Media stereotypes and the image of "the other": insights from the Bulgarian mainstream press in the 1990s

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Abstract

The paper has a twofold purpose: to offer some theoretical considerations on the image of "the other" and role of media in ethnic and national stereotyping; and to fill in this frame with examples from Bulgarian printed media in the 1990s analysing the interdependence between intergroup and interstate relations and the image of the neighbours. The theoretical part addresses several issues: stereotypes as cognitive structures, their negative connotations and problems of rigidity and change of media stereotypes. Against this background the text analyses the formation and role of stereotypes in the images of Balkan neighbours as they appear in the Bulgarian mainstream press throughout the 1990s. The research reveals the importance of knowledge about media stereotypes and images of "other" for the inter group and inter-state relations. It shows that printed media have great potential and resources to further aggravate interstate relations. However knowledge of media images and stereotypes of neighbour and their fluctuations over time could help conflict-resolution efforts.

Key words: media, ethnic and national stereotypes, Bulgaria

Nowadays it is almost a truism to claim that media is one of the most powerful vehicles in promoting and reproducing national, ethnic and other stereotypes regarding the "Other." Yet this "common knowledge" seemed to be both reconfirmed and reconfigured in the experience nad practice of the printed media throughout the Balkans following the end of the Cold war. In that particular time and space, where the immediate neighbour aptly featured as the relevant "other"[i], the process of media "image-making of the other" put together

century-long historical "burdens" with transition-related challenges and realities. Traditional stereotypes have been invoked and readdressed and their content has been changed or preserved depending on the circumstances. Inquiring into these issues, the present paper will focus on some theoretical aspects of stereotypes and media stereotyping as a basis for describing how Bulgarian printed media throughout the 1990s constructed and presented the image of the „neighbour" building on and thus reinforcing various stereotypes. The analysis aims at revealing the relationship between perpetuation and/or transformation of stereotypes and changes in the environment and the interdependence between intergroup and interstate relations and the image of the neighbours.

The topic brings together stereotypes and media, which are phenomena of a different order. Stereotypes are related to social relations, inter-group and interpersonal relations and therefore are a subject matter of social sciences. Because of their complexity there is no a single approach to the study of stereotypes, neither there is an agreement on the definition of stereotypes. Rather the term 'stereotype" is ascribed several different meanings depending on the approach to the study of the term and its content. Ashmore and Del Boca (1981: 9-13) distinguish among three separate and yet interrelated perspectives to the study and theory of stereotypes: sociocultural, psychodynamic and cognitive. The sociocultural approach conceives stereotypes as a part of society's non-material culture. Stereotypes are understood as cultural patterns linked with patterns of prejudice.[ii] The psychodynamic perspective is focused on intergroup relations and the role of prejudices. From this perspective, stereotypes serve the motivational needs of the perceiver and are of secondary concern; since stereotypes are of interest primarily because of their link to prejudice, there is an emphasis on the overgeneralization. The cognitive orientation approaches stereotypes as cognitive structures; stereotypes are sets of beliefs for certain objects, which are not substantially different from other cognitive structures and consequently should not be regarded as something intrinsically bad or bizarre.

The multiple approaches to the study of stereotypes predetermine the multiple ways of defining the meaning of 'stereotype" and ensuing varying taxonomies.[iii] The variety of meanings and definitions notwithstanding, there is still a common point that **a stereotype is a set of beliefs about personal attributes of a social group; these personal attributes are most often operationally defined as personality trait adjectives**.

Regarding the image of the "other" – whether "the other" constitutes of internal minorities and ethnic groups, neighbouring states and people, or any group, which can be defined as "them" – stereotypes form the basis of what we think we know about "them." Nowadays media are an important source of information about the "other" since media provide the main "data" about the life of the society and the state. Concerning stereotypes and stereotyping, media are important because of their vast scope, presentational goals and the fact that they distribute what other people – mainly politicians, statesmen, intellectuals, or in short people who may be considered as opinion-makers - say or write. Especially when it comes to the "neighbours", most people consider media as the most important (if not the only) source of information, but also of beliefs, opinions and attitudes.

