought up on that stereotype since kindergarten. Therefore, these things are extremely dangerous, not only vis-à-vis others, but *vis-à-vis* oneself, too.

NEIGHBOURS TO LOVE AND HATE

One of the problems here is that we have many neighbours. Everyone has many neighbours; the scope for hatred is very broad and we can always find a neighbour who is obnoxious. So everyone has struck a kind of balance that each of us has two neighbours we like and two we hate. But, as I already said, these categories are variable.

PREJUDICES BASED ON THE 1990S, ACCORDING TO WHICH THE SERBS ARE THE AGGRESSORS AND THE BOSNIAKS, ALBANIANS OR CROATS ARE THE GREATEST VICTIMS...

That isn't just prejudice. That is something one learns in school. That is something all these countries build their state policies on. That is not at an individual level, but at the highest political level. These prejudices are harming us, and we stick to them because it is easier to rule if one keeps on stoking that conflict, if you are always pulling an opponent out of your sleeve. Whenever you have economic or any other difficulties, you remember

your enemy and create another scandal. It is easier to rule that way, and I have always claimed that this nationalism based on prejudices is actually a way of ruling one's own country in an authoritarian manner, of abolishing freedoms and of staying in power for a long time.

HOW TO DISPEL STEREOTYPES

One of the ways to dispel stereotypes is to find out how others perceive us.

I advocate basing education on multiperspectivity, and I think that things like this caricature are extremely useful. Everyone should design one for



oneself, and we should then compare them to see how each of us perceives the other, because this is something we do not know.

COMMUNICATION IN THE REGION?

Yugoslavia is an excellent illustration of how life together and the communication we had was no guarantee that we wouldn't get at each other's throats, but I think we need to note here that Yugoslavia did not undergo its democratic experience.

Yugoslavia was never a democratic state and I think that this is the crucial point. A democratic environment needs to be created, and a totally new education system needs to be created, which will entail new, critical learning. This will produce aware, democratic citizens, who cannot be fooled by just anyone.

These processes take a long time. It is interesting that those who lived in 1900 and whom I have been researching as a historian, said: “We are so late, there’s no point even in starting.”¹



BOŽENA JELUŠIĆ M.A.

LITERARY CRITIC, BUDVA

PREJUDICE AS FATE

I think that all stereotypes can be attributed in some way to a greater occurrence of similar situations, otherwise stereotypes would not exist. Stereotypes are the way we start coming to grips with the world, packaging it in specific categories. Stereotypes come from categories. They are here, like our destinies, and we simply cannot flee from them.

I would divide stereotypes into those about others and those about ourselves. They are actually a kind of projection – whatever we do not want ourselves to be, we project onto others. Conversely, everything we

want ourselves to be, we project onto ourselves. If all of us here now (all of us belong to different nations of our erstwhile fatherland) tried to think of one feature of our nation that is our *differentia specifica*, which distinguishes us from all the other nations, I don’t think any of us would succeed. If we, Montenegrins, start by saying that we are the tallest, it would soon turn out that we are not. That we are the smartest, even that we are the laziest, not even that.

BETWEEN HUMOUR AND UGLY COMEDY

I have the feeling that if we made a selection of jokes and gave them to the readers as jokes about one nation, they would cause laughter among all the nations. But humour, as a fond joke, which was nurtured as a fond joke maybe in the former Yugoslavia, crossed the line and slowly turned into a kind of ugly comedy, which constitutes a form of aggression, even in the Freudian sense.

HOW WOULD DAVID ČERNÝ PORTRAY US?

Entropa was created by Czech artist David Černý. He presented all the member states of the European Union provocatively, to see whether Europeans were capable of tolerating crude jokes at their own expense. He flooded The Netherlands and left only the minarets visible. He depicted Germany with a series of cross-connecting highways resembling a swastika. He presented Italy as a bunch of footballers masturbating with the aid of footballs. He portrayed Bulgaria as a squat toilet landmass, which outraged mostly the Bulgarians. A major scandal broke out in Bulgaria and led to an official protest, and the part of the installation with Bulgaria was covered. The rest of Europe reacted either by defending the author’s artistic freedom or by simply keeping mum, aware that they could have fared much worse.

¹ In response to the anchor’s comment that this would happen in 2012.



I would be really pleased if we could fund a project and pay David Černý to come and create such an installation here, an installation that would be exhibited everywhere, at least in all the capitals.

SELF-IRONY

I think that self-irony is a sign of spiritual health. Not mental health, but spiritual health. I think that all nations, all individuals capable of dissociating themselves, simply decentering themselves and viewing themselves from another perspective, are simply spiritually more healthy than others. You recall, for instance, the problems after the caricature of Mohammed was published, that Dante put the Popes in hell in 1300. The ability to view things from another perspective is prerequisite for spiritual health. I think that the existence of artists, any forms of culture deconstructing national myths and dealing with national prejudices in all our countries is very healthy. We, in Montenegro, have film-maker Živko Nikolić and “The Books of Knjige” rock band and comedian troop.

CEMENTING STEREOTYPES

It is important to know not only how stereotypes are created, but how they are reinforced and cemented as well. When we look at the last century and take

1918 as a marker, we can see recurrent conflicts and recurrent problems among close nations. It is simply a biblical situation, the story of Cain and Abel, two brothers who hate each other and have the greatest prejudices about each other. This simply cemented specific prejudices within Yugoslavia, which are not used as humorously as they used to be, along with those famous folklore dances. Each nation had its own dances and its own humour. That was nice and we were all one happy family until we quarrelled, until Mom died and we went for each others' throats.

DURABILITY OF STEREOTYPES

The problem with the durability of stereotypes, as I see it, is that in the meantime, since the break-up of Yugoslavia, we have slowly, to put it figuratively, unburdened culture and education of all content. For example, the curricula, literature specifically, used to give us different and real information about others. It would be healing if all of us, for instance, read those pieces of literature where construction is the strongest. I love the devastating humour of Pekić's pages about Montenegrins in *The Golden Fleece*. Reading Crnjanski's work, as it should be read, means destroying stereotypes against Serbs the right way. Reading Krleža's work means dispelling stereotypes about Croats.



ŠAĆIR FILANDRA

DEAN, FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE,
SARAJEVO UNIVERSITY

FROM CATEGORISATION TO PREJUDICE

Individual experiences and individual knowledge are categorised, generalised and extrapolated into universality, a group, a whole on the basis of those individual experiences. This is how universality is actually deduced to the individual, to the detriment of the individual.

TRUTH AND LIES

Prejudices are generally not lies or fabrications, rather they are judgments based on an insufficient number of arguments and on unproven arguments. This is why they should be approached with much caution. They should not be disqualified per se, nor should they be held on to tenaciously. There is a grain of truth in every prejudice, no matter what it is like.

THE GOOD AND THE BAD IN PREJUDICES

In the positive sense, prejudices are a necessary part of a cognitive approach to reality and an orientational perception. The things we do not know lead to the forming and establishment of prejudices as such. On the other hand, prejudices are defined negatively when prejudices and stereotypes, whether they are

ethnic, professional, regional or any other, are instrumentalised, when they are consciously, ideologically instrumentalised by a specific group, when they create a specific negative target.

CHANGEABILITY OF PREJUDICES

Prejudices change over longer periods of time. One should bear in mind that they change slowly, that they are created slowly and that they are not groundless. Mere individual encounter with arguments dispelling prejudices does not per se mean that these prejudices will be so easy to change. Prejudices are very robust, very persistent; they undergo transformation, but, in principle, many prejudices are extremely vital.

NEGATIVE PORTRAYAL OF THE OTHER

I was just reading a book written between the two world wars by an author whose name eludes me at the moment, who argued that Bosnian Moslems i.e. today's Bosnians, are people who have tails. This is that negative portrayal of the other. There are, of course, major differences in general. Belgrade and Zagreb have quite a negative attitude towards Bosnia and Bosnians as such. There is no chance of the Croatian media, which I have been following more than that of Belgrade, portraying Bosnia or Bosnians or that part of the country and those people more accurately and with greater dignity. One has to spend the whole day looking around Sarajevo to find those places, those corners, the beggars, the caved-in homes, shown on Croatian TV. All the women are covered. They project an image, as if Egypt were in question.

SELF-VICTIMISATION

This self-victimisation has been present among all our nations for the past five decades, in different periods. Only the protagonists change, from the number of victims in Jasenovac to today's stories about the Bosnian wars and Srebrenica. It obviously has some deeper collective psychological foundations, where the truth is on the victim's side, where justice is on the victim's side, and where the victim can expect specific gains or specific rights on the basis of truth and justice, whether they are historical, political or material. The orthodox opinion is that being a victim is useful.

COMMUNICATION AS (UN)SUITABLE SOIL FOR PREJUDICE

It's questionable whether communication actually contributes to dispelling stereotypes. The decades we spent living together actually facilitated the creation of collective ethnic stereotypes. We are now in an entirely different situation; we are actually politically separated and we live in separate states. This is an entirely new situation and it need not be bad per se when new prejudices are at issue, given that our experience of living together and some increased and ideologised inter-cultural communication had actually contributed to the emergence and persistence of those prejudices.



SANDI BLAGONIĆ

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGIST, INSTITUTE FOR HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES OF THE CROATIAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES IN RIJEKA, PULA UNIT

THE DANGERS OF PREJUDICE

Prejudices are extremely dangerous, at least in these areas. Namely, one survey conducted in the 1970s showed that this region was one of the most authoritarian in the whole world. The results were somewhat better later, but we still have societies that are extremely authoritarian. That means that people are very frequently willing to resolve conflicts ... they think that physical showdowns are the right way to resolve conflicts, as we have often had the opportunity to see. What is very often characteristic of people in the region is that they bow to authority and are simultaneously brutal to their subordinates. I think that this feature is, unfortunately, excellent humus for instrumentalising stereotypes and prejudices. I think that these stereotypes are even pernicious in this region in specific contexts.

PREJUDICES AND EMOTIONS

If you were to go to a city, any city, in the former Yugoslavia, anywhere, and ask the kids in a kindergarten: "Which kids are better, the ones here or the

kids in another city?” which they had never been to, they would always answer, “The ones here”. So, you are already defining yourself as better the moment you are classifying a group. If we here split up into two groups, one group or even both groups would very soon start thinking of themselves as the better group. And why are all stereotypes so resistant? They are resistant precisely because they are so saturated with emotions.

ENCOURAGING DIFFERENCES WITH PREJUDICE

To the regret of some nationalists, we are very similar. There is that paradox of nationalism, where two men living in the same Belgrade high-rise, one a Croat and the other a Serb, are much more similar than a Serb from Šumadija and this Belgrade Serb. What the nationalist ideology tried to convince us in the years behind us – that we are monolithic nations – simply isn’t true.

CROATS ABOUT THEMSELVES

Analysis has shown that tourist guidebooks in Croatia make no mention of Croatia being part of the Balkans. All of them mention Central Europe or the Mediterranean. On the other hand, all foreign tourist guidebooks about Croatia say that it is part of the Mediterranean, Mittel Europe, and the Balkans as well. Croatia could definitely use this term, but it simply cannot allow it because of the image Croatia wants to project of itself. It has ascribed everything bad, some of which occurred in Croatia as well, to the Balkans and the Serbs.

WHAT’S A SERB WITHOUT A CROAT (COMMON STEREOTYPES)

I think that we actually share all the stereotypes. For instance, the stereotype – we are innocent, the others are guilty. Namely, during the process of identification in Eastern Europe, and in the former Yugoslavia as well, saying what we were did not simultaneously entail saying what the others were, rather it entailed identifying the ones to blame for our misfortunes. Everyone did this. This did not begin in the 1990s but in the late 1980s, when the Serbian media started qualifying the Croatian media as Ustasha outlets. Of course, the Croats wholeheartedly took this up and started calling the Serbian media Chetnik outlets.

We do not exist without each other. That is, we could paraphrase the title of the book by Ante Tomić “What is a Serb without a Croat?” and vice versa.

SERBS AND CROATS THROUGH STEREOTYPES

Serbs mostly perceive themselves as heroes-geniuses, whose veins are filled with a kind of vital energy, as opposed to the decadent and contaminated West. The residents of Zagreb, Croats, are usually portrayed in bow ties, whose sexuality is ultimately extremely questionable, if you take a closer look. That is why a Croat’s entire corporal habitus is censored as opposed to a Belgrader, whose shirt is typically more unbuttoned and mouth always more open. Why? Because the stereotype of masculinity is reproduced here as well. The one whose mouth is always open is courageous, he does not worry about what he will say, and that is how real men behave.

I think I was able to identify only one positive thing about these prejudices after my two-day experience here in Belgrade. Namely, I went out of my way to be pleasant over the past few days. Awfully pleasant, in fact. There is this custom in Serbia – you offer the



guests salt, bread and brandy, in a way to ritually alleviate the tensions between strangers. I kept on saying “thank you, thank you, thank you” these past few days, precisely to deconstruct the possibility of being viewed as a Croat, and, thus, as bad. At one point I realised I was getting on my own nerves. I don’t say thank you that much in Zagreb. That is why everyone there thinks of me as a Croat, in a good way.

We would benefit from communication in any case. But, it was politically impossible before, and, I fear, it is economically impossible now. Of course, we need some biology as well, because some people simply will not give up and will find a reason to believe in their prejudices.

TIME FOR SELF-IRONY

I actually love to see this: Serbs the Heavenly Nation, Danke Deutschland ... I love the self-irony in that. It is time we began self-ironising ourselves, started laughing at ourselves, because, unfortunately, for the past 20 years, the nation, nationalism and national

identity were a deadly serious, almost sacred subject. That devotion to “the national” is precisely the cause of our misfortunes.

