

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

MEDIA COVERAGE OF EVENTS FROM THE 1990S ON THE OCCASION OF 30 YEARS OF DISSOLUTION OF YUGOSLAVIA

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The narratives in media discourse of B&H do not contribute to normalization of relations, they are all exclusive, one-sided, two-faced, unprincipled, and often aggressive.



Three decades after, wartime events are interpreted in the same way as when they actually happened, the guilt is seen on one side only, self-reflection and self-criticism are virtually inexistent.



Ever since the High Representative for B&H, Valentin Incko, supplemented the B&H Penal code with the Decision on ban of negating a genocide, it is often mentioned in the Republic of Srpska that Serbs are a genocidal nation. That thesis is, by the way, mostly mentioned by Serbian politicians.

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MEDIA COVERAGE OF EVENTS FROM THE 1990s ON THE OCCASION OF 30 YEARS OF DISSOLUTION OF YUGOSLAVIA

Thirty years after the start of the final decomposition of SFRY, it would appear that the situation in the society is the same, or at least, similar to the one in the dawn of war. Exclusiveness, unprincipledness, hypocrisy, relativization, generalization, intolerance, hatred, are more than present and they are eating out the already unhealthy social tissue of states on post-Yugoslav area, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Political discourse, dominated by intolerance and hatred, has become an integral part of narrative matrix, i.e. of a system of values in general, and according to the *perpetuum mobile* principle, without consuming a lot of energy, it endlessly continues to burden the public sphere. We cannot neglect the "discourse from the bottom", that is, the prevailing narrative present among the population, which does not significantly differ from the "discourse from the top", that is, discourse of political elites. They are mutually intertwined and conditioned, providing fuel to each other. However, greater guilt certainly lies with political elites who use the media to place the aggressive discourse, thus maintaining the state of latent intolerance.

Three decades from the start of the war in SFRY and a quarter of a century after the end of war in BaH, the process of normalization in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not only not progressing, but it seems at times it is not even stagnating, but actually regressing. Political elites, along with the population, are unable to reach a consensus about some basic aspects, such as, e.g. the character of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the one hand, the nominally Serb option in BaH advocates the thesis that it was exclusively a civil war, while the, conditionally speaking, Bosniak side advocate that there was an aggression on BaH. In both cases, as well as in the case of Croat side, the armies and the peoples led defensive wars, and there is a persistence on this for the past three decades. Character of the war, the issue of guilt, victims, causes and consequences of conflicts, burden not only the public sphere but the society in general. The

attitudes being persisted on, have been built in the system of values, and it is not being doubted. There is practically no self-criticism; labelling, stigmatization and proscribing became a general spot and a dominating pattern in communication.

Unlike the 1990s, when ethno-national elites emitted a discourse filled with hate through classic media and people were merely a recipient, today, by means of social media, the people have a possibility to create and emit a discourse that, regrettably, does not differ much from the discourse of political elites. Although they are not representative, social media can certainly serve as a sort of a test for the situation in the society, primarily for recognizing a dominant narrative.

The stale mate position of Bosnia and Herzegovina is certainly by large caused with the final outcome of the war, which, in the essence, did not have explicit winners or explicit losers. The Dayton agreement that silenced the weapons enabled the ethnonational elites in BaH a free interpretation and calling upon it as needed, that is, when it is handy for realization of their goals. A volatile interpreting of the Dayton agreement and insisting on it, just as digressing from it, has been present from the very beginning, and especially in the last few years as the political crisis in BaH was more and more turning into a general crisis of society. Interpreting the Dayton agreement by the principle of "sliding a hand into a bag of candies and looking for the sweetest one" has become a part of a dominant narrative matrix. Such an approach has created a situation of constant uncertainty and a feeling of an endangered vital national interest, which is abundantly used by political elites.

The dominant narrative matrix may be divided into multiple narratives, such as, inter alia, narrative of commemoration, narrative of generalization, narrative of relativization, independentism narrative, unitarist narrative, ethno-nationalistic narrative. Although they are mutually intertwined, conditioned, and caused by each other, we can note specific characteristics of each of them.

INDEPENDENTISM NARRATIVE

In the past few years, especially since the holding of a referendum on the Day of the Republic of Srpska in 2016, the independentism narrative is imposed as dominating, among the political elite of the RS – first and foremost in the ranks of the ruling, mostly SNSD, but also among the population in the RS, which is manifested in the social media as such. The base of this narrative lies in the insisting on the Republic of Srpska's right to self-determination. Anything falling out of that framework is immediately attacked and criticized. The discussion is allowed only about the ways of realization of the idea, not on its substance.

Unlike the wartime narrative, with the focus also on independent RS, the independentism narrative does not insist on an armed conflict but rather on legal and political, but just like the wartime narrative, its essence also is the thesis on independent RS.