Regarding the image of "the other" and the role of media one can also extrapolate from Vernon van Dijk's (1987) concept of the role of media in communicating and reinforcing attitudes, thinking and social patterns, regarding ethnic groups. As he points out "print media are among the major channels that communicate attitudes" (van Dijk 1987: 30). This is so because 'social cognition, in general, and ethnic attitudes, in particular, are acquired, shared, validated, normalized, and communicated primarily through talk (and the media) rather than through perception and interaction" (Ibid., 31). Because they provide the main "data" about "the other", media become so relevant a vehicle when talking about stereotype dissemination. Moreover media are particularly given credit for information about national issues (Ibid., 45) and in regions like the Balkans national issues, which usually are related to the neighbours, serve as a basis for various stereotypes.

Therefore studying media stereotypes and images of the neighbours invokes a definition of stereotypes as cognitive structures, which comprise of the perceived or assumed characteristics and the general knowledge of the respective neighbouring state and/or people. Stereotypes are generalizations, which often appear in the form of trait adjectives about "the other." Media exemplify and reinforce the social cognition element of stereotypes (van Dijk 1992: 2). Some of media stereotypes are also interrelated with historically rooted patterns of society non-material culture (Ashmore and del Boca 1981: 16). Defining stereotypes as cognitive structures builds upon a combination between sociocultural and cognitive approaches, both of which have clear relevance to media stereotypes.

Several issues should be introduced to complement this definition of media stereotypes. The first one concerns the problem of whether the notion of badness should be

included in the definition of stereotypes in general and of media stereotypes in particular. There is no agreement among different authors whether stereotypes should be defined as bad by definition. Usually the notion of badness is included in stereotype definition because a stereotype is conceived as a set of beliefs that is incorrectly learned, over generalized, factually incorrect, or rigid. However, as Ashmore and Del Boca correctly point out, "[w]hile stereotypes may well have any or all of these characteristics, the proposed sources of badness should not be incorporated into the definition of the term 'stereotype'" because of three reasons: 1/ it is not parsimonious to add this value judgement to the substantive specification of what a stereotype is; 2/ stereotypes are related to the "normal" process of perceptions of individuals and groups; 3/ the stereotype-as-bad notion has only cut off stereotype research from possibly relevant "basic" research and theory, it has also lead researchers to assume rather than study the alleged reasons for badness (Ibid., 16-17).

The problem of stereotype "badness" is particularly relevant to media stereotypes and media stereotyping. Because of their very nature media are quite susceptible to using stereotypes. Media by definition use what Ehrilch (1973, 20) describes as "language of prejudice," without however implying either negative or positive connotations, but simply emphasizing media disposition to generalization. Since, as pointed above, stereotypes often appear as trait adjectives, often the same words describe both individual and the group.[iv] It is linguistically easy to make the transition from individual to group level and media tend to use collective nouns without qualifications, thus encompassing the collective.[v] Media tendency to favour event over content and the atypical over the systematic (Parenti 1993: 191)[vi] also contribute, though not so directly, to media usage of stereotypes, especially of negative ones.[vii]

Because of their propensity to reproduce and reinforce negative stereotypes[viii] about "the other" media are often seen as intrinsically bad. Hence printed media all over the Balkans are accused of inciting ethnic and national hatreds and intolerance among Balkan peoples thus highly increasing the possibility of conflicts and violence.[ix] And although an extreme one, the media-as-a-cause-for-war notion seems also to be quite popular.[x] While there is a kernel of truth in the interconnection between media and conflicts, violence and war, it is a gross overgeneralization to consider media themselves as a cause of conflicts and war. In fact assigning such a role to media seems to be a stereotype in itself[xi] and does not help much in seeking explanations for real concrete situations.