DIALOGUE

PREJUDICE HURTS

Š. FILANDRA: Both stereotypes and prejudices can hurt because they are basically true.

S. BLAGONJIĆ: That does not have to mean that they are basically true. I disagree.

Š. FILANDRA: They need not be true, but they hurt. When the jokes about Bosnians are in question, for instance, I agree with that. That is a form of self-reflection. Of spiritual self-reflection. Of disencumbrance. Of self-awareness. An expression of a positive attitude towards oneself and an expression of the will to face one’s own shortcomings. Making fun of oneself.

HUMOURLESS CROATS AND LAZY MONTENEGRINS

S. BLAGONJIĆ: Let me reassure you that Croats are, indeed, humourless.

Š. FILANDRA: I agree with colleague Sandi. Compared to the Bosnians' sense of humour, Croats have no sense of humour.

B. JELUŠIĆ: I perceive Croats more broadly, as Dalmatians. And they are certainly endowed with a sense of humour.

S. BLAGONJIĆ: Some time ago, I was at St. Stefan in Montenegro and I was asking a local gentleman about a restaurant, and he said, "Well, there's one uphill, about 15 minutes away on foot." So my friends and I headed towards the restaurant and got there after walking for three minutes. You can only imagine the stereotypes and interpretations that ensued. We, of course, received confirmation of the stereotype. However, this example shows how stereotypes and prejudices function. We simultaneously ignored the numerous times during that summer holiday, when the Montenegrins were very industrious, very efficient and very accommodating. So, prejudices are great in the sense that one can always find confirmation for them if one wants to. Even where there isn't any. That is why we always select the content we take in.

WHAT EUROPEANS THINK OF EACH OTHER

The Netherlands: The most relaxed country in Europe because everyone there is stoned. The Dutch, on the other hand, look down upon almost everyone else.

Greece: Europeans think of the Greeks as lazy, as swindlers, who have to be supported by Europe. If it weren't for the Turks and Americans, the Greeks would hate Europeans the most, but the residents of Europe now rank only third.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO "PACKAGE" IN THIS WAY ALL OF THE WORST THINGS WE IN THE REGION THINK OF EACH OTHER?

Š. FILANDRA: Yes, but I don't think that there are enough initiators in that sense. People have absolutely had enough of the economic and political topics that have been constantly on the agenda the past 20 years, and it would be extremely refreshing.

S. BLAGONJIĆ: I think we have the opportunity to read in the papers what we think of each other every day, the worst imaginable things.

For instance, one Serbian historian said in a show on Croatian TV last week that all Croats without exception were primitive, while his Croatian interlocutor retorted that this was typical Serbian babble, which, interestingly, all Croatian media ignored. These myths are still constantly reproduced, on a daily basis: that is what's at issue. Talking about Europe, there is another interesting thing that makes us specific in a way: a survey conducted in 15 European countries showed that only three countries mentioned their neighbours when they were asked which nations they hated the most. The same survey in this region would, of course, yield significantly different results.

B. JELUŠIĆ: We still aren't ready to start laughing at our own expense. It seems to me that the difficult economic situation may be evolving in two directions. One is that it may start easing that type of ethno-narcissism, and the other is that we don't feel like laughing precisely because we have grown poor. So, we have a problem.

GENERATION, GENDER, AGE AND SEXUAL PREJUDICES

B. JELUŠIĆ: Ageism, or let's start with gender prejudices, have caused all our countries to lose



a lot of money. There are more educated women than men who finish college in principle, but decisions are always made by the men. Society does not get a return on everything it invests in the female labour force, because there is prejudice that women cannot be at the same level as men after a certain point. The story that one has to be young and beautiful, that a 60-year-old woman simply will not let herself be photographed or participate in a TV show looking 60, this actually negates some essential things linked to every being, this is something that inflicts great damage on people. It is simply counterproductive, and, in my opinion, it is impoverishing quality of life on the whole, both the life of the community and of individuals.

D. STOJANOVIĆ: I had a strange experience when I talked to a man who cannot see. I realised that it was much more difficult to talk to that man without being able to convey my opinions by facial expressions, gestures, so on. I had to use other things. It was only then that I realised that we use the way we look, which may not be beautiful, but we use some parts to underline things, to be heard better.

B. JELUŠIĆ: Even when job interviews are in question, I heard that a person who comes and

establishes personal contact, plus is also good looking and has a pleasant appearance, has a 70 percent greater chance of getting the job. But that creates problems with jobs. You come to an age when your looks are no longer pleasant, and, if you lose a job, you cannot find another. It goes without saying that you should look good at work, not scare the clients away.

SELF-IRONY AT WORK

B. JELUŠIĆ: I am so hard-working that I work even on workdays.

S. BLAGONJIĆ: I left my room in such a state today, that I was convinced that the maids would change their stereotype about tidy Croats.

Š. FILANDRA: I am a Bosnian who does not like ćevapčići².

D. STOJANOVIĆ: Serbs are heroes, but they lost the last four wars.

² Oriental grilled meat dish for which Bosnia is famous.

CHAPTER II

HOW TO SURVIVE

Fifty-year-olds supported by their parents and parents supported by fifty-year-olds; consumer basket reduced to bare necessities; investments not going where they should be; borrowing and economic growth not accompanied by development... These are some of the scenarios of the region.

How to survive? This question is still topical because of the economic depression plaguing the countries in the region for years now. Guests of the second episode of the series Vicinities – Svetlana Cenić, Vladimir Gligorov, Saša Popović and Miroslav Zdravković – tried to provide an answer to a puzzled citizen, who long ago said the following: “I know I’m poor, but I don’t know why!”



MIROSLAV ZDRAVKOVIĆ

EDITOR, WEB PORTAL WWW.MAKROEKONOMIJA.ORG

IN AN ECONOMIC DEPRESSION

Serbia and Bosnia are in identical situations; their GDPs are around 37 percent below the level they were at in 1989. Croatia and Macedonia had exceeded that level but the crisis brought them back to that level, or slightly below it. So, as far as living standards are concerned, we are not undergoing an economic crisis, we are undergoing economic depression. A depression is a state of major, deep crisis, a fall of over 10 percent compared to the previous climax.

DEVELOPMENT AS A BUBBLE

The main point and most important factor is that the level of industrial production has more than halved and that Serbia's development after 2000, like the global crisis, was a bubble. Borrowing, not real growth, was at issue, like in all other countries. Growth was not based on the growth of industrial production, so the fall that ensued affected those who had prospered the most through growth of wages in Euros, etc.

CONFUSING STATISTICAL DATA

I would like to draw attention here to average wages. How much people are paid and how average wages are calculated are very important points. For instance, if wages in a country are growing and those paid the least lose their jobs ... For instance, in a municipality with a population of 10,000, with 100 workers in an electricity company, the average wage stands at 1000 EUR. While, in another municipality with a population of 10,000, but in which ten times as many residents are working, the average wage stands at only 200 EUR. That means that the second municipality is much more vigorous than the first one. The statistical picture one sees is quite confusing. The salary fund, the way the average is calculated and the differences within individual sectors are much more important.

PRICE OF PETROLEUM

While the price of petroleum was rising, we consumers, on the one hand, were losing, but, on the other hand, billions went to those who were borrowing and spending more. It is in that context that, in my view, everyone is saying and complaining that they have been struck the hardest. But, what is objectively at issue now is that some things are in the works in Iran, some very bad things are in the works around the whole world, and the increase in the price of petroleum is the price to be paid.

WE'RE BUYING CELL PHONES ALTHOUGH WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO PAY OUR UTILITY BILLS

When one looks at the statistical data, no matter whether Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro or Macedonia is at issue, we see a major discrepancy between the items that are bought. For instance, the

value of imported cell phones and all luxury goods is great in all these countries, while, on the other hand, the greatest share of the populations, 70 to 80 percent, can afford only the bare necessities and cannot even pay their utility bills. A lot is spent on cell phones and similar products, even on laptops. But these are mostly bought by a small part of the population, the material elite, which always has to have the latest thing.

CRISIS TO END IN 3-4 YEARS

Let's be optimistic, let's say that the European crisis will end in three or four years. Let's say that Europe will pull us all up by the ears, by whatever, just to lift us and help us get out of the quagmire we are in.



SVETLANA CENIĆ

ECONOMIST, BANJA LUKA

QUESTION FOR THE ECONOMIC POLICY MAKERS

I ask them why they design economic policies as if they needed to repair the plumbing in just one place, without thinking at all about the risk of the entire sewage system breaking down tomorrow, why they are thinking one day at a time: because personal interests are primarily at stake.

People should work. Work has been rendered absolutely valueless. We have the attitude that you don't need to do anything, something will happen, just wait for others to resolve the problems.

AUTHORITIES IN THE GREY ECONOMY ZONE

All their incomes are under the table. They definitely are not in the legal economy. So, they are in the black economy zone. Now we expect to take the ordinary people out of the grey economy and move them into legal economy – but individuals working in the grey economy are feeding two or three family members, by working the land, cleaning house, babysitting, for instance. They are in the grey economy zone but they are doing something useful, feeding their families, satisfying some needs. This is why I would start off by eliminating grey economy from the top.

AVERAGE WAGES

A worker in Germany earns an average 11.70 EUR per hour, or between three and six times more than workers in our region. In Germany, a worker works an average of three minutes to buy a litre of milk. A worker in Croatia works an average of 10 minutes, a worker in Montenegro 14 minutes, a worker in Bosnia-Herzegovina 16 minutes, a worker in Serbia 19 minutes and a worker in Macedonia an average of 21 minutes for that litre of milk.

You should go to Bosnia-Herzegovina and ask a construction worker how much he needs to work to earn a litre of cooking oil. The lowest paid workers. They work for 20-30 Marks a day, if they are fortunate enough to get a job like that. Let me convert that for you; that equals 10-15 EUR. They would kiss you for a 20 EUR per diem here. Statistics show the ingredients – some eat just cabbage, others just meat, but both are needed for stuffed cabbage rolls, as we say here.

The wages in the textile industry stand at 350 Marks or 175 EUR per month. And the labourers are happy if they are paid regularly, if they are paid at all. And now divide that amount by 172 working hours.

SOCIALLY EXCLUDED POPULATION

We have a socially excluded population. People who are not only jobless, but simply don't even know what their elementary human rights are, who are excluded from life, developments, decision-making, simply from everything. You know, when someone is unemployed, sitting at home or waiting for a job, who has been waiting for his salary for 20 months, he is excluded from absolutely everything, particularly from decision-making, and he does not even know where to go to look for his rights.

THE CITIZENS SHOULD BE TOLD THE TRUTH

All of us have the duty to tell the citizens the truth, to teach them. Most citizens in the region think that the budget is something Santa Claus brings on the first of January. They cannot understand that something is filled and emptied every day, because they are simply uninformed. Provide them with quality information, give them the truth no matter how much they will hate you for telling it – that is how you create a democratic setting and a more mature citizen, who will also be able to understand economic policy.

ACHIEVING GOOD RESULTS WITHOUT STEALING

I was minister for a year³, I have results to show for it. I left a surplus and industrial production grew by 23 percent. Why? There was no stealing. Pure and

simple. Where there is no stealing, where there is some discipline, results are evident. And no one can refute them. It would be in vain. Figures say it all. Two plus two equals four no matter how much we try to make it add up to 18.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO

Nothing will get done as long as every citizen expects of others to resolve his problems for him. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, you have that attitude “don't make waves, lay low, it's OK, at least there is no war, we've been through worse”, and similar laments. But the authorities are practically, slowly and simply getting the citizens used to the situation getting worse and worse. It's like the frog boiling story. Three and a half million people have been boiled. The process should be reversed. That, of course, takes a long time. But I still claim that short interventions, five or six interventions in the economy, can make a lot of difference. I call on the authorities to start thinking about employment by departing from a different principle, such as “portfolio employment”, which would improve the mobility of the labour force, fill the funds more. Furthermore, there must be financial and fiscal discipline, for example payment of dues within 40 or maximum 60 days, and, of course, investment in research. My message to the citizens is: *never draw a loan to cover old debts, because then you will end up in a vicious circle, like the state.* And never fall for those ‘quick buck’ promises. Whatever is too good to be true, usually is too good to be true.

³ Dr Svetlana Cenić was Minister of Finance of the Bosnian Serb Republic



SAŠA POPOVIĆ

PROFESSOR, FACULTY OF ECONOMY, PODGORICA

WHERE ARE THE INVESTMENTS GOING

Following the flow of money, that's not the problem. It entered the country through various foreign direct investments, but, in Montenegro specifically, it did not go into greenfield, into new investments, into opening new jobs. It went into concentration of ownership and the purchase of real estate, so it was not the lever that encouraged economic growth in Montenegro the way it should have been. When economic development is based on foreign direct investments, it is like keeping an organism alive thanks to infusion. Everything is all right as long as it is receiving the infusion. The moment you cut off the infusion, the organism finds itself in dire straits – and in this case, you have to look for alternatives to financing a country's economic growth. I think it depends on a country's economic policy. The problem is that an economic policy is conducted only within the confines of the political elite's own mandate, that there is no long-term analysis of the problems that will sooner or later surface. Take, for instance, regional disproportions in Montenegro, the agony with the industrial sector, and so on. You must look at whether the focus should be on industry or on tourism and services, and so on. So, the orienta-

tion of Montenegro's economic development is in question, and these are not minor issues.