Political elites in the Republic of Srpska, foremost SNSD and alike structures, use the issue of independence and referendum on the status of the Republic of Srpska from time to time, when it is necessary to draw away the attention from essential problems, as a reaction on tendencies in BaH and surroundings that, in their opinion, endanger the national rights of Serbs and the position of the Republic of Srpska, or simply for the sake of heating up the atmosphere among the population in the aim of gaining the political points.

Independentism narrative corresponds to the "all-Serbian narrative" that insists on the final solution to the Serb national issue. Its essence comprises of ethno-nationalistic matrix that has been dominant since the 1980s and understands a thesis on unique Serb living space, one state for all the Serbs, united Serb territories and similar ideas, which have been present in this format for over three decades. Unlike advocating these ideas in the past, especially in the 1990s, the independentism narrative is not as aggressive to call for the armed conflict, but it is persistent and uncompromising as a wartime narrative.

Three decades after the start of wars in former Yugoslavia, when reporting on wartime events, whether those were commemorations, war victories or defeats, agreements and similar, the independentism narrative draws all those aspects through the issue of the position of Republic of Srpska and its fight for independence.

The most obvious examples of independentism narrative are noticeable in reporting about the RS Day, when indicted members of the RS Army are being processed for war crimes, as well as during marking the anniversaries of military victories, but also the suffering of people. In the basis of all reporting on said topics there underlie a thesis on fighting for the Republic of Srpska, i.e. sacrificing for it.

UNITARIST NARRATIVE

The opposite to the independentism narrative is the unitarist narrative that is dominant among the Bosniak political elite, but also among the civic political options – where, truth is, it appears in somewhat covert form. It is characterized by equally uncompromising position on the organization and position of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with no possibility to discuss the essence of it, but only the ways of realization of the idea.

It corresponds, more or less, to the wartime narrative that insisted on a unitary BaH. Unlike it, it does not advocate to such a large degree aggressive and radical methods such as armed conflict, though there are examples when even highly positioned politicians, at mentioning of a possibility of self-determination of Republic of Srpska, threaten with armed conflict, i.e. they state that the secession of the RS cannot be realized in a peaceful manner.

Just like the independentism narrative, the unitarist narrative rests on exclusiveness. In essence, they are based on diametrically opposing ideological concepts, and even opposing systems of value. In its fight for the identity, the independentism narrative rests on a thesis of a nation as an ethnical construct, while unitarist narrative advocates the thesis on a nation as a political construct. Both these approaches are, however, only a part of a bipolar perception of the world, which is still present.

Although the Iron Curtain fell in the end of the 1980s and start of the 1990s, the Cold War discourse is still present. Conflicting parties in the 1990s war did not only differ in ethnical and religious aspects, but also ideological and to a good degree cultural, that is, they differed by different system of values that almost all aspects of organization of society originated from. To that regard, these two narratives also advocate a different perception of nation and nationality, which causes all the misunderstandings, intolerance and conflicts.

Independentism narrative, close to the "eastern perception of the world", where the leading part is played by Russia and as of recently, China, on the one hand, and unitarist narrative, close to "western perception of the world", headed by the USA and the EU on the other hand, essentially represent a turning point in a battle for interest and power in this area.

Both narratives are prone to give themselves a greater significance by insisting on importance and interest of the conflicting blocks in them. The most obvious example for this is pointing out or asking for support for one's ideas from conflicting blocks, e.g. congratulations of Russian or Chinese president to the officials of Republic of Srpska-on the one hand, or support of European officials to political

parties advocating the idea of civil Bosnia and Herzegovina-on the other hand.

With no option to achieve not only consensus, but also compromise, and with no intention to step away from the starting positions, both narratives significantly contribute to the preservation of the state of latent antagonism and essential stale mate position of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

THE NARRATIVE OF COMMEMORATIONS

Although, at least at a first glance, it is a part of the culture of remembrance, narrative of commemorations in its essence goes beyond the usual process of creation of a symbolic heritage that serves as an initiator of the meaning of what happened in the past. The narrative of commemorations over emphasize lamentation over own victims, at the same time using generalization, proscribing the other side.

Commemoration narrative in the form of over-emphasized lamentation over own victims is more present in nominally Serb public opinion in BaH, mostly because the Serb civilian war victims are far fewer than Bosniak, and that "gap" needs to be filled with over-emphasizing the own victims. Often military victims are mentioned and given the same significance as to civilian victims of war. In media, conditionally speaking, close to the RS ruling structures, almost on daily basis there are reports about commemorating Serb victims, often military victims. In those reports, dominated by generalization, there are prevailing pathetic images that are supposed not only to evoke sorrow for your own people, but also a disguise towards the other side. In that way, the state of latent antagonism and hatred towards the other is being maintained.