The mere usage of stereotypes by media is not by itself a negative phenomenon. First, being cognitive by nature, stereotypes in a way are indispensable since they serve as "matrixes," which help people to approach the world around. In this respect media are merely one of the "channels,"[xii] which introduce stereotypes regarding "the other." Second, though rare compared to the negative ones, there are positive stereotypes too because "biases may be pro as well as con" (Allport 1954: 7).[xiii] Moreover focussing only on the negative media stereotyping deprives one from getting the whole picture and from fully understanding the role of the media and the significance of the "image of the other" (Bakalova 1997: 80-81).

It is important to mention that media themselves cannot produce stereotypes and prejudices. Stereotypes and prejudices belong to mind and "[I]n the media these notions and dispositions merely acquire tangible shape, an outward visible expression." Consequently stereotypes and "prejudices take shape or root after the reader or viewer is exposed to the text provided that s/he is in the appropriate disposition" (Roussanov 1994: 2). Thus what media do in fact is to magnify the already existing stereotypes and prejudices. Though media are not stereotypes producers, their importance in permanent re-production and reinforcing of stereotypes and prejudices is significant and should not be neglected. As Vernon Van Dijk (1987: 360) points out "the mass media reproduce and reconstruct the attitudes and discourses in the society".

Here comes the problem of the correspondence between media notions (stereotypes, prejudices) and reality. Ashmore and Del Boca (1982, 17) accentuate on the fact that not only the stereotyped content of media is important, but also "how this content influences the beliefs of individuals." information about individual and groups is attended to, encoded and retrieved" (Ibid., 30). Within the sociocultural paradigm of stereotype study "[M]ost researchers seams to assume that the members of the mass media audience simply "absorb" what is portrayed by the media," which together with "other socializing agents directly and effectively teach prevailing cultural stereotypes." This "absorption" either is seen simply as part of the 'socialization" (structuralist-functionalist wing of the sociocultural orientation) or is described as a manipulation theory (conflict form of the sociocultural orientation) (Ibid., 25). It is not possible, however, to define media stereotyping as only a part of the socialization process or as an absolute manipulation. Rather these two tendencies coexist and the effect of media stereotyping is usually a combination of the two.

Another important issue regarding media stereotypes is the problem of rigidity and change of media stereotypes. The etymology of the word[xiv] implies certain rigidity of stereotypes. Moreover, "the term "rigidity" has, in fact, been given two related but distinct meanings in discussion of stereotypes. First, stereotypes have been regarded as rigid because they are believed to be persistent over time. (…) Second, rigidity has also denoted a psychological quality of the individual perceiver" (Ashmore and Del Boca 1982 16). It is true that social-cognitive research produce evidence according to which many social beliefs seem to be fairly resistant to change. "This inertia was seen to be, in large part, an inevitable consequence of the normal operation of cognitive biases" (Oakes et a, 1994, 73). Despite the inertia and the „intrinsic" rigidity some stereotypes do change. Among different hypotheses and theories about stereotype change there are two approaches which are relevant to media stereotype change.

First, stereotypes change in response to real change, i.e. under conditions where the "other" transforms and consequently becomes actually different from the existing image. It is exactly this "disconfirming information," which contributes to stereotype change (Ibidem.). Though this type of change is considered to effect mainly the individual not the intergroup level, it is still relevant for media stereotype changes because "in the work on the effects of disconfirming information, the overall context seem to influence significantly the way that information was processed" (Ibid., 77) and media usually provide a significant part of this overall context.

The second relevant type is the so-called „illusionary change." Contrary to the first case here the emphasis is on the disjunction between stereotypes and reality. Characteristics and "trait adjectives" about the "other" are based on outcomes (outcomes of behaviour, action, statement, etc.). Change can occur through a bias, which takes one piece of information (the outcome) out of the context without considering other relevant factors. In this way there can occur a change in the stereotype of a given "other" when outcomes changed over time as a result of changes in some other factors, non-related with the nature of the "other," thus producing an illusion of change where there is no a real one. Because of their very nature media many times tend to focus on outcomes often neglecting some relevant factors, which have led to the respective outcomes.