I KNOW I'M POOR, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHY

A sentence one Macedonian citizen once uttered has been echoing in my head for years. He said of himself publicly: "I know I'm poor, I just don't know why." This one question summed it all up, it was a slap in society's face. If an individual does all he can and is still jobless – who is then to be held accountable for his unemployment? Is that society's problem or the individual's problem? Not even to mention people who for some reason do not want to assume responsibility for their economic fate. Give us a setting in which we really have equal opportunities and in which we do not have exclusion, in which we are not excluded from the opportunity to work.

CONSUMER BASKETS

The UK Office for National Statistics, which monitors the prices of around 700 goods and services, changes the make-up of the consumer basket once a year to indicate changes in tastes and trends. When computer tablets like Apple's iPad and Samsung's Galaxy Tabs were included in the British shopping basket, which is used to measure the official inflation rate, the average consumer baskets in our region became even more meagre overnight.

Let me start off by saying that I think a huge mistake is at issue. I think that there is not one Montenegrin who does not own a high-quality cell phone, and that only statistical coverage is at issue, not the actual content of consumption in the field. That indicator is really one of prestige in Montenegro, so that the number of cell phone cards was practically double the number of its residents. There is obviously money to spend on cell phones, although they are not in the consumer basket. I think that there is an imbalance

in the calculations, but if you take a closer look at six items in the consumer basket, if you boiled them all and made one stew, you still would not be able to live off it.



VLADIMIR GLIGOROV

ECONOMIST, VIENNA
INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL
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READING STATISTICS

Statistics have improved recently, but the problem is that the people reading the data are not interpreting them well, that they are not linking them, and that is what is actually causing the confusion. In regard to Macedonia, for instance, employment rates, not salaries, are the key problem. In Serbia, the problem is not so much in the salaries but in the fact that

around 600,000 people lost their jobs in the last few years. As far as Bosnia-Herzegovina is concerned, huge unemployment is the greatest problem there, more than anything else. You have the labour force survey data covering those working in the grey economy and employment agency data, which do not cover those working in the grey economy. This is why you have a higher unemployment rate when you read the data of the employment agencies than when you read labour force survey data.

DEBTS

Loan companies, above all for trade and construction, account for the greatest share of the debts. And they are actually the greatest burden on the entire region. The amount of the debt is not such a severe problem; the greatest problem is what the money was spent on, on services and consumption.

POOR COUNTRIES – POOR BASKETS

The consumer basket is created on the basis of actual consumption. If a household spends 60, 70, 80 percent of its income on food, then food must predominate the consumer basket. So, until food falls to 20 to 30 percent, you cannot expect cell phones or air tickets or other items that are included in the consumer baskets of other countries to play a huge role in our consumer baskets. Our countries are poor and our consumer baskets are poor.



DIALOGUE

SUPPORTED BY THEIR PARENTS

S. CENIĆ: This is a specific environment, and it is not inconceivable in the least to have our parents support us and have us support our parents. I witness such cases nearly every day.

M. ZDRAVKOVIĆ: In Italy, they are living in their own households by the time they are 30. In the Balkans, most start their families while they are still living with their parents. If you have a nearly identical number of workers and pensioners in Serbia, and the situation is the same in Bosnia, pensioners are then the most valuable beings, because they finance the jobless or the poorly paid family members.

S. POPOVIĆ: Transition has led to the emergence of two categories of poor people in Montenegro, and, I believe, in the region as well, as literature professor Božena Jelušić put it well. One category of poor people includes those who have nothing and the other the ones who want to have everything.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Serbia's industrial production stands at 63 percent of the 1986 level. The Gross Domestic Product fell by two-thirds. All former socialist countries have witnessed declines in their GDPs, sometimes drastic, since the onset of transition. Poland, Slovenia and Hungary reached their 1989 GDP level only after 6, 9 and 11 years, respectively.

S. CENIĆ: I can never agree with taking GDP as the only indicator. Growth does not necessarily mean development. You can earn much more in a state, but that does not mean that it is evenly distributed, that everyone benefits. This is proven also by the fact that the share of the poor and socially excluded population has been growing and now stands at around 63 percent. Growth in GDP does not really guarantee better quality of life.

S. POPOVIĆ: We need to understand growth and development, I don't think any of us would like to see our children just growing and not developing at the same time. Emotional, cognitive abilities ... and

so on. That is essentially the difference between growth and development. Another thing that I think is very important is that the GDP is not the main measure of a society's prosperity. We have an interesting paradox in our economy – it's called the Easterlin Paradox, according to which the increase in human happiness accompanies the increase in salaries, incomes and wages, only up to a specific point. Beyond that point, man's life satisfaction, man's understanding of life happiness is not linked to his income at all. So, I think we are still at the stage where we can buy happiness with money, because we have not achieved the income ceiling yet.

HOUSEHOLDS BORROWING MORE CAUTIOUSLY THAN THE STATES

M. ZDRAVKOVIĆ: Seventy billion more EUR were spent in Serbia in the last 11 years – more precisely, 70 billion EUR flowed in, 60 billion were spent, while foreign currency reserves grew by 10 billion EUR. Of those 60 billion, 55 billion are the deficit, funding imports exceeding exports, and another 5 billion EUR went to pay foreign dues. Sources are the problem. Of the 70 billion EUR that came into the country, 30 billion were remittances, 15 billion were fresh loans, 15 billion were foreign direct investments, while everything else accounted for much less. And this is the main generator of our inefficiency in the region. Foreign debts are complemented by a huge trade deficit and non-competitiveness. All of us would like to live off services and not work, and all of us would like to live on credit if we could. I think that the households are much more cautious when it comes to borrowing than the state.

S. CENIĆ: The level of foreign borrowing is not the criterion that provides an answer to the question of why the economy is bad. One-third of Bosnia-Herzegovina's population is living in poverty and 63 percent are socially excluded. These data are staggering. Science should provide the answer to the question of how the state and state-run companies are surviving given the huge internal debt and the huge economic insolvency. As far as the availability of money is concerned, all levels of government are such good clients that less is left over for the population. Nothing is left over for the people. Their electricity is turned off, their water supply is cut off and they have no other option but to do what the state is doing – borrow more to cover the debts. They thus enter a vicious circle, a very bad circle of insolvency, together with everyone else.

S. POPOVIĆ: The main problem, as I see it, is that we're borrowing to repay our debts. It's like trying to put out a fire by blowing on it. This new borrowing mostly serves to service old debts, and I do not think that the main function of debts is to discipline the management, the political elite or company managements.

CREATING A SOCIAL POLICY WITH THE HELP OF ELECTRICITY PRICES

S. POPOVIĆ: Electricity is traded in an informal market, through insiders in the electricity and petroleum industries, and so on. This is a good mechanism for manipulation. The problem we have in Montenegro is that we are the hostages of KAP, the Podgorica Aluminium Complex, which uses up a large share of industrial electricity. We are practically subsidising that institution to preserve some kind of social peace, while our electricity bills are

sky high. As a citizen of Montenegro who lives in an 'environmental' state, at least declaratively, I am willing to pay more for electricity if it really helps preserve my environment. But, if it does not, then it costs me twice as much. Not only am I paying dearly for electricity, but I am also not living in a clean and beautiful environment either.

S. CENIĆ: In Bosnia-Herzegovina, you have to be directly connected to a party or a national leader and ask him even what you should be thinking. The people have, unfortunately, been brainwashed. Take this paradox. We say that electricity in Bosnia-Herzegovina is cheap and that it is a social policy instrument. But the electricity we export is cheaper. It is much more expensive for our industry, although they say Bosnia-Herzegovina has a surplus of electricity. There is a surplus because the industry is not working, the households are the greatest consumers, and it is more expensive in the domestic market than in the export market. How is it a social policy instrument then?!

V. GLIGOROV: It's the same as with democracy. Ultimately, you elect a government that promises to keep the price of electricity low. So that's it. You can't say that you did not have the chance to elect that government. Now we can debate two other issues. One involves the formal conditions. You, for instance, have countries with relatively limited democracy within this group of countries. That's one problem. Another problem is that you have an imposed agenda, topics important for elections. Economy has rarely featured among them in various countries so far. They mostly revolved around national issues. That is why we have the outcomes we do. Ultimately, whoever wants to pay more for electricity and have a better government, or at least

see that sector privatised, should vote for the party offering that avenue.

S. CENIĆ: Talking about privatisation in the absence of the rule of law means talking about depredation; our privatisations were predatory. Here in the Bosnian Serb Republic, we sold our petroleum company to the so-called Russians. I say "so-called" because still no one knows the breakdown of the ownership. That is what we've come to, and we still have the most expensive fuel. Debts to the state budget stand at 150 million convertible marks (75 million Euro). So you can see what we do with our resources in the absence of rule of law.

M. ZDRAVKOVIĆ: There is a lot of hypocrisy here about maintaining social peace by keeping the price of electricity down. When each of us looks into our wallets and at our bills, we altogether spend more on our cell phone bills in each of our countries individually, and that is how we can see how much our electricity companies are earning. This amounts to a ludicrous destruction of the energy systems to keep pursuing a so-called social policy that is utterly senseless.

EVERY NATION HAS THE GOVERNMENT IT DESERVES

S. POPOVIĆ: Nations often have the governments they deserve.

S. CENIĆ: But we are running around in circles then, Saša. We are underestimating our citizens, thinking that they are stupid because they deserve such a government, which should be tried for committing genocide against the economy. We are then running around in circles. I think that we need to enlighten the citizens, and that the real objective of this show is to tell them the truth.



M. ZDRAVKOVIĆ: My personal mission when I analyse statistics is to smack everyone in the face with the truth, from the politicians to the people. I wouldn't go into whether every nation deserves the government it has because we would then come to racial theories and theories as to whether we as people are capable of falling so low.

S. POPOVIĆ: You know, it is just one degree of a society's democratic maturity – whether you perceive a politician as someone before whom you should stand in awe and shake in fear or as an agent of your interests on the social stage. You see, that is what I'm talking about. You have to demand that politicians account for every single Euro they are in charge of. If the nation is incapable of that, it then really deserves such a government. That was my point, nothing else. And I think that this is happening right now – that we see our own faces reflected in the politicians' mirrors.

WHEN WILL WE REACH THE LEVEL WE WERE AT IN THE 1980S?

M. ZDRAVKOVIĆ: We need between 15 and 20, maybe even 30 years. A whole generation from now.

S. CENIĆ: Yes, there is that magic number one through 72 and then look at the growth, divide it and you'll get the number of years.

V. GLIGOROV: The problem here, above all in Bosnia and Serbia, and the greatest problem, especially in Serbia, is the decline in industrial production, which is dramatic *vis-à-vis* the 1980s. So we are definitely talking about a decade or a decade and a half of normal growth rates before we reach the level we were at in the 1980s.

CHAPTER III

MEDIA

Media waged the wars of the 1990s with their own weapons. The profession lost. The few who defended the principles of journalism with dignity even at such times are, to continue using war terminology, now war orphans. Shunted to the margins of social attention, they are a deadweight disrupting the harmony of political power centres, tycoons and corrupt individuals and groups.

Times are nevertheless changing, albeit slowly. Adjustment to the new technologies and the market rules, on the one hand, and to liberation from the pressures of the ruling political parties, on the other, takes both time and effort. Communication and exchange of opinions among journalists in the region (given that they face, more or less, the same difficulties) is one of the ways to revert from the newly established rules⁴ – anyone, anything, anytime, anywhere, and anyhow – to the standards of professional journalism and news that are double-checked and clearly reply to the following questions: who, what, when, where and why? The guests of the third episode of *Vicinities* – Milka Tadić Mijović, Tomislav Klauški, Vildana Selimbegović and Nataša Tešanović – think so, too.

⁴ Croatian journalist/writer Boris Dežulović: *Five fundamental principles of new journalism*



MILKA TADIĆ MIJOVIĆ

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MONITOR, PODGORICA

(NON)CONFRONTATION WITH THE PAST

I think that we have never really confronted our past and that this is one of the greatest problems of all our states. For instance, Milo Đukanović⁵ is presented as a peacemaker in Montenegro, although he was one of the main warmongers and participants in the wars. He was even awarded a peace prize, and when we said, “Wait a second, we still remember some things, we haven’t forgotten everything,” an avalanche literally descended upon us, that we, not Đukanović, had actually been at war. There are entire teams, well-trained teams, I think, who are creating a new reality, but who are actually blurring the essence of the real processes and developments.

POLITICS AND TYCOONS

Politicians and tycoons are one and the same in our country. All the power is actually in the hands of one family, the ruling family. It would have been easier had someone occupied us 20 years ago. We would have been left with more than we have now, after this marriage between the family and the tycoons. The ruling family. They are simply linked.

⁵ Former Montenegrin Prime Minister and leader of the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists

PRICE OF INDEPENDENCE

We are paying the price of independence. We are often sued. We don’t have enough advertisers. I think that the main problem is that the politicians are maintaining a state of neither war nor peace to cover up the large-scale looting. It is precisely that focus on the other, the devil, which allows them to continue with their unhindered looting.

FLOOD OF INFORMATION

We can say that we are over-flooded with irrelevant information, information that means absolutely nothing. Getting the real information, for example who is behind the privatisation of a company, is extremely difficult. You can’t discover who is actually behind, say, an offshore company that bought one of the key factories in your country, who is actually pocketing money from some of those suspicious deals. A flood of information meaning nothing, of those tabloids writing about things that don’t matter, all this serves to cover up the really essential and important things.

