

**EUROPEAN DISCOURSES IN THE ENLARGEMENT
CANDIDATE COUNTRIES AND SERBIAN PRESS
ON THE PROCESS OF ENLARGEMENT**

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Abstract. *The first part of the paper presents the results of opinion polls that surveyed attitudes of citizens in Central and East European countries (CEE) concerning their attitudes to the EU enlargement and expectations from their countries' joining the EU. That attitude is generally positive – the majority would vote in favour of joining the European Union in the case of referendum. The strongest argument given for voting in support of EU-membership is the hope that general progress would happen thanks to the EU. Economic development and open markets come after that.*

European discourses in different countries of the region throughout the '90s are also analysed in the paper. Comparing reports from various countries it becomes evident that Euro-optimistic and Euro-sceptic views in most public discourses exist simultaneously, with sometimes stronger emphasis on one of them. A lack of interest on the part of the public for deeper Europe-related discussions is also noticeable and rather common.

The final part presents and discusses the results of the research that examined the ways Serbian press wrote about Europe in the last three years, more specifically a part of the research devoted to coverage of the process of the EU enlargement. It could be seen that progress achieved in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe towards membership in the European Union, stages of their political, economic and social reforms that bring them closer to the EU, and the process of negotiations with the Union were not really visible in the writing of Serbian press in the late nineties and in 2000. The situation changed gradually with the new political situation in Serbia, after elections in 2000.

Key words: *EU, enlargement, discourse, Serbia, press*

According to Central and Eastern Eurobarometer conducted in 1997, the image of the European Union was very positive among people living in the candidate countries. At that time 50 percent of those surveyed said that 'their impression of the aims and activities of the European Union' was generally positive. Out of those questioned, 60% would vote in favour of joining the European Union in case of referendum.

People from ten candidate countries (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia), when asked what topics they specifically were most interested in, responded: working and living conditions (55 per cent) and human rights (49 per cent). There was also substantial interest in issues such as bilateral relations between the European Union and one's country (39%), the environment (36%) and so on.

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A negative vote is warranted mainly by the worry that the EU-membership will worsen the economic crisis, is too costly and brings no benefits to the country in question. Other reasons include the fear of losing one's identity and sovereignty.

People in CEE countries, when asked who would benefit most from closer relation with the EU, mainly say that it would be the private sector and armed forces, followed by the educational system, health and social services.

The three main issues surveyed were future of the countries, image of the European Union, and voting intention in case of referendum on joining the EU. Poland, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria score high in all three issues. Hungary and Slovenia held middle position, while the Czech Republic and the Baltic states were well below the average.

In 2001, however, support for the EU enlargement is lower in most candidate countries as shown in a survey released by a leading polling agency, Taylor Nelson Sofres Factum (Euractiv, 2001). The poll showed that overall support for enlargement in 11 candidate countries (ten Central and Eastern European countries and Turkey) fell from 62.9 percent in November 2000 to 55.7 percent a year later. The support for the EU membership is strongest in Bulgaria where seven out of ten want to join the Union. Estonians are least in favour of the EU, with only four out of ten wanting to join the EU. The support is also strong in Slovakia and Slovenia, while in Poland it dropped to 49.6 percent from 61.6 percent last year.

EUROPEAN/EU DISCOURSE IN CEE – SEVERAL EXAMPLES

The research conducted on newspapers from eight EU countries in 1999 (Kevin, 2000) brings, among others, the following findings: the German press highlights the broadest coverage of European news and offers most information about people outside of the European Union, above all in CEE countries; media and public figures do not tend to perform a pro-active role in informing the national public about other people in Europe – it is usually a function of geographical proximity. It is also said that, since European political issues are complex, it is often complicated for correspondents to convince editors in their countries that such stories are important. With the present commercialisation of news media, articles need 'a national angle', 'a personality story', or an element of scandal.

European news spreads across different sections in the press – it could be 'world/foreign' section (as is in Netherlands) or 'home news' (in French, Italian and Irish papers).

What does the situation look like in the media of Central and East European countries?