No matter, however, whether stereotypes change because of a real change in the „other" or it is an illusionary change, many authors emphasize that stereotypes are related to

intergroup relations and change according to their change (Ashmore and Del Boca, 1982: 18; Oakes et al 1994: 77): "Historically, intergroup perceptions were viewed as deriving from the existing relationships between groups. In fact, there is ample evidence that stereotypes of nations reflect the prevailing political and economic relations between countries and that changes in political alliances can result in dramatic shifts in stereotypic perceptions" (Hamilton et al 1994: 303).

The interdependence between inter group relations and stereotype change is especially conspicuous in periods of sharp political changes, like the period following the end of the Cold war. These changes have been related to the reconfiguration of interstate relations, which entail changes of media stereotype about the „neighbours." Consequently since the image of the neighbour is highly dependent on the bilateral relations, it is not surprising, that much of the news about the neighbours is political news. In other words political definitions of the neighbours have a powerful impact on those in the press (van Dijk 1992: 8).

These theoretical considerations notes are used to explain how Bulgarian printed media in the 1990s constructed and presented images of the „neighbour" and what was the role of stereotypes in this process.[xv] It should immediately be mentioned that Bulgarian case fully supports the thesis that media themselves do not produce stereotypes. Following is a long quotation, which is both an explanation and an illustration by itself: "The notions which Balkanites have of each other have been established at the level of mass consciousness and are cultivated by folklore, creative literature and arts. They are perpetuated in the education system and historical memory thanks to the continuity between generations; (…) In other words, their vast opinion-shaping potential notwithstanding, the media are but a part of an enormous system of interconnected notions of different nature - memories, tastes, impressions, "grandma's and grandpa's tales," personal experience and innumerable other details. The superimposition of notions from all these spheres builds a stereotype…" (Roussanov 1994: 3).

The quotation clearly shows how rich and deeply rooted are Balkan and in particular Bulgarian notions of the neighbour, appearing in the printed media. If we extrapolate from the given above definition of media stereotypes, we shall see that they are cognitive structures defining the neighbours' characteristics. They are embedded in these notions of the „neighbour," which on their part are built on various sources. It can be said that stereotypes summarize the main characteristics of the neighbour. Obviously most of the stereotypes,

monitored in Bulgarian press, are also interrelated with historically rooted patterns of society non-material culture and therefore it is history, which can provide a „key" to media stereotypes and stereotyping.

The stereotype-history connection is more than conspicuous. In the century long co-existence Balkan people have developed about each other notions that are are deeply rooted in history. In this sense stereotypes are normal and natural since they can be seen as „legacy of the past" (Ibidem.) What is not so normal and natural (though it seems to be more a general rule than an exception for the Balkan printed media) is the way media use history to exemplify and justify stereotypes. The present seems to be deeply rooted in history and accordingly news is selectively adjusted so as to fit the „traditional," historically proved" and „long-known" role of the neighbour. This is so since "media have the power to imbue even the simplest description of historical events with negative implications for the present day" (BN4/1996: 2).

Many of the Balkans historical and current developments have a clear relevance to the respective national causes and national causes are immediately related to media stereotypes. The ways Bulgarian media portrayed the „neighbours" show a direct correlation between the „image of the neighbour" and Bulgarian „political/national cause." This correlation is aptly illustrated by the image of Macedonia and the Macedonians in the Bulgarian press throughout the 1990s. This image is not merely burdened; it is bursting with history. In that period it is practically impossible to find in any paper a serious commentary on Macedonia making no references to history. The obvious reason is related to the bilateral contradictions on issues of nation and language. However, there is a deeper reason since Macedonia itself and the so-called "Macedonian issue" has been considered a central point in Bulgarian national question (see Bakalova 2003).[xvi] Another example is the way Greece and the Greeks are presented in Bulgarian press. Regarding Bulgarian national cause their usual image is of a people who falsify history because instead of admitting the fact that in Greece live descendants of ethnic Bulgarians official Greece and Greek media call them "slavophones." Indicative for the relation with Bulgarian national cause is also the fact that in all Bulgarian papers "slavophones" is always written in inverted comas or with "so called."