Similar to the "Serbian version", the "Croatian commemoration narrative" also over-emphasizes own victims, trying to create a feeling of sorrow, but also of contempt towards the other.

With regard to the "Bosniak narrative of commemoration", it equally evokes the feeling of contempt towards the other, but the approach in evoking sympathy is different. Unlike the other two narratives, the Bosniak commemoration narrative does not over-emphasize so much the role of a victim in everyday discourse. However, there is a presence of another aspect that explains the lack of over-emphasizing, and that is a creation of a sort of a cult of victimization; based on it there is no need to over-emphasize the victimization of the Bosniak people because it is being understood.

Although all the victims are the same in the sense of suffering, although they all deserve duly piety, by over-

emphasizing victims of only one side in a situation where there is a disbalance in number of victims, at least when it comes to "Serb commemoration narrative", there is an attempt to create a perception on equal suffering.

Over-emphasizing reports on victims is closely related to the independentism narrative. They complement, giving strength to one another. Over-emphasized reporting on Serbian victims and evoking sympathy on one side and contempt on the other, aims at fortifying the idea about the necessity of Republic of Srpska's independence. By generalizing crimes, if we talk about civilian war victims, also putting military victims with them, the commemoration narrative in conjunction with independentism narrative, causes the feel of unrest among the Serb people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, primarily in the RS, and creates a perception on the necessity of realization of independence so that the crimes and suffering do not repeat, without any reflection to the crimes committed in the name of and during the battle for the Republic of Srpska.

A separate segment of reporting on crimes is reporting on the suffering of the other side. In that case, usually only the facts are presented, without stating impressions and pathetic portraying of victims and generalization. Often there is relativization and taking out of context, as well as quasi usage of arguments that most often correspond to the logical mistake "does not follow" (non sequitur). For example, when reporting on commemorations claiming that perpetrators still have not been processed (in court), it presents a pseudo-evidence that the other side does not want peace.

GENERALIZATION NARRATIVE

Generalization narrative is an integral part of the aforementioned narratives, without it, the others are essentially impossible. Based on separating of a few crime cases, an inappropriate general claim about the collective guilt is being constructed. This narrative is present in all sides, regardless of ethnic and religious affiliation, or political and ideological preference.

Although present in all levels, both among the political elite and among the people, it is far more severe when inappropriate generalization is applied by the political elite. Their word may cause far more serious consequences than comments in social media, like, for example, when Bakir Izetbegovic stated that Serbs are a bad people, saying he was not sure about whether there are no bad people but just bad leaderships, pointing to the example of Milorad Dodik and people who vote for him.

Generalization narrative rests on exclusiveness. For everythin that happened in the war, from causes to all

sufferings and consequences, the blame is always on one side-the other side. There is no self-criticism, self-reflection, respect to attitude of others. Regardless of which side is in question, the war started exclusively as a guilt of the other, and that narrative is now being persisted on for here decades. All media reporting, politicians' statements and communication "from the bottom", on social networks, regarding wartime events, are based on the same premise – the others are guilty for the war as well as for the existing situation that is a consequence of war events. Although the usual starting point is that official policies are to blame, it usually ends in generalization, putting all members of a people into the same hat.

Generalization is particularly expressed in social media when users, without choosing the words, openly spread hatred and intolerance, threatening others, firing personal insults, advocating the idea on collective guilt and responsibility of one side and suffering and righteousness of the other. As the discourse sharpens in the public sphere, heated up by inappropriate expressions of politicians, there is noticeable sharpening of the discourse in social media. The users often act as "lawyers" of politicians, defending not only their positions, but themselves as well. They do not give up on generalization, expressing absolute guilt of one side, and innocence of the other side. Although social networks may be looked upon as a kind of a "safety valve", that type of communication is inappropriate and additionally burdens the normalization.

Up until a year ago, generalization was noticeable only during commemorating dramatic events, such as genocide of Srebrenica, during marking significant dates for certain nations, such as the Day of the RS, or at the occasion of arrests of indicted for war crimes or court processes thereof. At that occasion the public sphere "heats up" and politicians, most frequently through classic media, and citizens through social networks, express generalization that additionally "undermine" the process of normalization. However, as the political situation in BaH gets more and more complex, in the recent times there is hardly a day without "fire works" on social media, without particular cause, again with dominant application of inappropriate generalization.