In Polish press there are plenty of metaphors, themes and visions connected with Europe (Horolets, 2001). It could be associated with: domination and discrimination (in the form of new colonization), eurocentrism, claims that it is new USSR or that 'it tests us!'. Europe is also: bureaucratic, in decay, naïve, symbol of high culture (that can become dead culture), sometimes weak and ridiculous; it means stability, open society, Christianity. Europe is: in debt to Poland, host that invites Poland, it is a game (of interests), home and future, it is club and victim of globalisation. It is also: symbol for the foreign language, rule of market, 'sweets shop', both rational and romantic, helper and friend. The author points out that 'seemingly simple and obvious differentiation between positive and negative visions of Europe', or the lines of divide that go between eurosceptical and euroenthusiastic opinions, are not the product of the last decade. She refers to the historian Jirzy Jedlicky (1999) who claims that such binary oppositions were brought to life by Polish specific geo-political position and the efforts of intellectuals to conceptualise it. The historian stresses that these contrasting trends come out with particular strength during the times of disruptions. Such a situation is present in Serbia as well, which becomes obvious in media, more specifically in the press. Regarding the role of the media in constructing public opinion in Poland, Horolets writes that since:

Neutral attitude is not sellable, the exaggerated 'pro' and 'contra' opinions are cultivated and presented for the general public as an exotic and spicy meal. This bias and exaggeration should be kept in mind as well as the fact that sophisticated images created by journalists and intellectuals are not necessarily internalised or used by ordinary people. (Ibid.)

On the same subject, Andrzej Krajewski (Schmidt & Scullion, 1999) says that in Poland 'the more we know about the pains of joining, the less enthusiastic we become'. Characteristics of articles one can read nowadays in the Polish press about the European Union are:

...informative and dull stuff, mainly written by media correspondents in Brussels and some Polish experts. Few read it, even less understand it and almost nobody remembers it.

...spicy news on how to protect Krakowska - Polish kielbasa's trademark.

Thirdly, articles which irritate and give something to think about (...) For instance, the fact that Poland will have to have a transitional period before receiving the right to work in European Union countries.

Fourthly, articles and news which not only irritate, but openly make people nervous such as (...) announcements that almost half of Poland (...) will be taken back by the Germans (...)

Finally, we find the articles that really terrify the readers (...T)ranslations of some of the headlines: "By Hitler's route to EU", "Polish money will go to EU farmers",

"In the EU Polish national culture will be finished", "Europe will regulate everything!"

According to Rovna (2001), the Czech internal debate about European integration can be divided into three periods: 1) 1989-1991 – mainly connected with a slogan 'back to Europe'; 2) 1991-1997/8 – forming of political attitudes of Czech subject matters vis-à-vis the EU; 3) 1997/8-onwards – forming positions towards various aspects of the European integration (p.66).

Jiri Brodsky (2000) explains the spirit of the first phase:

The figurative slogan "a return to Europe" has come to mean "a return to the normal order of things" for the Czechs. It is a return to a Europe to which they have always felt they belonged and with which they have always claimed to have strong cultural and historical ties.

Right away after 1989, there was a period of euphoria in the political, economic and social spheres of life that was characterized by great expectations. But a crisis of expectations and disillusion arrived soon after 1993, writes Brodsky. This crisis was caused by democratic inexperience, by the fact that the "little Czech" expected something from the new political elite but not himself, by the fact that many promises were not kept, and by the perception that it is not valuable to be active because the rich and powerful achieved their success by questionable means. What does the situation look like after the disillusionment?

The Czechs accept entry into the European Union in the same manner as they accepted democracy ten years ago: messianically, because of freedoms, opportunities and hope for a better standard of living. It can be argued that many Czechs understand entry into the European Union as a *mariage de convenance*. The question "What will we get out of it?" is more frequent than "What will we have to do for it?" In other words, European enlargement is not widely understood in terms of responsibilities, freedoms and civic duties.

The author points out at the adaptability of Czech identity and Czech political culture ('although countered by Czech "littleness," envy, scepticism, cautiousness, finger-pointing and constant dissatisfaction') and the ability to open up to different cultural environments form a good credit for the Czech Republic's entry into the European Union.