NEW RULES OF JOURNALISM

Boris Dežulović: Five fundamental principles of new journalism: anyone, anything, anytime, anywhere and anyhow. Or: as short, as bizarre, as shocking, as banal and as stupid as possible. This is becoming the professional standard.

I think that very many media would corroborate Boris Dežulović’s words. We have to resist and insist on the principles we were taught. Be as professional as possible and write about the essential and important social issues.



TOMISLAV KLAUŠKI

COLUMNIST, WEB PORTAL WWW.INDEX.HR, ZAGREB

MEDIA SYNERGY

All media are now one great synergy. Papers on the Internet, TV on the Internet – all of this is turning into a huge corporation. Index will come out as a paper tomorrow, the papers will be on the Internet. So, it will be one huge synergy, because that is what the technologies are bringing. iPad, iPhone, Facebook... all of them are interrelated media communication forms and media simply have to adjust to them. There are no longer any dinosaurs, which are not on the Internet, which want to be sold only at the newsstands. That's a thing of the past. We simply have to reconcile ourselves with this and start adjusting to it.

BREAKING THE ICE

I'll give you the example of the ICTY judgements against the Croatian generals, when 90 percent of Croatia's political actors and 90 percent of the Croatian public were shocked and appalled by the convictions against Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markač. Index was one of the rare outlets that looked at that story from another angle, insisting that war criminals, not Croatia, had been found guilty. Index was the first that dared say something like that and its courage then spread and others began saying that,

too. That is the strength of the media, to defy the prime minister, the president, the opposition leader.

GOING BEYOND OFFICIAL RHETORIC

The Index.hr portal, of course, also likes to report about broken heads and broken windshields, if those windshields were really broken and if the soccer fans were really beaten up. But we are always trying to offer a perspective that may not necessarily be in line with the official rhetoric, which is obviously imposed on all the media. We are trying to highlight situations that are not really smoothing the authorities' feathers, but ruffling them. That is what Index is known for.



VILDANA SELIMBEGOVIĆ

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, OSLOBODENJE,
DAILY NEWSPAPER, SARAJEVO

THE PRESS IS NOT DYING

Nearly a month ago, the Americans conducted a huge analysis and moaned about the huge decline of the publishing industry, advertising market and everything else. They then summed everything up and admitted that the publishing industry still had solid revenues. I'm all right with the press dying when I do, but I am deeply, deeply convinced that there will always be people, at least while I'm alive, who will

not believe that they've had a proper cup of coffee if they haven't sipped it as they leafed through a real newspaper.

POLITICIANS ARE DICTATING REALITY

Our politicians are dictating our lives. This is why they are identified with the media. This is why they distort reality the way they do. That's why you have, for instance, the Bosnian Federation Government, which does not assist the media, and the Bosnian Serb Government, which invests in all the media. But the Federation authorities decided to aid the media and hand out pieces of the marketing pie through the public companies.

CHASE

Getting hold of information, checking it and talking to more than one source; that is our problem today. So, we're chasing information, time, interlocutors... but that is journalism.

WAR OF WORDS BETWEEN BANJA LUKA AND SARAJEVO STILL ONGOING

That story is 20 years old and I doubt that anything will change in the next decade or so, unfortunately. For instance, *Oslobođenje* and the Banja Luka *Nezavisne novine* entered a joint project about six months ago, and both our colleagues in *Nezavisne* and we got a beating, a media beating.

That defiance is quite costly, in terms of lawsuits, qualifications, fatwahs. By the way, I am the first official Islamophobe in the Balkans, if that is some kind of an ID.



NATAŠA TEŠANOVIĆ

DIRECTOR, ALTERNATIVE TV, BANJA LUKA

BOSNIAN INFORMATION STEW

There's been a lot of polemic recently, not only in the last few days, but in the last few months as well, about the Federal TV's reporting. It was particularly obvious when the Bosnian Serb Republic was celebrating its 20th anniversary of existence, when the Federal TV showed a movie that had hardly any facts, but was full of qualifications; it went as far as claiming that the Serbian aggression idea was 200 years old.

WHAT WE WATCH AND FOR HOW LONG

Regional survey: 3 percent do not watch TV at all, 25 percent watch movies and series, 14 percent watch sports, 11 percent watch the news and political shows, 10 percent watch music, 9 percent watch entertainment and comedy shows, 8 percent watch quizzes and 7 percent watch nothing in particular.

The fact is that 66 percent of the population on average watches TV in countries in transition like Bosnia-Herzegovina. The degree of a country's development is measured by the percentage of those reading serious papers. We are obviously very, very low on that scale.



You try to publish serious political magazines, to engage in investigative journalism, and then the people meter rises when a Survivor starlet bares her breasts.

GOVERNMENT IS PAYING

I see no problem with the government paying for the media. The government in Serbia also gave money to the media. To be honest, numerous outlets got money from foreign governments as well. The problem is how that is done, given that the taxpayer money is in question. Is it sufficiently transparent? And, of course it is important what the media do with that money and how they behave afterwards. That's the test they are put to.

ACHIEVING RECONCILIATION BY TELLING THE TRUTH IN THE MEDIA

We have to persist in our efforts to tell the truth and find the truth. The greatest challenge journalists face in this era of general acceleration and globalisation is how to provide accurate information and provide it fast. We must not waver in that sense, because only if we really stay in the sphere of information, if we keep away from the sphere of qualifications, can we aspire to achieve some kind of reconciliation in the future.

MEDIA OF TOMORROW

Media will resemble media in the classical sense less and less. They will increasingly be content providers. The platform they use will be the least important – they should be available on as many platforms as possible. But content is the essence. You have to offer something that will draw the people to watch you, listen to you, read you, regardless of the way you get it.

DIALOGUE

RIDICULE AND FEAR

T.KLAUŠKI: From our Croatian perspective, our relations with all our neighbours are unfolding in two ways. Either they instil fear in us: of Slovenes and their territorial demands, of Serbs and their Draža Mihajlović and Chetniks, or of the Bosnian Serbs and their Prime Minister Milorad Dodik. Or, on the other hand, we ridicule them: the Serb who axed an old woman to death (not a man, a Serb), or the Slovenes who lost a sports match, or the Bosnians who don't have a state. So, either we ridicule them or we fear them.

M. TADIĆ MIJOVIĆ: Montenegro is extremely afraid that Serbia will come and swallow up our free state. That fear still exists and it is, of course, used for political purposes. That is keeping Đukanović in power. We must have an enemy.

V. SELIMBEGOVIĆ: We've already been swallowed up. Our Wahhabis are not Wahhabis, they shoot from Serbian Kalashnikovs and use Serbian ammunition. The situation with our entities is similar. We won't let the Croats have their own station. We won't let even ourselves live if need be – there's nothing to live off anyway – so that this is what we feed the masses with.

WHO'S BEHIND THE MEDIA

M. TADIĆ MIJOVIĆ: We actually don't know who's behind many of the media outlets. You have a plethora of media in Montenegro. All of them are very close to former Prime Minister Đukanović. Many of them cannot earn any money in the market. Someone is funding them, but we don't know who. Although they may have a formal owner, we don't know who is behind them. I think that the

leading political players, tycoons and organised crime gangs are probably behind them. And they are all fused in this case.

V. SELIMBEGOVIĆ: The situation is clear and transparent in Sarajevo and Banja Luka. We know who works for whom. We know who belongs to whom. We have the Bosnian Avaz in the middle of Sarajevo, whose owner is also the owner of the party that lost the elections, front-pages himself and says "Opposition leader says this is out of the question." We in Bosnia always know everything.

T.KLAUŠKI: Large corporations are formally behind the media. The two largest publishers, EPH and Styria, own most of the print media in Croatia. We have one public-service and two private TV stations with national coverage, and the ones surrounding them are the so-called small fry, which pick up the crumbs from the advertising table, the political table, the secret service table, and so on.

WAZ formally owns half of Europa Press Holding, the largest newspaper publisher in Croatia. But the other partner, Ninoslav Pavić, is involved in shady partnerships with various people. He is formally the owner, but it's still unclear which spheres of interests he represents.

N. TEŠANOVIĆ: Everything is clear and everything is well known. Most media are formally owned by people close to the regime, and this is how the media are surviving.

SPINNING

T.KLAUŠKI: Some people in Croatia think that they are spinners, but they aren't. For instance, former Government spokesman Ratko Maček thinks he is a spin doctor, but he now risks jail. He declared himself a spin doctor because (and that's the point of spinning) there must be a stick behind the



spinning. Ivo Sanader's⁶ stick was behind Ratko Maček. Sticks, threats, two-three million kunas worth of advertisements are behind big corporations and they will be withdrawn if the media don't give in. So, spinning without a stick is actually ridiculous spinning and the media disregard it.

V. SELIMBEGOVIĆ: Power is being spun in Bosnia. It is sold. It is packaged. You have turncoats, you have journalists, you have the still unresolved situation from the 1990s. Maybe the situation in the media would be better in all of our countries had we embraced the idea that emerged immediately after the wars in the 1990s, that a corner of the ICTY be set apart for those who had been spinning the wars. I am talking about our profession. I am talking about people who only changed stripes after the war and continued spinning, allegedly for the democrats.

N. TEŠANOVIĆ: Milorad Dodik is our spinner, and he is an excellent student. He's attended various courses and I think he mastered the spinning skills beautifully. Believe me, his anger, which appears so serious, is very often just a wonderful example of spinning. Let me tell you how we were recently spun brilliantly by Zlatko Lagumdžija and Milorad Dodik

during their meeting in Banja Luka. Half of the journalists at the press conference were talking about how Milorad Dodik had lent Lagumdžija money to bet on Bosnia-Herzegovina in the match against Brazil. No one talked about what the two of them had talked about, that is, whether they had agreed on how to resolve the problem of state property.

NEIGHBOURS ARE MENTIONED ONLY WHEN SOMETHING BAD IS HAPPENING TO THEM

T.KLAUŠKI: A large share of the Croatian public has never found out what the name of Serbia's Prime Minister is, for instance. That goes for Serbia to a large extent as well.

We've only heard of Boris Tadić⁷; we have no idea who is actually in power, who the Prime Minister is, what the situation in Serbia is like. We hear when it takes a step backwards, but we don't hear when it takes a step forward. A kind of self-centredness is imposed on us. We don't need anyone else except ourselves, media-wise, television-wise, news-wise. Everything you hear about other countries is bad. You hear only about the crimes and accidents, about the mafia, about the weekly of Draža Mihajlović,

⁶ Former Croatian Prime Minister

⁷ Serbia's President at the time Vicinities was broadcast

about Bosnia-Herzegovina, which cannot form a government for umpteen months. So that we nevertheless grow aware that there are some countries in our vicinity through such bad signals. As long as the situation around us is good, we are preoccupied with ourselves, but we can't say that this preoccupation with ourselves is actually productive.

N. TEŠANOVIĆ: Generally speaking, media are interested in crime, the glitterati and politics. Banja Luka, of course, likes Belgrade and will always try to present Serbia in a better light. As far as other neighbours are concerned, we go by the saying "May the neighbour's cow die". That is our general rule and I'm afraid it does not apply only to Banja Luka. I'm sure it doesn't. Generally speaking, we suffer from that backwater, one-horse-town mentality... We like to see bad things happen to others, to talk about that a bit. That is how we are practically justifying our own laziness, slackness, ignorance.

Let me mention a very interesting teaser for a show on a commercial TV station in Croatia, which sounded something like: "Serbian woman made 20 movies in a month. Porn movies". That a Serb surgeon was part of a medical team, which recently performed the most complicated face transplant ever, did not make the news, of course. That seems to be our everyday situation, which, unfortunately, not even Banja Luka has been spared from.

V. SELIMBEGOVIĆ: We're interested in all the developments in the region, but we are really the most interested in when others are worse off than we are. Since that does not happen, we have to focus on ourselves.

M. TADIĆ MIJOVIĆ: All of us are well aware that these splinter statelets, created after the break-up of Yugoslavia, are actually using each other to present themselves in a better light. We (the paper I come

from), for instance, are closely following the events in the region and we have three correspondents in Belgrade alone. I think that everything that is happening is extremely important, not only what's happening in the region, but what's happening in Europe and America as well, such as these movements, protests, Occupy Wall Street, and so on. I think that we're simply not communicating with the world enough, that we, unfortunately, think we need only ourselves and that our political and criminal elites are actually making the most of that.

TABLOIDISATION

V. SELIMBEGOVIĆ: There are no tabloids in Bosnia in principle. We import them from Croatia and from Serbia. We have a different kind of tabloid. We have political tabloids. We have a newspaper and an owner that we are exporting to Montenegro, which puts the Reis (I Ulema) on the front page and a naked woman on the last page. That is precisely how they attract readers. Tabloidisation is on a downward slope in the world. Bosnia has fortunately been lagging a bit in that respect as well, so we are now offering exclusive newspapers, shows... we'll try to create something ourselves, too.

T. KLAUŠKI: We published the alleged photographs of Blanka Vlašić in a porn movie and it turned out that it was not Blanka Vlašić, and we paid 40,000 kunas in damages and got our fingers rapped, which is very legitimate. I think that Index published many more important things worth listing here: we ousted ministers, we raised some issues, but those who talk about Index are mostly those who remember Severina rather than Index. It seems to me that a large number of the media have sought refuge in tabloidisation. It is the safest. Nothing is safer than writing about crime and accidents, because you will not rile any power centre, from political advertisers

to others. That is the safest avenue, under the excuse that this is what interests the people. Some of the people are definitely interested in that, some aren't. A balance needs to be struck between serious journalism and tabloidisation.