Following this line of defining the relationship between the national causes and respective neighbours' images, it can be said that Balkan peoples' concept of each other are prompted and cultivated by the problems ensuing from proximity (or neighbourhood).

Therefore while the contemporary image of the neighbour is mostly inherited from the past, popular stereotypes and prejudices seem to be firmly incorporated in political contradictions in the Balkans. In this sense the notions about the relationship between stereotypes and the intergroup relations (in this particular case mostly bilateral political relations) are supported and exemplified by the Balkan and Bulgarian printed media portraying of the neighbours.

Generally the images of the neighbours presented by the Bulgarian printed media reflect the political images of the respective countries and their policies. "Nation is often assessed by its State and the State by its leaders" (BN4/1996, 2).[xvii] Thus the positive or negative sign of a neighbour's image depends significantly on the political (bilateral) relations.[xviii] On the one hand, this is only natural, as the purpose of the media is to report events. On the other hand, media tend to apply „logical" patterns in interpreting events. If bilateral relations are bad the media seek and find some explanations, which might be related to history, religion, national psychology, geopolitics or a combination of these. If they are good the media find an explanation too.

It was explained above that „badness" should not be included by definition in stereotypes. However the stereotypes in the printed media all over the Balkans are predominantly negative ones. Part of the explanation, of course, is in media propensity to sensational reporting and permanent hunt for scandals and sensations. Bulgarian papers are no exception. However it is not only media inclination to sensations, which stands in the core of negative stereotypes and implications in neighbours' images. In many cases the mere information background implies negativism. Media cannot go against realities (and against their very nature for that matter[xix]). Reporting grim realities and events cannot but effects the overall image of the respective country and people negatively. Thus for example the information background on Albania is „by definition" with strong negative implications. Reports about thefts, bloodsheds, chaotic shooting, drag trafficking and so on, even with no comments, invariably imply insecurity and instability, chaos and anarchy and thus are by themselves a strong factor of negativism in the image of Albania.[xx]

Regarding bilateral relations media are even less „able" (if at all) to go against the „reality." It is not possible to cover positively or even to report neutrally about a country, which has performed hostile or offensive acts against your country. Thus attitudes to concrete events (plus history) shape the images of the people.[xxi] Therefore negativism in neighbours"

images stems from a combination of history (or rather history interpretation) as a source for mostly negative stereotypes and some problems in any aspect of bilateral relations.[xxii]

In this context Balkan countries (and media respectively) could be seen as interconnected vessels - when tensions mounted on one side the other side is simply forced to respond „adequately" (BN4/1996, 2). On media level this led to what can be described as „inter-media communication." It was most typical of the Macedonian and Bulgarian press where particular stories spark "exchange of fire" between papers. (Notably, this exchange of fire might be triggered not only by a particular text but also as protest against an „attitude."[xxiii])

Only when seeking to answer why bilateral relations are good or improving media turned their attention to the common traits between neighbours and positive developments. In the general case these were from the „extra-political" sphere. It was typical for Bulgarian press the have a discrepancy and sometimes even contradiction between „political space" implications and non-political implications. Since these two spaces constitute one and the same whole, it was even more conspicuous that they emanated and were reflected in almost opposite messages. The positive notions and stereotypes were extrapolated from cultural sphere and sports, they were related to national psychology and the beauty of nature.[xxiv]

It is important to mention that positive and negative stereotypes about a given neighbour were not homogeneous across the whole spectrum of Bulgarian press in the 1990s. There were two dailies, which showed stable commitments, both positive and negative - the papers of the then two biggest political parties in Bulgaria: „Demokratsiya", the Union of Democratic Forces' daily and „Douma," the Bulgarian Socialist Party daily. These papers defined stereotypes of the neighbours ideologically and their leanings depended on the respective party policies. Thus in that period „Douma" was definitely pro-Serb, anti-Turkish and pro-Greek (in compliance with BSP general pro-Russian and anti-American orientation), whereas „Demokratsya" was of strong anti-Serb and pro-Turkish leanings (because of UDF anti-Russian and pro-American policy).