The perception of Europe and the EU evolved during the nineties in Hungary, too. The image of Europe as the 'common ancient home' is replaced by the more dynamic and actualised image that 'Europe is the West' (Tamas, 2001; p.83). With the time and reforms passing, the relationship between 'we' (Hungarians) and 'they' (Europeans) has been changing in the sense that Europe has become closer, part of the national self-image. Previously homogenous image also began to break up into separate parts. In sum, the concept of Europe was partially demythicized. On the other hand, excessive use of the 'European' concepts is present:

Over the past three years, the attribute 'European' was used so frequently and with such intensity by Hungarian political figures and journalists – generally in a

positive sense but in very diverse areas – that it lost its earlier distinct meaning. If everything in a sphere of life is described as 'European', then, eventually, that sphere will become amorphous, and, therefore, insecure. (p. 84)

Media coverage of this topic needs to be, the author argues, more emotional and metaphoric in order to be more comprehensible for wider strata of society. At present 'the treatment of subject, the system of selection here are the same as Hungarian journalists conventionally use in reporting on world events elsewhere' (p. 91).

In this country (as, presumably, in most of the countries in the region) the EU is associated with: survival, progress, limited self-determination, preservation of identity, equality, distinctiveness, inclusion, development, being in control, centre, prosperity, stability, the future, mainstream, freedom, rule of law (Kosztolanyi, 2001). There are, however, europessimists, too. As Hegedus (2000) points out, 'Hungarian europessimism explains any event or statement at the European level from one exclusive perspective: how could it slow down our accession to the EU?' The second concern of europessimists is expected negative effect in general or on a part of the population that will be caused by the EU membership. Europessimistic interpretation of the European Union affairs in the Hungarian press demonstrate that

the early general emotional-historical wish to join the West and rational arguments about the successes of European integration have been mostly replaced by a new way of thinking: we have to join them, since there is no alternative, but they are not better than us'...Citizens overwhelmingly share the view that 'politics is a dirty job' even in a democracy.

In Romania, to take one Southeastern country, not selected for the first round of the EU accession, key concepts, such as the European Union, integration, NATO, the West, 'have status of non-articulate chimeras, placed into mythical space' (Biro & Rostas, 2001, p. 92). They claim that nowadays the EU discourse appears to be fully supportive of the cause of integration, backed by political and public elite. However, there are also aggressive controversial reactions regarding concrete aspects of the approach to the EU. For that reason it is important to picture 'the dichotomies' surface-depth, text-practice and the dimensions and ways of manifestation of these dichotomies' (p.93). A characteristic of the EU-related discourses in Romania is the existence of two images of the topic – one fundamentally positive, the other negative; they do not oppose each other, but are complemented. 'Either one or the other is valid, but only one at a time. The images do not have ideological or social validity, but only a temporary situational validity. This is why they can replace one another in a relatively sudden manner' (p. 100-1). Authors write that the national dailies publish, every week or every other week, comments on and accounts of events related to the EU. They deal with, for example, conferences on the subject of enlargement, or with the prospects for Romania's integration. There is also an indirect approach to the EU topics. In such cases, those that are critical of the specific government's actions in support of the European practices are quite careful not to mention the EU, 'lest they should appear as enemies of integration' (p. 96-7).

SERBIAN PRESS ON EU ENLARGEMENT

Progress achieved in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe towards membership in the European Union, stages of their political, economic and social reforms that bring them closer to the EU, and the process of negotiations with the Union were not really visible through the writing of Serbian press in the late nineties and in 2000. First of all, this topic was marginal. In the research* on the coverage of European issues in Serbian press, this topic amounts to 11% of all Europe-related articles in *Danas* and 15% in *Politika*. The positive attitude in *Danas* is twice higher than in *Politika* (44 versus 21 percents respectively). Second, state press was often presenting stories that portrayed negative aspects and difficulties of the process of enlargement, ignoring favourable developments. Third, it seems that journalists lacked the understanding of the whole process or failed to see significance of it both in global terms and for Yugoslavia after the democratic changes in the country. Such a situation started to change with the political and economic reforms in the country, when 'Europe' became buzzword and entering the European Union is described as a strategic goal of the present government. Media are now publishing stories that deal with the transitional, pro-European process in certain countries of the CEE or write about specific issues referring to experiences and practices in several of those countries (for example: reforms of the banking system).