M. TADIĆ MIJOVIĆ: We, for instance, sold very many copies of an issue of Monitor in which we showed Severina together with Milo Đukanović. I think she was singing for him at a party. But, on the other hand, I think that this precisely tells us where we're now, where we had once been. I remember Start, for instance, what a great paper that was. And Danas. And the erstwhile NIN. I remember all those excellent media, which carried tremendous weight and were extremely serious, although we were living in a one-party system at the time. And look what we've suddenly got around us. I think Croatia doesn't have one paper resembling Start or Danas, precisely because all of us want to make a buck on the market, and the people need bread and games.

FACEBOOK – A BARE NECESSITY

T.KLAUŠKI: I think the journalists are extremely privileged to enter such a setting. You're moving among a virtual circle of people exchanging information, comments and ideas, and you're in a space where you can reach a different kind of audience with your texts. We can attract a large number of readers to Index through Facebook. Facebook is very useful if you know how to use it – if you don't privatise it, if you don't expose yourself to all the worthless things posted on Facebook. For journalists, this social network can be a valuable source of information and a valuable tool for self-promotion among a broader audience.

M. TADIĆ MIJOVIĆ: You're actually constantly trying to catch up with the new things, but our paper

is more into analyses. Monitor is, of course, on Facebook. We have lots of friends. And we advertise our own articles on Facebook. We have a specific network. I'm on Facebook and I get information from other people. On the other hand, you can link up with your colleagues in the region. I think it's a very good tool for linking up. I think that Facebook's activist role is very important; it can rally us, spur us...

N. TEŠANOVIĆ: I have two sons and it was with great reluctance that I finally let them open their profiles on Facebook, because I am aware that this is where they hang out, but I do not want to enter that space myself.

INTERNET AND/OR US

T.KLAUŠKI: Index has become a populist outlet; the Internet is actually itself a populist medium, which must reach out to the broadest possible audience, have as many hits as possible. Tabloidisation is, of course, a way to attract as many people as possible to one's website, but it is also an opportunity to raise extremely important issues. Index's experience in the past 10 years shows that what actually attracts our readers the most is not tabloid journalism, or crime and accidents so much, but the stories no-one dares touch, the tycoons no-one dares touch, the politicians no-one dares criticise. Going against the flow is, therefore, precisely what brought it both its readership and its media relevance.

M. TADIĆ MIJOVIĆ: You know, there is that old story, whenever something new appears; we thought TV would kill the radio, that the radio would kill the press, that the Internet would kill the traditional media. I think there will nevertheless be room for both of us and the Internet. Circulations are, of course, going down in general, but I don't think that only the Internet is to blame. I think it's because of this huge crisis rocking the world.

CHAPTER IV

THE BALKANS AND THE GREAT POWERS

The role of the Balkans is either overly exaggerated or unjustifiably underestimated, depending on the eye of the beholder. Going from one extreme to another is so Balkan-like, as is pinning the blame on others and self-deprecation, and accepting the Balkans as a common home of different peoples and then tearing that same house down. Countries in which everything and nothing is possible at the same time, countries with sudden rises and falls, where only instability is stable – these are the issues analysts have been deliberating for quite some time, not only in the recent past. Guests of *Vicinities* – Dušan Reljić, Srećko Horvat, Dragutin Papović and Biljana Vankovska – analysed the great powers' influence on the Balkans.



DUŠAN RELJIĆ

SENIOR RESEARCH ASSOCIATE, GERMAN INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AND SECURITY AFFAIRS (SWP), BERLIN

BALKAN NO LONGER IN THE LIMELIGHT

If you look at the EU's enlargement strategy, you will see that every year the EU repeats that the purpose of the EU enlargement policy is to include all Southeast European countries and thus contribute to stabilisation, lasting peace and progress in the region. But other questions are more important now, for instance the crisis in the European financial zone and relations with the Arab world. So, as long as there is some kind of a truce in the Balkans, the region is not in the limelight.

PRICE OF BORROWING

The parameters of power have changed in the world. But that one step backwards, when the former Yugoslavia broke up, created an empty space, a vacuum in Southeast Europe. Before that, we had a Yugoslavia, which was non-aligned and which balanced between the two blocs. The United States of America was the first to fill that empty space politically. We here have something we can call American peace, because all the solutions, in Croatia, in Bosnia, in Kosovo and in Macedonia, through the Ohrid Agreement, are the

result of U.S. political and military interventions. The European Union came afterwards and, as opposed to the United States and all other factors, offered integration through the rule of law, through incorporating the EU's legal order, and that is the only form of the genuine trans-national integration in the region, by abandoning petty national particularisms. None of that is possible, of course, without money. This is why anyone thinking about the region's future needs to bear in mind that the region is broke, that it will have to borrow. The future political options will greatly depend on whom the countries borrow from.

BRUSSELS' BILATERAL POLICY

I think we should deconstruct some things, because it is very popular to talk about what Brussels, or Moscow, or someone else is demanding. We don't have one interest at issue here. Twenty-seven EU member states are hiding behind Brussels. The EU's policy on Zagreb, Belgrade, is not just formed in Brussels and then voiced by the EU President, it is a bilateral policy of the strongest EU countries, between Berlin and Belgrade, between Paris and Podgorica.

EUROPEAN UNION'S FEARS

The fear of letting countries that are not functional join the EU is what defines the interests of most EU countries towards Southeast Europe. Letting in countries without a functioning rule of law, with corruption and organised crime, with a non-functioning judiciary not ensuring access to justice. That is one of the fears. The other is that enlargement will cost them money. And, ultimately, the fear that fresh unrest, new conflicts will break out and result in the need for new military interventions, which are very expensive, both politically and financially.

RUSSIA'S INFLUENCE ON SOUTH EAST EUROPE

Investments, as well as diplomatic support to Belgrade and Banja Luka, denote Russian interests in the Balkans. Russia is primarily investing in the energy sector, such as the construction of the South Stream pipeline, which is to pass through the region. The value of the South Stream is estimated at between 10 billion and 15 billion EUR. Moscow has clearly drawn its lines, relying not only on investments, but on historical and cultural preconceptions as well. The European Union is OK, but NATO is unwelcome.

Russia exerts its influence in the Southeast European region in three directions. First of all, Russia is a permanent member of the Security Council. Therefore, as long as Kosovo's independence is not verified there, Kosovo will never be a member of the United Nations, whereby an important course of the U.S. Balkan policy is blocked. This Russian influence is indisputable and it won't change. Energy is the second direction in which it exerts influence. The vast majority of the countries in the region are currently almost 100 percent dependent on its oil and natural gas deliveries. And all the countries in the region and many EU countries are vying for rights to hook up to the Russian energy systems. The South Stream does not end in the Balkans; it extends towards France, just like the North Stream goes through Germany, to Holland. And the third direction of influence is, of course, tradition. The Christian Orthodox faith and culture are also important factors. American political scientists call that "soft power".



SREĆKO HORVAT

PHILOSOPHER, DIRECTOR,
SUBVERSIVE FORUM, ZAGREB

WE ARE IMPORTANT

We are important, because of our resources, because of the industries that can still be privatised, and because of the Balkans' geo-political position. The latest news is that either the Chinese or Qatar will buy a Croatian shipyard. We know that the Chinese decided to buy the biggest Greek port, the fourth or fifth largest port in Europe, after the austerity measures were introduced in Greece. The Balkans are actually very important in that sense.

EU INTEGRATION SPED THINGS UP

I think that Croatia merely sped up the things that it would have eventually done itself if it weren't for those power centres. Specifically, Croatia sped up EU integration and, above all, new privatisation. So, the largest Croatian industry, shipyards, and then the petro-chemical industry as well as some other factories will be dismantled. A similar phenomenon happened in Serbia, with Jugoremedija as well as other cases. Another thing on the agenda is what is now happening in Italy, with Prime Minister Mario Monti - changes in the labour market. The new labour law, so-called flexicurity, above all provides

those employing workers with the flexibility to dismiss them more easily. The third thing is what is already happening in Romania, the privatisation of the public health care system. Then comes the education system, and so on. Croatia is merely speeding up these things because there are some similar laws and similar trends at the European level, which are best illustrated by the example of Greece.

EUROPEAN UNION THROUGH WORDPLAY

Italy's current Prime Minister, Mario Monti ... where did he come from? He was one of the leading officials at Goldman Sachs. Mario Draghi, now the President of the European Central Bank, was the second in command at Goldman Sachs. The current Greek Prime Minister, Lucas Papademos, who became Prime Minister after a referendum was not allowed there, also worked at Goldman Sachs. So, what is Papademos? We can toy with the etymology of his name⁸! We have a man called "papa" "demos", which can mean leader of the people. You have a man who is simultaneously saying "papa demos" – that is, a man saying goodbye to the people. Then you have the Hegelian dialectic – if you go back to the Roman myth about Saturn, you have a man who is eating his children. And that is what the European Union is today, actually.

FINANCIAL POWER CENTRES ARE THE GREAT POWERS

We live in the era of financial capitalism. Let me specify. Croatia was visited by the leading world ratings agencies over the past few months, and they are now setting out the new measures Croatia is to implement. Continue privatisation and do not give in to the dissatisfied. What the rating agencies mean

is that we should not give in to the trade unions, not give in to the workers, and those are actually the real problems. So, if we are talking geo-politics, we should actually have the financial power centres in mind: Wall Street, the European Central Bank in Frankfurt and other segments shaping the world today. When we stop talking about Russia, America and other major powers shaping our destiny, and actually start talking about capitalism and capital, which is not necessarily preceded by the attribute "Russian", "American" and so on, then we will be on the right track, we in Croatia and all others in the region.



DRAGUTIN PAPIĆ

TEACHING ASSISTANT, HISTORY DEPARTMENT,
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, NIKŠIĆ

ADJUST TO THE GREAT POWERS' INTERESTS

I think that the Soviet Union and the United States of America treated the Balkans as their sphere of interest in the 20th century, notably during the Cold War, like they did with all the other regions and parts of the world. The Balkans was a sphere in which they, logically, wanted to achieve their interests, and so they behaved accordingly. What Balkan countries and their residents in general need to understand is

⁸ Papa means 1) Father, 2) Bye-bye and 3) Eat in baby talk

what the great powers' interests are, and, if possible, adjust to those interests. Otherwise, these Balkan countries often end up with the short end of the stick.

IN MONTENEGRO, THE EU IS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL

The European Union's influence ranks supreme in Montenegro in political terms. Of course, it's one thing to talk specifically about political influence, about the implementation of the standards the European Union has been imposing on Montenegro, and quite another to talk about the economy, about the origin of capital and the origin of investments. I think that the whole region is predominantly within the European Union's sphere of interest at the moment.

WE HAVE TO RID OURSELVES OF OUR NARCISSISM

I think that the Balkan countries would do wisely to rid themselves of their ego-centrism and narcissism, to realise that all the major problems lie within them, and to be open to all the positive messages coming from the outside. Of course, as far as the influence of the European Union, America and other great powers, above all from the West, is concerned, the good is inevitably accompanied by the bad, but I think that this is nevertheless the best alternative at the moment.



BILJANA VANKOVSKA,
PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE,
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, SKOPJE

DEPENDENCE SYNDROME

Now, 20 years on, we are suffering from a kind of syndrome of dependence on foreign mentors, whoever they may be. I agree that it's not just dependence on states or alliances, but on corporate capital as well. And our leaders who act like pimps, do their economic tours and offer what our small states, any of them, have, such as cheap labour, some resources, low taxes...

WE HAVE (NO) CHOICES

I believe in the There Are Thousands of Alternatives - TATA - thesis. For instance, I am well known for my opposition to Macedonia joining NATO, and I believe that there are security arguments indicating that it would really result in a loss of social or human capital, and lead us to enter wars which are not our wars, and so on. So, it would bring us nothing that would improve life in Macedonia or democratise the country.

Democracy is about choice. That is how I understand it and what I teach my students. Choices are made by the people, the citizens. Now, if you persuade the citizens that they are stupid and incapable, that

their leaders are Messiahs, while they, again, get more legitimacy from the outside than the inside, then it seems that we have no choice. It may indicate that we may be heading towards EU accession, but that we are losing the democratic capacities of our own system, of the citizens and that lively, vibrant democracy and civil society. This is something where you win some, but you also lose some.

AMERICA MAKES A MESS, EUROPE HAS TO CLEAN IT UP

The US policy definitely has its own strategy and goal in the Balkans, while the European Union has another – hence the saying that Americans usually make a mess and then Europe has to clean up after them. Politicians understand this, and I think that this is the secret of their survival and legitimacy. A saying of our colleague Krastev from Bulgaria comes to mind. He says that “our politicians are making love to the citizens, but they are loyal to the international community”, no matter what the international community actually entails.

WHAT CAN A DEMOCRAT DO?

There’s a lot to be done, but my impression is that when someone designs an impossible constitutional framework, which is itself producing systemic deformations, and at the same time you have ethnicities dividing society for instance in Macedonia, there’s not much you as a democrat can do.

DIALOGUE

HOW THEY SEE US AND HOW WE SEE OURSELVES

D. PAPOVIĆ: We must go back 20 years and realise that it had been inconceivable that Europe would ever again witness what happened in Southeast Europe and the Balkans at the end of the 20th century. It was above all a cultural and civilisation shock, something no one had thought possible. The region has since been viewed with a lot of scepticism, even with a lot of disgust. This region’s importance is not as great as the problems it has been causing, and it is in an area that is extremely important for Europe. That is, it is part of Europe, and Europe is not whole without it. This is why the European Union is investing so much effort above all in stabilising this area, in achieving lasting peace, in having the countries in the region establish economic ties, first amongst themselves and then with the other EU members, as much as possible.