The last important point about neighbours' images concerns changes of notions and consequently changes in stereotypes. As explained above there is interdependence between intergroup/interstate relations and the image of the neighbours. Bulgarian press generally confirms to this rule. Beside on relations, images also depend on events. Therefore the relevant question here is to what extend media stereotypes about neighbours depend or can be

changed by contemporary events.[xxv] Thus for example during the Bosnian war the image of Serbs was deteriorated to such an extent that many historically developed stereotypes (like for instance about the Serb chauvinism and aggressiveness) were revived and reinforced. Once, however, the war ended, those stereotypes seemed to fade away. In fact they were still there, only they did not have such an importance in the overall image of Serbs in Bulgarian press. It is probably the nature of the transition itself, when everything around seemed to be in permanent change, which made the images of Bulgarian neighbours to „fluctuate" depending on the change of circumstances.

Following is a long quotation, showing how Bulgarian attitudes and approaches changed in accordance with the change of situation: "The past four years have shown a consistent tendency of publishing bizarre stories about Romania (from villages attacked by crows to people bitten by dogs). On the whole, the most gross and insulting characteristics have tended to decrease. No one says any more that "Romanian is not a nationality, it is a trade" (24 Chassa daily, 20/04/1994). This was partly due to our first-hand experience: the Bulgarian crisis showed that notion that Bulgarians had of Romanians were not quite adequate. Bulgarians found themselves in the position of losing the lead to Romanians, stereotyped as poor and *mamaligari* (literally, "hominy-eaters," a pejorative term for Romanians from a traditional Romanian hominy-like dish) (BN8/1999, 42).

The fluctuation of images does not necessarily lead to stable change of stereotypes about neighbours. By the end of the 1990s transition dynamics in Balkan societies was still high (not to mention the extreme situation of Yugoslavia's troublesome disintegration). Because of that it is hard to consider stereotype transformations as completed. However, a visible process of changes of stereotypes can be recognized throughout the studied period. Thus the image of the Balkan neighbours in the mass media exhibited both continuity with historically formed and sustained attitudes and stereotypes, as well as transformation and adaptation related to the post-Cold-war geopolitical changes and the dynamics of bilateral relations. These are characteristics of media image-making in Balkan countries that can be found in the following years too.

The analysis calls for another important conclusion in respect to the problem of media stereotypes and public attitudes. Research on media neighbours' images reveals that it is not possible by defining what are the notions and stereotypes of neighbouring countries and people in the monitored media to establish whether they correspond to reality, i.e. whether

people really share them. Hence media images and stereotypes offer but an approximation (if any) to genuine and really existing public attitudes and feelings towards the relevant "other". In conclusion concerns about the importance of knowledge for media stereotypes should also be addressed. The research clearly indicates that printed media have great potential and resources to further aggravate interstate relations when necessary. However knowing better the media image and stereotypes of the neighbour and their fluctuations over time could help greatly efforts in conflict-resolution and good-neighbourly relations.

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i Internal minorities can also represent the relevant "other." Though there are several similarities between the construction of the media images of a "neighbour" (be it a neighbouring state and/or a neighbouring people) and an "internal minority" (which, in a way, is also a neighbour - to the majority), the emphasis in this paper is on the image of the "other" in the former sense, i.e. understood as neighbouring states and people.

ii These patterns of prejudice are relevantly consistent across time and region within the country. Such consistency is assumed to derive from culture.

iii Ashmore and Del Boca's taxonomy (1982, 14-15) of psychological meanings of the 'stereotype" divides then into two broad groups, depending on whether stereotype is define as bad, or not. The issue of "bad" stereotypes is discussed further in the analysis

iv In English there is no difference between singular and plural of the adjectives. In Bulgarian there is a linguistic difference between singular and plural of the adjectives. The meaning, however, allows the same extrapolation from individual to group level. For example in Bulgarian "The Serb is bloodthirsty" (without other references and explanations) can also be read as "Any Serb is bloodthirsty" which ultimately leads to 'serbs (in general) are bloodthirsty."

v The statement 'serbs are bloodthirsty" can easily be read as "All Serbs are bloodthirsty."