In the following part we will discuss more closely the coverage of the EU enlargement process in the Serbian press before democratic changes in the country.

An independent Serbian daily, *Danas*, published an article on October 19, 1999, written by its correspondent from Bonn, with the title: 'Decade without symbol of the Cold War' and the heading: 'Germany and Europe celebrate ten years from the fall of the Berlin Wall'. A state controlled paper, *Politika*, issued an article written by the Reuters for this daily on the following day. Its title was: 'Berlin still divided' and the heading: 'Euphoria after the Berlin Wall knock down did not last long'.

The article in *Danas* is mainly focused on reminding a reader of what was happening in Eastern Germany ten years ago, how the political changes had started with the resigning of the East Germany's political leader, how events were developing with citizens' protests, and how everything ended with the big street party in Berlin, followed with, a year later, unification of Germany. The consequence for the city is 'simmering life' in this 'grandiose capital'. The whole article has an optimistic tone, the only opposite remark is made in the last sentence: in redrawing the map of Europe, 'on the altar of the new times there is placed a sacrifice whose name was SFRY.'

Politika published a text whose focus is the life nowadays in Berlin, specifically differences between its Eastern and Western parts, as well as the discrepancy in political attitudes, habits and mentalities of the people from the two parts of the city. This article pictures the situation as rather dark. It is said that: 'sharp divisions poison the country...while the distressing East-West gap floats beneath the surface' and 'Germans in the East and West weep over mutual deficiencies: Western arrogance and Eastern ignorance'.

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What is implied in these two articles? According to *Danas*, the end of the Cold War meant an end of the old tensions; it brought unification to some nations (like Germany) and liberation to others (former members of the USSR), both by and large positive processes. Ten years later 'Germany, Europe and the USA' celebrate the reminiscence of the event, previously divided Berlin is now a capital, prospering and living to the full. *Politika*, however, presents a different picture: what was meant to be a new union for Germany and for Berlin, turned out to be, in a different form, the continuation of the old division; ten years is too short a period to overcome the fifty years of separation, of different political, economic and life styles. For some, this paper writes, the period when the city of Berlin was divided was better, more comfortable, and safer. One can also read the message: the end of the Cold War was not such a positive event after all, many problems have outlived the Berlin Wall, new ones have appeared; what Yugoslavia has missed in the nineties may also have not been such a mistake – others have great difficulties in adjusting to the life in new circumstances, after the end of the bipolar world.

Some other examples from *Politika*:

- Hungarians Wait to Join the EU: Prime-Minister Criticizes European Union (July 9, 2000)
- In front of the Gates of European Union: Stumbling of Favourites (October 18, 1999)
- Roads and Side Roads of Transition: Poles Afraid of European Union (July 24, 1999)
- Nervousness in front of the Doors of the European Union: Newcomers in Big Uncertainty (February 21, 1999)

All the above-mentioned problems exist, and therefore it is logical to write about them. However, when continuously only the dim side of a complex picture is being highlighted, misinterpretation of the situation is a very likely consequence.

The state press often treated the process of enlargement and the situation in applicant countries in such a way that a reader would easily conclude the life in Yugoslavia, and problems the country had, were indeed very similar to that in other CEE states. It was only after the change of the government that it was made clear in the media and in speeches of politicians and experts that many countries of the region indeed made a great progress during the '90s. It is at present repeated fairly often that there are countries, like Poland, Slovenia or Hungary, that we have to learn from; that reforms have to be full-scale if not to repeat the mistakes of, say, Romania or Bulgaria. It is also emphasized that, despite preconceptions of the people (dating from the period of the former Yugoslavia), the country is now lagging behind majority of former socialist countries but that, at the same time, we have the opportunity to use their transitional experiences and to put into use only the best practices.