B. VANKOVSKA: I think that what we’ve just heard is that mantra of political correctness, which the young generations seem to have embraced, unfortunately. It is a negative stereotype about one’s own region, according to which we have always been bad, we have always hated each other and warred against each other, which simply isn’t true. One has to be politically naïve and believe that geo-political and geo-strategic interests have not been crossing paths here, not only now, in the early 21st century, but forever. What particularly concerns me is that we’ll actually get nowhere if we are building these states of ours, the links, democracy and so on, under the conviction that we are essentially bad.

S. HORVAT: There are at least three mystifications about the European Union. The first is the one about



stabilisation. The European Union has never been less stable. Look at Greece, look at the protests in Italy, Ireland, Romania, elsewhere. The other myth is the one about corruption. The people of the Balkans are the corrupt ones and are just raring to steal whatever they can. But, Jacques Chirac was convicted and given a two-year suspended prison sentence half a year or a year ago, for corruption. Sanader could not have been corrupted if it hadn't been for the Hungarians who had taken over the Croatian petroleum corporation Ina. And there are many other examples that I won't list now. And the third mystification is the one about peace, the one that the only thing we in the Balkans know is how to rape and kill our neighbours and that we just can't wait to do that. But the European Union is itself dropping bombs on Libya, it can't wait to intervene in Syria, it is letting Libyan refugees drown near Lampedusa, off Italy's shores. You saw what émigrés in France did in their suburbs in 2005. So, there is some kind of a permanent civil war simmering in Europe.

D. RELJIĆ: That is an entirely legitimate perception because it measures the divide between the

normative and the real. The normative, the mantra that is repeated, and the real achievement. But, on the other hand, the fact is that those 500 million people living in the European Union are still living better lives than most of the world, that they are living more peacefully and that the rule of law is nevertheless more stable.

.... IS TO BLAME FOR EVERYTHING

S. HORVAT: I was in Brussels last week, I'm in Belgrade this week, I think that only Budapest and Vienna are missing to get a contexture of all those who have always been blamed in this region. I think I've covered them, although the focus is now moving towards Brussels.

B. VANKOVSKA: Macedonians wouldn't be Macedonians if they didn't blame others.

D. PAPOVIĆ: Due to our inability to face our own shortcomings, it is, of course, easier for us in Montenegro to blame someone else, someone stronger, as a rule.

D. RELJIĆ: Germans also like to pass the buck on to others. Particularly when soccer is in question. They always underline that others are playing soccer but say that the German team is winning. That is a kind of self-awareness built through history, which may differ from one nation to another.

TURKEY

Turkey is a ship going at full speed, even during the crisis in 2011. The Turkish economy can pride itself on a growth rate exceeding 8 percent, which Europe can only dream of. The Turks are strategically investing in telecommunications, air traffic and the road network. Most of their investments go to Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Turkey's role in the Balkans is proportionate to its growing influence.

B. VANKOVSKA: I would look at the example of Turkey from a totally different angle. Why do we feel good if the Americans are interested in the region, if they built their largest embassy in the region in Macedonia, with who knows how many underground floors? That is the largest intelligence centre in that part of the Balkans. Therefore, they're here to stay. So, why the paranoia that the Turks are coming back and that they are the enemy? If we're already living in that globalised world, we must be pragmatic as well. Yes, everyone may have their own national interests or some other interests, but maybe we should be pragmatic and know what to expect of whom and how to make the most of it. For instance, I find this entire neo-Ottomanisation through Turkish series interesting, from this post-Yugoslav perspective if you will. I also ask myself whether our future generations would watch a movie in a hundred years' time, like we're watching the series *Suleiman the Magnificent* now, with such satisfaction and serenity, without it causing hatred and frustration.

D. RELJIĆ: Generations had watched American series, too, but we never became cowboys.

B. VANKOVSKA: Thank God.

D. RELJIĆ: We watched Latin American series but we didn't become Latin lovers. I think that this level of popular culture plays an important role in facilitating the 'throughput' of culture. But the other level is the circulation of capital, and if we take a look at where investments in these parts are coming from – those investments are coming from Western Europe, from several countries, not more than four or five, and Turkey is at this point still far from having the economic power to actually be a factor of change in this area. Where Turkey is, however, producing an effect, an effect that is barely noticed, regards the

schools and universities it has been establishing in the region, by which it is slowly grooming a part of the political elite, which will be extremely benevolent to a thinking that differs from the ideological indoctrination we have had over the past 20 years, a Euro-Atlantic indoctrination.

B. VANKOVSKA: Why would that Pax Americana (American peace), which is being spread around the world by bombs, wars, Afghanistan, Iraq, in which Macedonia took part for no reason, without gaining status in NATO, be better, more Western-oriented and democratic than this oriental, cultural indoctrination or even economic breakthrough?

RULE OF LAW AND THE EXAMPLE OF GREECE

D. RELJIĆ: The elections⁹ in Greece will be "decent".

S. HORVAT: That's immaterial because they, all of them, both the parties in power and the ones in opposition, signed that loan, the debt that will lead precisely to the privatisation of the health system, the privatisation of the shipyards... Elections are immaterial.

D. RELJIĆ: No, no. The elections are very important.

S. HORVAT: Of course they are important, but, unfortunately, the situation is consolidated and will thus not result in the kind of changes we'd like to see.

D. RELJIĆ: I'd always rather live in such a Greece than in a Belarus.

S. HORVAT: OK, I'd always rather live in Europe than in China, for instance, if we're going down that line.

D. RELJIĆ: Individual freedoms and collective prosperity are nevertheless better safeguarded by integration in the rule of law, no matter how many shortcomings it has and how porous it is in many

⁹ This regards the 6 May parliamentary elections.

respects, than by acceptance of the naked capitalism that had existed...

S. HORVAT: That's not true. The European Union actually equals naked capitalism. You have the so-called Fiscal Compact, which has been adopted, which will come into force next year and which was agreed earlier this year, and under which the European Union will from now on limit national budgets to prevent the countries from indebting themselves. The European Union will from now on be the one imposing the budgets that the national governments may adopt. All autonomy of the national states is being abolished. If you do not accept this, you won't get new loans from banks, and you won't be able to borrow anymore.

D. RELJIĆ: Is borrowing good for the demos?

S. HORVAT: Of course not.

D. RELJIĆ: The people are the ones who are ultimately repaying the debts.

S. HORVAT: Yes.

D. RELJIĆ: And that is why limiting borrowing is a step towards improving the circumstances.

USA

The USA's goals in the Balkans are obvious: preservation of peace and stability, independence of Kosovo, and unity of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Washington has repeatedly declared its wish to see the entire Balkans join both NATO and the European Union. But, has America, pressured by greater problems elsewhere, taken its eye off the Balkans forever?

B. VANKOVSKA: Well, yes, there is a saying, if you misbehave, we'll bring you democracy, American democracy, of course. By military means, that is. Skopje is a good indicator that the Americans are here and looking after what they've already created.

Dayton Bosnia is their creation, Kosovo is their creation and this post-Ohrid Macedonia depends on American influence and the preservation of peace and stability. Of course, they've spread themselves thin across the world and that crisis is already hitting America, too. I don't think American policy will continue maintaining a strong focus on us, but it won't give up on us easily either.

S. HORVAT: You had that U.S. campaign, in Afghanistan I think, called "Bomb Them with Butter", but they were actually dropping humanitarian aid packages, which really included food. Then they stopped the campaign because they were warned that when they started dropping bombs, people were also running towards those packages, thinking that they, too, were humanitarian aid packages. Not to mention that the U.S. has done with its interventions exactly what it now claims Afghanistan and Iraq were doing. Iran was a secular state before the Americans intervened in Iran through the CIA. During Saddam Hussein's reign, Iraq had about one million Christians. The Foreign Minister was a Christian. You were able to walk around freely in Afghanistan in the 1970s, because it was a secular state. And, now, after the U.S. interventions, all these states have become Islamic fundamentalist states, and I think that this may also be the case in one state we didn't mention here, Syria. On the other hand, you have Egypt, and then, of course, we have to mention Libya. All these powers differ amongst themselves, but we can see that it is precisely after the U.S., as well as France and some others, exported their products (democracy and humanism) to these countries that there is no more democracy or humanism in them.

CHAPTER V

BEING YOUNG AND BEING IN THE BALKANS

Had the young people in the region been able to choose where they would be born, the Balkans definitely would not have been on their wish lists. Nevertheless, many of them perceive living in the Balkans as an exciting challenge. Although European Fund for the Balkans (EFB) alumni are not typical representatives of their generation inasmuch as they have had the opportunity to live elsewhere, most of them decided to come back and live in the countries where they were born. Aware that the wars of the 1990s slowed down the region's development and hindered communication among neighbours, these young people nevertheless believe that they will live better and more comfortable lives in the Balkans. Bosiljka Vuković, Azra Bećirović, Dejan Tonić, Vesna Jarić, Aleksandar Jovanoski, Srđan Hercegonja, Uroš Živković, Tamara Branković, Goran Furjan and Dejan Radić shared with us on *Vicinities* their wise and insightful thoughts, without any bitterness. Nevena Jovanović and Božana Bešlić, themselves EFB alumni, proved to be extremely talented anchors as well.



BEING YOUNG IN THE BALKANS IS A CHALLENGE

A. JOVANOSKI: OK, I'd say that living in the Balkans is difficult, but that it is a challenge as well. Until just two years ago, we were a generation that needed visas if we wanted to travel anywhere. Our parents had no problem travelling all across Europe and around the world, but our generation felt the problems brought on by transition. I think it also resulted in the creation of a kind of Balkan 'ghetto', the walls of which we as a generation have been trying to break down the last few years, to turn toward a positive trend.



OLDER RESIDENTS OF PODGORICA ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE

- Maybe they should be given more employment opportunities. I know that the young people of today finish college and then sit at home doing nothing.
- I have only good things to say about them.
- They graduated from college and earned their master's degrees. But they can't get traineeships, even for a monthly salary of 100 Euros; all they get are promises.
- There are all kinds.
- To tell you the truth, I don't think well of them at all.
- They are behaving in accordance with their time. If our experience can be of any use to them, all the better.
- They are moving forward. The old ... live from one day to the next.
- You see what the young people are doing ... enjoying themselves. None of them are working.
- They're great.
- We, the older people, we have done our share of work. As much as we could, as well as we could, and I think we've left a lot to the future generations.

IN THE STREETS, BUT IN CARNEGIE HALL AS WELL

B. VUKOVIĆ: These criticisms can definitely apply to some of Podgorica's youth, because we can see some of the things described in the vox pop. But we cannot forget that young people from Podgorica, that is young people from Montenegro, are today also playing in Carnegie Hall, participating in the Olympics and winning debate competitions, or helping their school-friends with physical disabilities. So, the situation is far from one-sided. One thing is for certain, the young people of today are not having an easy time, far from it, given what they've inherited.





D. RADIĆ: I have the feeling that we really are the generation waiting for Godot, and that by the time we realise that there is no Godot, either our lives will have passed us by or we will no longer be young; we will become precisely like the generation in the Podgorica vox pop.

D. TONIĆ: I think that the situation in Serbia is similar to the one in the other former Yugoslav republics. The young face the worst kinds of problems, which were totally inconceivable to the generations of their parents, not to call them the older generations. What is probably the worst thing at this moment is that there is no specific solution to such a situation. There is no systemic approach to the problem. Worst of all, young people are increasingly treated as the object, not as the subject of change.

WE CAN(NOT) DO EVERYTHING BY OURSELVES



S. HERCEGONJA: What's crucial is that we have to make our ideas happen and achieve our ambitions by ourselves. I think that young people should no longer rely as much on support from the state and the state institutions, that they have realised that they cannot rely on those resources anymore. Of course, you can't implement your ideas all by yourself, but if you rally a team of people with similar views, with similar ideas, you can achieve whatever you want to without state aid.

D. RADIĆ: There definitely has to be a driving force and that is definitely only up to us. But a young man here can do absolutely nothing without systemic support. The political establishment must recognise the driving force of the young if it is to make adequate use of us as a generation. For instance, you have legislation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, you have the Law on Youth in the Federation and the Law on Youth Associations in the Bosnian Serb Republic, but both are unfortunately just dead letters. There aren't enough initiatives or ideas about how to make relevant use of the capacities of the young.

WE DON'T KNOW EACH OTHER

D. RADIĆ: I think we definitely don't know enough about each other and that it was precisely the media breakdown we have lived in all these years that created the distance among the nations in the region. But, the opportunities to bring us together, such as this Vicinities project, demonstrate that we definitely suffer from the same diseases and that we should be prescribed the same therapy.



T. BRANKOVIĆ: Those born in 1991 more or less recognise regional cooperation as something very important, but they do not trust each other anymore; that is, this distrust is mostly based on ethnic grounds. I think we simply must work on breaking down those barriers so that we can start doing something and overcoming that manipulation.

EFFECTS OF THE PAST ON THOSE BORN IN THE 1990S/ THE ER (EMERGENCY ROOM) GENERATION

S. HERCEGONJA: If we generalise and take a look at the generation of young people born around 1990 on the whole, we can conclude that young people are no longer involved in politics at all. You no longer have that story that young people in the Balkans are, alas, overly involved in politics. I think that the young people are engaged in gossiping about politics or politicking. The very fact that they are not involved in politics makes them more susceptible to manipulation, mostly by the politicians and political elites. The young first need to become interested not only in politics and the current social and economic situation, but also in what caused the situation, the events of the past, particularly those that occurred in the 1990s.