With this narrative, we can notice one specific kind of narrative present in the Republic of Srpska – auto-generalization. Lately, and especially since the former High Representative, Valentin Incko, imposed the Law on ban of negating the genocide, in the Republic of Srpska there is often mentioning a thesis that Serbs are genocidal nation. It is mostly mentioned by the Serb politicians. Although this inappropriate generalization is frequent in social media, it could never be heard by the politicians from Federation BaH. Sometimes it is heard that the Republic of Srpska is a

genocidal creation, but never that Serbs are a genocidal people. Hence, only the RS politicians use this term with the intention to, using the logical mistakes, such as the mistake "does not follow", create a perception among the RS population that, primarily, the Bosniaks treat the Serbs as genocidal nation due to the Law that forbids negating the genocide. Their logical matrix in this case derives from the fact that genocide cannot be negated, via a qualification that the RS is a genocidal creation, to the position that Serbs are genocidal, where this last one is mentioned only by them (the Serbs). In that way they attempt to create a feeling of fear and contempt towards the Bosniaks and Bosnia and Herzegovina, depicting it as an "impossible creation" with no room for Serbs.

RELATIVIZATION NARRATIVE

In the process of stereotyping and creating a narrative matrix with prevailing generalization on absolute guilt on the one hand, and undisputable righteousness on the other hand, relativization is mandatorily used. It is especially present when reporting on war crimes, i.e. when they are being commented in social media.

There are two types of relativization, explicit and implicit. Explicit relativization understands direct negating and diminishing of victims of the other side. The most obvious example is negating the number of victims in Srebrenica genocide. By diminishing the number of victims and insisting on a thesis that the killed were predominantly soldiers in retreat, stranded in the woods or surrendered, there is relativization of crimes and diminishing of victims, trying to provide "cover" for own claims on absolute righteousness.

Implicit relativization understands providing facts data, without providing details or impressions, but it is followed by examples of suffering among own nation. At the example of genocide in Srebrenica, the implicit relativization of crimes committed over the Bosniaks is presenting the Serbs victims in Podrinje region (eastern part alongside Drina river). In that way the crime is implicitly justified as there is a presumption that it was a revenge in an affect, on the one hand, also diminishing its significance on the other, pointing out that there are victims on the other side as well.

Though it is necessary to insist on a piety for all the victims, relativization narrative is doing the opposite – by emphasizing victims of own people in the context of mentioning the victims of other people, paying respect is devalued and there is an attempt to create a feeling of injustice due to alleged mentioning of victims of only one side. By relativizing own role and significance in committed crimes, there is an attempt to equally distribute the guilt and to decrease own responsibility, on the one hand, and

to stress the guilt of the other side, whether it was in a direct correlation or not.

Relativization narrative is closely related to other narratives, and they are all based on exclusiveness. Additionally, relativization narrative has a role to devalue the victim so that the other narratives get stronger effects.

ETHNO-NATIONALISTIC NARRATIVE

Although all aforementioned narratives are inter-connected and mutually conditioned, ethno-nationalistic narrative dominates and unifies all the narratives. They are all based on ethno-national perception of not only state and social organization, but of life in general. Even when nominally calling upon civic approach, particular political options, such as SDA, basically advocate ethno-national approach.

Relativization is being made according to ethno-national principles. Role and crimes of one side in a conflict are being relativized at the expense of the other ethno-national group. Commemoration narrative over emphasize suffering of one ethno-national group, implicitly proscribing the other group. According to the independentism narrative, one ethno-national group has the right to self-determination, neglecting the status and position of other ethno-national groups. Generalization is based on inappropriate general claim on collective guilt of one ethno-national group.

Besides the mentioned narratives there are others, such as traditional, conservative and modern – progressive ones. Conservative is more or less present in the whole BaH, but more present in the RS. The dominating narrative in the Republic of Srpska insists on re-traditionalization. Within that, there are conservative ideas being advocated that are to a large degree exclusive, such as rights of LGBT persons, relation towards minorities, the issue of a nation, religion, etc. On the other side, progressive narrative insists on respecting the legacy of western civilization, such as respect of rights of minorities, relation towards family, nation, religion, etc. Progressive narrative often goes in “combination” with unitarist, which advocates civil concept of the state. However, it often happens that it, in fact, covers the ethno-national narrative, favorizing one ethno-national option. Both narratives insist on a thesis that war, besides being a fight for survival, was also a battle for preserving certain values, traditional on the one hand, and progressive, on the other.

Generally speaking, none of the mentioned narratives contributes to normalization. They are all one-sided, two-faced, unprincipled and often aggressive. Three decades since the start of the war in Yugoslavia and a quarter of a century after the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethno-national positions of former

warring parties are still firmly cemented without signs of softening of narratives and building of a sincere process of reconciliation. Wartime events are still interpreted the same way as when they actually happened. The guilt is seen exclusively on one side, self-reflection and self-criticism are virtually inexistent. Even the “biology” aspect does not work in favor of those advocating reconciliation. Although active participants of wartime and post-war events are at the end of their political and biological life, it appears that younger generations, even those born after the war, almost equally or even more passionately advocate the positions and follow the same narrative matrix created by their ethno-national ancestors.

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