The research conducted shows that the Serbian press put special emphasis on writing about Europe in periods of high tensions – in this case, during the bombing of Yugoslavia and in the days after the change of the government. Very different in their nature, these events raised the interest of Serbian papers concerning the character of relationship between Serbia/Yugoslavia and the rest of the continent. The approach to the topic was also completely different. In the former case Europe was pictured as deeply unjust and ungrateful to this country, while in the latter this aspect was not discussed. In both cases, however, it was clearly stated, often very emotionally, that Serbia is part of Europe – be it

described as a political and economic Union or, more poetically, as a joint house, family, birthplace of common culture and civilization. The process of European enlargement in different periods gets different meanings due to specific political circumstances: before the change of the government this matter was discussed only in the light of other CEE countries on the way to the European integration. Now, it applies to Yugoslavia/Serbia as well, for it has started its first, preparatory initiatives that should sooner or later bring it closer to the European Union.

CONCLUSION

After half of the century of political isolation, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are eager to join the European Union, both for practical and symbolic reasons. Politicians and the majority of population believe that becoming member of the EU will bring economic progress, political stability and security. Moreover, being a member of the Club has its symbolic value – for the people in this region it means being an equal partner to other Europeans, being a 'real' European. And yet, the whole process of preparations is often painful, causing sometimes doubts and fears, creating in some cases public discourses on the same subject that have little in common. Great expectations and enthusiasm often go concurrently with scepticism or beliefs that European integration for the country in question is too costly or too risky, that it can undermine national identity and state sovereignty. Such state of affairs is evident in the media of these countries as well, as we hope to have shown.

Bearing in mind the scope and complexity of changes undergone in the region during the previous decade, the changes that affected in numerous ways both whole societies and individuals, it is of little surprise that emotions and opinions are sometimes going to extremes, and that, with so many things in a flux, there is a spectrum of possible answers to particular questions.

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EVROPSKI DISKURS U ZEMLJAMA KANDIDATIMA ZA ČLANSTVO U EVROPSKOJ UNIJI I ANALIZA PISANJA SRPSKE ŠTAMPE O PROCESU PROŠIRENJA EU

Larisa Ranković

U prvom delu rada predstavljeni su rezultati istraživanja javnog mnjenja koja su ispitivala stav građana zemalja Centralne i Istočne Evrope prema proširenju Evropske unije i očekivanjima vezanim za priključenje njihovih zemalja EU. Taj stav je generalno pozitivan – većina bi, u slučaju referenduma, glasala za pristupanje Evropskoj uniji. Najjači razlog za pozitivan odnos prema članstvu u Evropskoj uniji je nada da bi to doprinelo opštem napretku. Mogućnost ekonomskog razvoja i otvoreno tržište su sledeći na listi.

Evropski diskursi tokom devedesetih u različitim zemljama regiona bili su takođe predmet analize. Poredeći izveštaje iz ovih zemalja, jasno je da optimistični i skeptični pogledi na Evropu u većini javnih debata postoje paralelno, s time što je povremeno naglasak jači na jednoj od opcija. Manjak interesovanja široke publike za dublje diskusije koje se tiču Evrope je podjednako uočljiv i prilično raširen.

U završnom delu predstavljeni su i prodiskutovani rezultati istraživanja koje se odnosi na analizu pisanja srpske štampe o Evropi tokom poslednje tri godine, preciznije onaj deo istraživanja posvećen praćenju proširenja Evropske unije. Ono što se vidi jeste da u srpskoj štampi krajem devedesetih i tokom dvehiljadite nije bilo lako saznati o napretku koji su zemlje Centralne i Istočne Evrope postigle u pravcu pristupanja Evropskoj uniji, niti o fazama njihovih političkih, ekonomskih i društvenih reformi koje ih vode ka EU. Situacija je počela postepeno da se menja sa izmenjenom političkom situacijom u Srbiji, nakon izbora 2000.

Ključne reči: *EU, proširenje, diskurs, Srbija, štampa*