T. BRANKOVIĆ: I think that the young people, particularly in the Balkans, are extremely susceptible to manipulation, particularly because some important issues are not raised in society and especially because we are still held hostage to the unresolved issues of the 1990s. The fact is that young people are simply willing to base their views on various stereotypes and prejudices churned out by the media in our states. I think we have these media walls that just won't let information pass through and that with these walls there is no way we'll get to know each other better.



V. JARIĆ: Every generation in the Balkans can lament about the simple fact that every generation had its own war, and every generation can pass the buck to the previous one, blame it for the bad decisions, and talk about every next generation as if it were an invasion of barbarians who must be civilised. This is constantly perpetuated here. And, as a member of the generation born in the 1970s – and I know I risk coming across as strict towards the generation born in the 1990s – but I have to note that the political engagement of this Generation R, which we can dub 'the war generation', which grew up in wartime, is expressing its political views quite radically. The frightening fact is that the vast majority of the protesters against the gay parade, for example, were underage; that was the generation born in the 1990s. Demonstrations

in support of Ratko Mladić were also attended by those young people, who may not even know who that man actually was. So, if you add that environmentally friendly Generation E to this Generation R, you get Generation ER (Emergency Room); we are obviously in need of emergency assistance.

D. TONIĆ: Despite the situation we had across the Balkans in the 1990s, I don't think that the susceptibility of young people to manipulation differs that much among our countries. The one thing we – those of us who have experienced some kind of cooperation, good practice of cooperation with people in our region – can do is show other young people, who unfortunately account for the majority across the Balkans, what it should be like.

U. ŽIVKOVIĆ: Those who destroyed our lives and our youth, and the best years of the lives of my generation, are also someone's legacy. Those people are the legacy of the 1950s. They are the product of what the people of our region had lived from 1945 onwards, so these roots are, indeed, deep. But, the young people, with their activism and their new ideas, who are burdened neither by what had happened before the 1990s nor by what had happened in the 1990s, are primarily the ones who can show the right way and the right solution.

ASK NOT...

B. VUKOVIĆ: I think that young people are unfortunately not thinking about some of the things earlier generations thought about, about how we can contribute to change by our active participation, how we can contribute to improving all of our lives. Such involvement, for example political party membership, is now exclusively perceived as a chance for rapid career promotion or for achieving a social status and reputation quickly, although how we would define this reputation is also problematic. Young people today no longer think about what they can do for their party; all they think about is what the party can do for them. The youth involving themselves in politics are no longer motivated by activism, they no longer ponder and contemplate 'can my party really improve things and how'. They just follow the tracks imprinted decades ago, without any hope that something will change.

UNIVERSITIES CHURNING OUT DIPLOMAS INSTEAD OF GRADUATES WHOSE SKILLS MATCH LABOUR MARKET DEMAND

B. VUKOVIĆ: When we think about what we expect, we need to go back to the question of what we have given. Who of us in the Balkans, 22 – or 24-year



olds, has ever done any work, volunteered, studied and at the same time helped out our families and contributed to our society? What the states can do is pass laws on volunteering if they already haven't or improve the ones they have – laws that may have been adopted prematurely for this new idea of volunteering. Volunteering used to be a social category, and it's time we in the region start talking about it as an economic category.

T. BRANKOVIĆ: It is, on the one hand, up to the young people themselves to work while they study, try to involve themselves in as many activities as possible and engage themselves in the field which interests them the most, but, on the other hand, I think that the problem is that our universities do not follow market demand. I think that there is a mismatch between our education system and the labour market, that it focuses more on churning out diplomas than on graduates whose skills meet labour market demand.

S. HERCEGONJA: There is nothing that makes us particularly stand out in the labour market, besides the fact that we are young. So you yourself have to find a way to acquire some experience that will improve your position in the labour market.

U. ŽIVKOVIĆ: A systemic approach is necessary because the young sometimes need to be nudged a bit, even though they are the dynamic part of society, I think they should sometimes be advised about what is really beneficial for them. I think the education system needs to be improved and that our colleges need to introduce practical work, which is almost non-existent. They shouldn't be surviving thanks to tuition fees, but they should use the fees for something more, for providing young people with the chance to acquire the practical skills they need to start working.

THE FUTURE IS IN NETWORKING

B. VUKOVIĆ: We here are probably not typical representatives of our region. I think we have to thank above all our parents for that, as well as all the other people who recognised quality and gave us the chance to gain somewhat different experiences. Social networks really help people obtain information faster. I think that the key is in networking, in knowing how to network and in maintaining that network. I would also like to commend the European Fund for the Balkans here. Maintaining a network is sometimes harder than just creating it on paper.

A. JOVANSKI: Well, I had definitely heard about Bosiljka before I even met her. So, thanks to the very fact that we are part of a network operating in

the Balkans, we came to know of each other even before we met in person. One more thing – although the word ‘network’ was taken from the business world, the young have become aware that networking is crucial for some kind of personal progress and the progress of their generation. Because, if we’re incapable of linking up with our generation in Serbia, Montenegro, anywhere, we face self-isolation, and we’ll live with the fictitious idea that where we live is great – which is untrue.



A. BEĆIROVIĆ: I really can’t tell which part of networking in this experience with the European Fund for the Balkans was more important. I’ve had different, similar experiences, and I can really never tell which is more important to me – the people I met, or the business, professional benefits we got from that networking.

D. RADIĆ: What the audience may find interesting is if we tell them about things they cannot see, what happens during the breaks between the shooting of the shows or behind scenes of the shows. In my opinion, the quality of the information and ideas we exchange may actually be the greatest benefit of this entire project.

U. ŽIVKOVIĆ: Communication and getting to know each other are the essence... That is how we dispel our own prejudices, how we dispel other people’s prejudices about us. I think that this is the essence and maybe the best way to link up the region. I simply think that you cannot get to know even yourself until you have left your hometown, which, unfortunately, only a few people have actually done – until you have gotten to know others.

SOCIAL NETWORKS ABOLISHING DISTANCES

A. JOVANOSKI: Social media are tools and it is up to us whether we will use or abuse the tools for developing and maintaining our contacts. I think that this dynamic time has given us a new form of communication, and that social media can facilitate our communication. For instance, we, as alumni of the European Fund for the Balkans, stayed in touch the entire year after we completed our programme last year, without ever feeling the geographic distances between us. That is the direct benefit of the social media – Facebook, Twitter.

V. JARIĆ: I could define myself as a passive Facebook user, but that does not mean I’m against that form of communication a priori. I think that it is a new form of communication that has entered our lives and simply put, you don’t exist unless you’re on Facebook. On the one hand, it expands the circle of

people we communicate with, that is simply indisputable, and it provides us with the opportunities we definitely hadn't had before. On the other hand, I must admit that it doesn't deepen our relations, that this kind of communication remains on the surface, and, in a way, simplifies our relations, makes them superficial. At least that's my impression.

B. VUKOVIĆ: The crucial thing about Facebook is how it's used. What I find odd is that there's something lots of Facebook users still don't know, that we can set the level of privacy we want ourselves, the extent to which we can limit what people can see, which is very important nowadays. Some kind of training in that respect is more than necessary.

WHEN WE BECOME THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION



G. FURJAN: Nothing will change for me personally when Croatia enters the EU. I will continue doing gigs as I do now, either here, or in another state, and I believe my fees will increase, which is great, but I'm not sure about the rest...

S. HERCEGONJA: We'll go on living like we're living now, trying to get closer to the European Union. We'll change and strive to get to where Croatia is now.

A. JOVANOSKI: There's a perception here that once we join the European Union, we will all wake up in Brussels the next day. That is not true. We're staying here, our countries are staying here, and I think that our interests and our future are precisely here.

MIGRATORY

D. RADIĆ: When we try to decipher the reasons why young people want to leave the region, we go back into that vicious circle, such as crime, corruption, unemployment, poverty and all the other negative social phenomena in the region. But, it would be interesting to look at all those surveys and find out about those who want to stay and why they want to stay here.

V. JARIĆ: I am not an example of those who stayed – I am an example of those who returned after living 10 years abroad, in Italy. I came back about five years ago, because I simply wanted to be part of the changes in the society I had left.

B. VUKOVIĆ: All of us should try and make small changes anywhere – in our families, our communities, our neighbourhoods – and once we realise



that this is possible, I think we'll all realise how many reasons there are for staying. We talked about all the challenges before us during these five shows. No one save our own generation and the coming generations can change that, so, if we all leave, we'll be leaving behind something that had so much potential.

U. ŽIVKOVIĆ: My only motive for being here and planning on staying here is that the challenges here are the greatest.

CHAPTER VI

MEDIA COVERAGE

Vicinities was broadcast by *BHT1* and *RTRS* in Bosnia-Herzegovina, *TV Vijesti* in Montenegro, *TV Kapital Network* in Croatia, *Alsat-M TV* in FYR of Macedonia and *Studio B*, *TV Forum* and *TV Vranje* in Serbia.

Monitor and *Vreme*, weekly news magazines from Podgorica and Belgrade, respectively, were *Vicinities'* media partners. The show's carefully designed concept, the competence and expertise of its guests and the breath of fresh air it brought to TV news programmes were lauded by daily newspapers and other periodicals across the region as well.



Dragan Ćuća

DIRECTOR, TV KAPITAL NETWORK, ZAGREB

Ever since it was founded in 2006, TV Kapital Network has striven to create, restore and foster good relations among the people in the region. Since our programme focuses on business, we have naturally devoted much airtime to improving business relations and cooperation in the region in the previous years. We aspired to accomplish this goal by broadcasting TV shows and reports about business and entrepreneurship, whereby we also encouraged the development of entrepreneurship and facilitated good business relations in the region. We 'picked up' other TV stations' shows and reports and rebroadcast them, which was, in a sense, a bold move considering the Croatian circumstances, but we believed that we would be recognised as an open-minded media outlet. Our viewers say that we have succeeded.

When we were first told about the Vicinities series, we immediately recognised the opportunity to become a partner in the implementation of such a good and necessary idea; and, in my opinion, our region needed a project like this one. It was precisely the concept of having guests from the entire region appear in every show that was the real key to success.

We broadcast all episodes on our channel and our viewers' reactions led us to the conclusion that we were spot on this time, too!

We are looking forward to continuing our cooperation and developing a new and longer-lasting concept of the Vicinities series. There are so many topics that interest the people in this region, because the similarities and differences in their lives are their common thread and every individual in the region is interested in seeing how those "on the other side of the border" perceive specific topics and live.



Belmin Karamehmedović

ACTING DIRECTOR, BHT1, SARAJEVO

Bosnia-Herzegovina, almost by definition, reacts positively to everything that can bring us together and unify us. These things oppose all kinds of divisions, which have unfortunately become BiH's destiny, due, above all, to the adverse influences and interests coming, as a rule, from the outside. That is a difficult burden to bear, a burden BiH would like to rid itself of as soon as possible, since all the attributes of life together are its legacy. It has borne this inner being and this historical reality, as its essence, since time immemorial. This is why BHT1, an umbrella public broadcaster at the BiH state level, reacted almost reflexively to the offer to take part in the Vicinities project, believing that it could thus itself contribute to the efforts invested in rapport and exchange of ideas, views and opinions.

It turned out that joining the project was the right move. The audience accepted the shows and its popularity, particularly among the target group, was greater than we had expected, especially if one takes into account that there was not enough time to promote the project before the shows were broadcast.



Branko Lazić

ASSISTANT PROGRAMME DIRECTOR, RTRS, BANJA LUKA

The editorial board of Radio Television of the Bosnian Serb Republic is extremely pleased that our TV station was part of the regional Vicinities TV project.

The series of shows once again demonstrated that the media in the region have to cooperate amongst themselves, particularly on topics that plague all of us.

We hope that our TV station will be able to broadcast such shows in the future as well, shows which discuss topics and phenomena provoking our societies in a balanced manner and simultaneously promoting dialogue as the only model for overcoming the problems and prejudices of the past, as well as the challenges the future brings.



Vladan Mićunović

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, TV VIJESTI, PODGORICA

Vicinities is a successful, interesting and original project. The carefully chosen topics of the shows provide an overview of the most sensitive points of the socio-economic-political reality of the countries involved in the project.

Vicinities does not have the character of the political boxing ring we have been watching on our stations for years. The shows hold your attention, but not by attacks, insults, pre-written scenarios, or scenarios which invariably and exclusively have the attribute of 'national' and are used for politicking ends.

The interlocutors in these debates went beyond that framework. They are all public figures with a similar sensitivity, recognised authorities in their professions, who have analysed and shed light on subjects that are equally topical, and one might even say, common to all Western Balkan countries, from different perspectives. Skilfully directed through the shows and provoked by well-designed questions, the interlocutors kept to the point, energetically complementing each other and exchanging ideas, literally "competing" with each other over who would talk and shed light on a specific topic more interestingly.

Interspersed with footage from the region and vox pops, the shows, with their good internal dramaturgy, were accessible to a broad audience but did not betray the viewers' expectations. It is obvious that serious work and preparation were behind that formula.

The fact is that such projects are invaluable and indispensable: our perceptions of ourselves are sharpened by exchanging experiences, by comparing ourselves with those around us, by understanding how similar or different we are.



Aleksandar Timofejev

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, STUDIO B, BELGRADE

Interesting topics, competent guests, good preparation and production – that is the recipe *Vicinities* applied and thus won itself the attribute of a successful TV programme.