vi Since Parenti (similarly to Vernon van Dijk in *Communicating Racism*) focuses mainly on media manipulation, in his understanding media stereotypes and stereotyping are considered as mainly negative phenomenon because they are used for deliberate distortion of the "image" for political/elitist purposes. Though negative stereotypes do not exhaust cases of media stereotyping, they are still important as a reminder not to downplay the role of the political factor and elite's interests in the media "image-making" of "the other." In Van Dijk's (1987, 46) understanding of media images of internal minorities even when media themselves do not formulate negative opinions and do not introduce negative stereotypes, "they provide a definition of the ethnic situation that makes such negative inferences not only possible but also plausible. In this way they both reformulate prejudice and reinforce the partial model of the ethnic situation."

vii Thus for example for a certain period of time the image of Romania in all Bulgarian mainstream papers has been mainly related to the stereotypes of backwardness and certain eccentricity so that even "pure" information (like routine news about political events) has been often embedded in a stereotyped framework implying the backwardness of Romania/Romanians sometimes in a piquant way.

viii There is a common, "non-scientific" understanding according to which bad or negative stereotypes are in fact prejudices. According to Ehrlich (1973, 21) 'stereotypes" is how the cognitive dimension of prejudices is labelled. In both cases, however, "badness" does not seem to be intrinsic in stereotype definition, but a part of the overall understanding of stereotypes.

ix Thus, for instance, the statement "Throughout the Balkan region, the media are producing such "hate speech," that the publics are being conditioned to support any new conflict that may arise" (Lenkova 1998, 9) embodies the main point of the whole book *Hate Speech in the Balkans.*

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[x] In *Forging war* Mark Thompson explains war in Bosnia and Herzegovina exclusively with media inference and manipulation. As stated in the forward "The book demonstrates that war could not have begun, or been sustained, by Serbia without the co-option of the Serbian media as the willing creatures of the Miloshevic government" (Thompson 1994, IX).

[xi] It is true that media are conveniently used for manipulation and mobilization of support for certain causes. However, explaining conflicts and wars with the role of media is both superficial and incomplete. Hardin (1995, 147) explains the violent disintegration of Second Yugoslavia in terms of pre-emption ("pre-emptive world" as he puts it). In such a pre-emptive world media obtains excessive power to reproduce and reinforce negative stereotypes and prejudices, thus further making the world more "pre-emptive." Media also play special role in the sequence of beliefs and events. Therefore a vicious circle is formed between conditions under which media increasingly use negative stereotypes, on the one hand, and reinforcement of the conditions by the media themselves, on the other. Media themselves cannot create stereotypes and prejudices. Rather, media resemble a magnifying glass, but then there must be something to be magnified.

[xii] Education and school are far more significant factors of socialization. It is not mass media, but rather family and school that initially acquaint people with ethnic and national stereotypes (which are amongst the most widespread types of stereotypes about "the other").

[xiii] For example all Greek printed media, the differences among different papers notwithstanding, offer positive stereotyping of Serbs as Greeks" closest friends. The positive attitudes towards Serbs are due mainly to the fact that both people share Orthodox Christianity. (See *Balkan Neighbours* Newsletter, issues 1-8, Greek chapters.)

[xiv] The term 'stereotype' has been "imported" in social sciences from printing, where it initially meant "metallic plate case from mold taken from movable type" (The Modern English Dictionary 1987, 710).

[xv] Illustrations and citations in this part are taken from Bulgarian reports in the biannual *Balkan Neighbours* Newsletter, published by the ACCESS Association, Sofia, 1994-1999). Issues of the Newsletter present the results of a Balkan-wide project (covering initially five and later on seven Balkan countries), under which the mainstream press in the project countries has been monitored for the general image of neighbouring Balkan countries and people. For the sake of brevity the Newsletter will be cited below with the abbreviation BN, the number of the issue and the respective year; example "BN1/1994".