Studio B was pleased to broadcast the five-show series and be part of the regional network. Judging by our viewers' reactions, so were they.

The countries in the region are obviously facing same or similar problems. The severed ties and communication have obviously not brought us any good, which is why the idea of the authors of this project – to bring people in the countries of the region in one place and simultaneously have them in a number of places in the region thanks to the cameras – was more than just a good idea. We need to keep on talking to each other.

If *Vicinities* continues, Studio B will definitely stay in the company of TV stations broadcasting this programme.



Mileva Malešić

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, TV FORUM, PRIJEPOLJE

The *Vicinities* shows were a breath of fresh air in TV Forum's programme. First of all, because the topics they dealt with are topical and common to all the countries in the region. Second, because the interlocutors in the shows were selected with particular care; they are experts on the topics they discussed and have a good sense of humour, particularly at their own expense.

The presence of the young alumni in the show and the almost equal representation of both sexes (apart from the anchors) deserve only praise and should be a recipe for similar shows.

The added value of the shows is that they were broadcast in a number of countries in the region, and I am sure that the other TV stations are just as proud as we are of having had the opportunity to offer their viewers the *Vicinities* series.

We support the initiative to continue the series and express our readiness to continue our cooperation.



Lirim Hajredini

OPERATIONAL DIRECTOR, ALSAT-M TV, SKOPJE

“Vicinity” is a breath of fresh air on the media stage of the former Yugoslavia. Given that there are always “hot topics” in this part of the world, Vicinity found a way to present these topics in a dynamic and modern format and simultaneously corroborate them with facts and views of various sides. Vicinity differs from other “cliché” shows, also because the members of the audience take an active part in the debate and voice their opinions. As one of the rare TV stations in the Balkans promoting life together and the positive values of the region, Alsat-M has always supported such projects, and I sincerely hope that Vicinity will be present on the region’s media stage next season as well.



Ljubica Zdravković – Džonov

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, RTV VRANJE, VRANJE

Cooperating with the Vicinity team was an interesting experience. All the agreements were fully abided by, which merely testifies to the serious and responsible intentions of its authors. Vicinity was met with positive reactions of the audience of regional RTV Vranje. This was the first series of the kind broadcast in southern Serbia. We agreed to cooperate precisely because we liked its concept, although the very names of the authors are recommendation enough for entering into cooperation. The shows dealt with topics and problems we have in common, no matter what language we speak. We all understood the language of Vicinity! The dialogues were conducted in an extremely civilised manner; more precisely, in the manner we in the Balkans should adopt a priori. I think that the concept was the most successful part of the project. Comedienne Marina instilled a real breath of fresh air to the programme. Maybe the future serials should have comedians from each of our countries. All in all – an excellent series! It would be great if our cooperation continued.

MEDIA PARTNERS

The Belgrade weekly *Vreme* and the Podgorica weekly *Monitor* published the most interesting excerpts from *Vicinities* week after week, reaffirming that good content can easily be transferred from one kind of media to another.

VREME

Dragoljub Žarković

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, VREME, BELGRADE

Vreme was extremely pleased to support the CDRSEE/EFB project given that dialogue and an open exchange of opinions are foundations of our editorial policy.

The dynamic and thematically rich *Vicinities* shows demonstrated that good content can easily be transferred from one kind of media to another.

The greatest quality of the programme is that it started slowly chipping away at the bulwarks erected after the latest wars, and that it has demonstrated that we can talk with each other in a civilised fashion. And, apparently, that there is plenty to talk about, since our problems, like our languages, are more or less the same. The young people will not have an easy time cleaning up the vast fields of corruption, crime, lack of rule of law... Judging by their participation in *Vicinities*, they have the enthusiasm, the enthusiasm that apparently also exists when it comes to continuing the programme. Vreme is here to continue supporting it.

MONITOR

Milka Tadić – Mijović,

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MONITOR, PODGORICA

The *Vicinities* series has fully achieved its goal – it has restored the ties between the post-Yugoslav states severed by the Balkan conflicts a long time ago and opened a dialogue on important topics in the fields of culture, economy, the media... The conclusion we can draw now, after the series has ended, is that we face the same problems, despite all our differences: the corrupt Balkan authorities have captured our societies and public interest, destroyed our economies, devastated education, cultural institutions and values. Although over a decade has passed since the last war ended, propaganda in some Balkan countries is still causing fear of others.

That fear is one of the levers the authorities have been using to stay in power, notwithstanding the fatal results of their rule.

A series such as *Vicinities* helps dispel the fears, facilitates networking and raises issues of public interest to every post-Yugoslav country. It contributes to reconciliation and dialogue. This is why we in the weekly *Monitor* supported this project, as we have been endeavouring to raise issues of utmost social interest and maintain relations with our neighbours.

OTHERS ABOUT US

Both the media in the region and elsewhere have written and spoken about Vicinities. Most of the articles have been collected in our press clippings, available at: <http://cdrsee.org/media.html>

If you skipped pages about the project in this book, you can read everything about the series in the interview Nenad Šebek gave the *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso* (OBC).

OKRUŽENJE, YUGOSPHERE AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD

There are not many parts of the world where a TV talk show can be produced without requiring dubbing or subtitles in order to be broadcast in 5 different countries. But in the Balkans this is possible. Vicinities is a first when it comes to talk shows with a regional approach. “But don’t talk to me about Yugosphere”, says Nenad Šebek, the show’s host.

Okružnje, literally “neighbourhood”, is the first talk show broadcast at the same time in five countries of ex-Yugoslavia, on eight TV channels. Five recordings on the screen from 2 April with four guests in the studio from different countries who will debate – according to the host, Nenad Šebek, “on prejudices that we harbour against each other, the economic crisis and how to tackle it, the media, the Great Powers and the Balkans, and being young in the Balkans”. A satirical slant to the show will not be missing, as each episode will also host the comic actress from Zagreb, Marina Orsag. OBC met Nenad Šebek, who moderates the show together with Petar Lazić.

How did the idea of producing Okružnje come up?

The idea was born out of the fact that, despite South East Europe having split up there are still ties among the neighbouring countries. One of these is certainly language: we’ve transformed it into four different languages that all of us understand! The problems we face all have a regional dimension, thus the solutions cannot but be regional too: they cannot simply be found within the borders of each small state. This is where the idea of launching the first regional talk show dealing with problems afflicting the whole region comes from.

Why did you decide on a talk show?

Because today on TV there are boring hosts with boring programmes. Okružnje has instead been thought up as an extremely dynamic production. The hosts’ questions are no longer than 7-8 seconds, the guests’ answers are just as short.

The programme lasts less than an hour and tackles questions that we believe to be crucial. The first was broadcast on Monday 2nd April and its topic was “prejudices”. The next episodes will be on the “economic crisis”, the “media”, “Great Powers and the Balkans”, and “youth in the Balkans”.

Okruženje is broadcast in five countries on eight different TV channels: on Mondays on Studio B (Belgrade), TV Vranje (Vranje), BHRT (Sarajevo) and TV Vijesti (Podgorica) on Tuesdays on TV Kapital network (Zagreb), on Wednesdays on RTRS (Banja Luka) and on Saturdays on Alsat-M TV (Skopje).

How many viewers do you have?

It's still early to answer the question, the first recording has just been broadcast. Let's say that potentially our catchment area is the whole of the ex-Yugoslav area, obviously bearing in mind that we don't have the same appeal as a reality show... Our objective is to reach those people who are thirsty for this type of information, presented in an original and more modern way.

Who are the guests of the programmes?

In every recording there are guests from four countries. They don't belong to political parties but they have a certain prestige in the public opinion, where they are known for their opinions on the most delicate topics of regional current affairs.

Who funds the project?

Our main partner is the European Fund for the Balkans (EFB), a big organisation composed of four big European foundations: the Robert Bosch Stiftung, the King Badouin Foundation, the Compagnia di San Paolo and the Erste Stiftung. It is a civil society project, not a commercial production, thus the televisions that broadcast it receive it for free. The other partner is the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe (CDRSEE).

We were talking about the common traits and that one of these is surely language. But did the use of a 'common language', not create problems in bringing together the former republics of Yugoslavia? News about Croatia's recent request to subtitle Serbian films comes to mind... nothing came of it in the end...

Language is the smallest of the problems we've had. We were more concerned about the clichés of Yugonostalgia and Yugosphere coming up. This programme has nothing to do with Yugonostalgia or anything like that.

A language understandable to all is what is used. And all the participants in this project have taken in this dimension. Even in Croatia this has been well accepted and we broadcast on Kapital network, one of the main commercial TVs of the region. Obviously we are not on the main channels like the national radio and TV, despite having been in contact with them.

What has been a big surprise for me has been the Programme's broadcasting in Macedonia on the Alsat-M channel, a Macedonian TV station in Albanian language. They of course add subtitles and also broadcast the talk show for Kosovan and Albanian viewers.

This talk show does probably not contribute to Yugonostalgia, but indeed it does have something to say about Jugosphere meaning the relations between the ex-Yugoslav republics...

Let's say we're making the most of a privileged position. As is the case for the economic sector where more is gained on a regional market.

What are your views on the reconciliation process in the region?

Unfortunately in the latter months we have seen displeasing situations. Violence in Macedonia, not to speak of Kosovo and all that is related to it. From my point of view the situation is not satisfactory. If we were to apply a comparative approach and look for instance at how Germany and France were doing 17 years after the end of the Second World War, we would see that they were already putting their effort into the creation of the European Union. Instead looking at where Bosnia Herzegovina is 17 years after the war, at the skirmishes taking place daily between Sarajevo and Banja Luka, how can we consider ourselves satisfied?

How much does European Union's support affect this issue?

In my opinion the European Union could try to use a heavier hand within the enlargement process. Personally I would see all the Western Balkans in the EU immediately. It would surely be a radical change of gear. But inclusion is better than exclusion.

LUKA ZANONI

Published on 10 April 2012

<http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Regions-and-countries/Serbia/>

Okruzenje-Yugosphere-and-its-neighbourhood-115080

TV EDITORS AND ANCHORS ACROSS THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA USED TO IMPATIENTLY WAIT TO SEE WHAT SHARP-WITTED TV CRITIC BRANKA OTAŠEVIĆ HAD TO SAY ABOUT THEIR SHOWS. WE ARE HONOURED THAT VICINITIES HAS CAUGHT HER EYE.

ZOOMING IN

VICINITIES CONVENE

...The media are still clogged up by the election campaign, flooded both by the paid ads and their own news shows in which they are trying to find out what (if anything) is actually behind those wonderful, bombastic phrases. And the TV states are airing countless shows, trying to cajole the party representatives into explaining their programmes, plans and intentions, and into speaking about them clearly, precisely and directly.

It is that kind of (dis)course, the sorely needed breath of fresh air in our current TV news programmes, which the Vicinities series succeeded in establishing. The series is interesting in concept and dynamic in form. It interweaves images and words, states and phenomena in the new states in the territory of the old Yugoslavia, while the questions and answers, the views and comments, are expressed pithily and graphically. The topics are familiar and well known – the economic crisis, unemployment, the status of the media, views on the European Union... Given that anchors Nenad Šebek and Petar Lazić did not invite politicians, but experts in their fields, to appear on their shows, their opinions and statements, interpretations and proposals, come across as more sincere and persuasive.

Vicinities indisputably contributes to better regional communication given that the shows hitherto have demonstrated similarities in nearly all the discussed walks of life in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro: a considerable degree of accord on what is wrong and what needs to be done, and understanding for one's opponents during polemics. This is all the more important (and necessary), because it was precisely the journalists, brought together in one of the Vicinities editions to talk about their work, who highlighted the deficiencies of the media regarding "regional reconciliation".

These, among other things, include insufficient or merely tabloid-like interest in others, insistence on the bad and disregard for the good news stories in the neighbouring countries, sustaining prejudices...

However, given that everyone is wrestling with the same problems at home – with political pressures, floods of irrelevant information, commercialisation, problems in pursuing investigative journalism, difficulties in getting to the truth about corruption – maybe this will encourage the media in the region to try harder and present the situation in the neighbouring countries more accurately to their own publics.

Off their own bat, without middlemen, for their own professional reasons, not because someone else encouraged them to. Vicinities, as the “first regional news show” (broadcast by Studio B and TV Vranje in Serbia), is, namely, the “brainchild” of the European Fund for the Balkans and the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe.

BRANKA OTAŠEVIĆ

Published on 29 April 2012.

<http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/Kritika/tv-program/Okruzenje-na-okupu.sr.html>

BACK ON THE AIR IN LATE 2012

The first edition of *Vicinities* has been completed. Judging by the reactions of our viewers (our most esteemed critics), we have managed to both grab their attention and hold it. Nothing could have pleased us more, because we are aware that nothing is more susceptible to change than a TV channel.

We have also recognized the viewers' message that we should keep up the good work. Although making promises is not popular, we can almost promise a sequel. We are planning on launching a new 12-episode edition of *Vicinities* and dealing with the following subjects: *Your History and Ours*, *Transition*, *War Crimes*, *Secret Service Files*, *Corruption*, as well as the positive sides of the Balkans, above all art.

CDRSEE and EFB would like to thank all directors and Editors-in-Chief of the TV stations that have broadcast *Vicinities*, for their trust in us, for their support to continue and, most of all, for their constructive criticisms and suggestions.

We were particularly pleased to have had *Vreme* and *Monitor*, two extremely eminent weeklies in Serbia and Montenegro, as our media partners.