[xvi] See the sections on Macedonia and the Macedonians in the Bulgarian reports in all issues of the *Balkan Neighbours* Newsletter. It should be mentioned, however, that there have been increasing changes in the way Bulgarian press portrayed Macedonia and the Macedonians. By the end of the 1990s some of the Bulgarian papers had already begun writing "Macedonian language" and "Macedonian nation" without quotation marks. Though this is not an indicator of a radical change, it still shows that the Bulgarian media attitude to Macedonia and the Macedonians was changing towards less identifying Macedonia with Bulgarian national cause. This can be considered as an indicator for changes in the public opinion regarding the issue. Consequent developments in Macedonia and in the bilateral relations (especially after the political change in Macedonia at the end of 1998) resulted in a decreasing tendency of Bulgarian media to relate the presentation of Bulgarian-Macedonian bilateral relation with historical references.

[xvii] The only exception is the Bulgarian press attitude to Macedonia and the Macedonians. The Bulgarian press generally showed a dual standard in its attitude to the Macedonians, on the one hand, and the rulers of Macedonia, on the other. The image of the 'state" (the incumbents, the institutions, the media, customs officials...) and the "populace" are diametrically opposed - the former is a constant source of anti-Bulgarian messages, and the latter, Macedonians are our brethren, or at least cousins. In several years this point of view underwent minimal change, mostly at the end of 1990s. The change was related to VMRO-DPMNE – with its access to power it turned out that not all politicians in Macedonia could be considered Serbo-communists or anti-Bulgarian. (See the sections on Macedonia and the Macedonians in the Bulgarian reports in all issues of the *Balkan Neighbours* Newsletter.)

xviii A good example is the image of Turkey in the Bulgarian press. The positive developments in the bilateral political and economic relations in the second half of 90s led to a tangible positive change Turkey's image in Bulgarian press. (See the section on Turkey and the Turks in BN8/1999.)

xix Negative implication are often achieved through „editor's tricks" like for example the usage of blunt expressions, which „grade on the ear" and give „credit" in the severe competition in media market.

xx See sections on Albania and the Albanians in Bulgarian reports in BN6/1997, BN7/1998 and BN8/1999 (Albania „entered" the project from the fifth issue of *Balkan Neighbours* Newsletter on). Albania's overall image is further worsened by the fact that Albania is the only Balkan Country whose image is not influenced by bilateral relations with Bulgaria. In general the coverage of Albania and the Albanians is scarce and illustrates the „no news is good news" maxim. The interest of Bulgarian press in Albania is in direct correlation with the gravity of the situation there. Therefore heightened interest means more negativism in the overall image.

xxi As far as the attitudes (and history interpretations) are ambiguous, the image of the respective neighbour is ambiguous too. A good example in this respect offers the Bulgarian media coverage of Serbs and Serbia in the first weeks after the beginning of NATO bombing on Yugoslavia during the Kosovo crisis.

xxii. Practically any problem in bilateral relations may be interpreted, and often is, through the prism of long-past events of 20, 50, 100 and more years ago. Many papers laid historical blame on the neighbours. This is significant not only because history plays an important role in the Balkans but also because in the last decade of 20th century Bulgaria saw many historical events reinterpreted, and that heightened public interest in such problems.

xxiii Cf. "The Yugoslav press mentions Bulgaria only on negative occasions, and this country's name appears in the Yugoslav papers only in relation to some scandal"; Standard daily, 23/10/1997).

xxiv The following quotation illustrates the differentiation between the two spheres. On the background of predominantly negative „political" image of Serbia state and the Serbs a statement like "[the Serbs] will not say a word against their pal. This is national rather than political mentality" (168 Chassa weekly, 22-28/10/1997) reveals a clear positively burdened stereotype about Serb ethnopsychology, according to which because of their strong feeling of unity and belonging to the group, Serbs will never go against one another in public („like Bulgarians do" being implied).

xxv In this context it is important to distinguish between stable stereotypes and incidental reactions. However as BN3/1995 exemplifies, a single event may transform (though only for a month) national media attitudes (See the section News and Views on the attempt on the life of then Macedonian President Kiro Gligorov, BN3/1995, 37-41)

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