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PUBLISHER

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VERSION

AM (Accepted Manuscript)

LICENCE

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REPOSITORY RECORD

Mihelj, Sabina, Veronika Bajt, and Milos Pankov. 2019. "Reorganising the Identification Matrix: Televisual Construction of Identity in the Early Phase of Yugoslav Disintegration". figshare.  
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## Reorganizing the Identification Matrix: Televisual Construction of Collective Identities in the Early Phase of Yugoslav Disintegration<sup>1</sup>

*Sabina Mihelj, Veronika Bajt and Miloš Pankov*

In the light of the bloody conflicts that unravelled in Croatia and Bosnia–Herzegovina in the subsequent years, the short clash that took place in Slovenia in 1991<sup>2</sup> may seem of marginal importance. Existing studies of the role of the media in the Yugoslav wars pay virtually no sustained attention to Slovenia and, instead, focus on the republics most immediately involved in the large-scale bloodshed (Malešič 1993; Thompson 1999; Skopljanac et al. 2000; Kurspahić 2003). However, the media portrayal of this brief conflict warrants more attention, particularly if we want to understand the full extent of media involvement in restructuring and mobilizing collective attachments among Yugoslav nations during this period. There are two principal reasons for this. First, at rhetorical level, this conflict cleared the stage and served as a dress rehearsal for what was to come. Although the media language across Yugoslavia was ‘a language of war long before war was even conceivable in Yugoslavia’ (Thompson 1999, 52), in fact, its formation could be traced back to opinion pieces published in mainstream daily newspapers as early as 1987 (Slapšak et al. 1997). It was only during the conflict in Slovenia that this media war finally turned into a real war. Second, this was the only conflict that featured Yugoslav federal institutions as major actors.<sup>3</sup> This means that the conflict in Slovenia provides a rare chance to examine not only the classic strategies of war reporting, aimed at mobilizing already established collective attachments (Carruthers 2000; Hoskings 2004; Andersen 2006), but also the parallel process involving a ‘reorganisation within the identification matrix’ (Godina 1999), which included a discursive dismantling and delegitimization of pan-Yugoslav identifications.

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<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to express gratitude to Radio-Television Serbia and Radio-Television Slovenia for providing access to all the archival materials needed for this project. Thanks are also due to Nedin Mutić for his help with transcriptions and to Jovan Byford, Stef Jansen, Ger Duijzings, Ivana Đurić, Đorđe Pavićević, Pål Kolstø, Gordana Đerić and an anonymous reviewer for their comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> According to the data released on 7 July 1991 by the Slovenian Red Cross, the total number of casualties amounted to 62, including 39 members of the Yugoslav People’s Army (YPA), eight members of the Slovenian Territorial Defence (TD) and the police, five civilians and 10 foreigners. A total of 313 were wounded, including 163 YPA soldiers, 89 TD members, 22 policemen, 38 civilians and one foreigner. These data continue to be quoted in official Slovenian publications (e.g. *Vojaški muzej Slovenske vojske* 2006: 12). On the other hand, a book written by a former YPA general quotes a higher number of both casualties (12) and wounded (116 TD, 28 police) among the TD and the police, and a lower number of casualties (37) and wounded (146) on the side of the YPA (Radaković 1997).

<sup>3</sup> The Yugoslav Prime Minister Ante Marković resigned from his position in December 1991, thereby leaving the already completely powerless federation politically beheaded. By then, the other major pillar of the federation, the Yugoslav People’s Army, had already de facto turned into a Serbian army: most non-Serb soldiers had deserted its ranks, while the remainder began fighting on the side of Serbs (cf. Silber and Little 1997, 169ff; Conversi 2000).

The longitudinal and comparative design of our study is particularly important in this respect. We examine four samples of prime-time television news taken from four periods in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, produced by two television stations broadcasting in two different Yugoslav republics: TV Ljubljana (TVL) in Slovenia and TV Belgrade (TVB) in Serbia. We start by examining the coverage of the military trial that took place in Slovenia in July 1988, which represents one of the crucial events in the early period of political liberalization in Yugoslavia. Next, the coverage of events immediately before and during the conflict itself are examined, and also its contribution to the reorganization within the identity matrix on each side. We conclude by analysing the portrayal of the international recognition of Slovenia and Croatia as sovereign states in January 1992, which cemented the newly established arrangements of collective attachments in the region. Such a selection of case studies allows us to trace the gradual public reconstruction of collective identifications fostered by each television station, as well as examine their growing incompatibility and the concomitant elimination of the common Yugoslav identity. By focusing on television coverage, we also aim to add to the rather limited body of work that examines Yugoslav war discourse in broadcast rather than print media (Valić 1997; Skopljanac-Brunner 2000; Turković 2000). Before turning to the actual analysis, the following sections briefly discuss selected aspects of the Yugoslav national question and the Yugoslav media landscape relevant for the understanding of our analysis, and present the methodological framework.

### **The national question in Yugoslavia**

The socialist Yugoslav approach towards nationality and statehood was modelled on the Soviet federal system (Shoup 1968, 114) and followed a two-tiered pattern: the unifying Yugoslav citizenship, based on supranational principles that promoted a common Yugoslav ‘brotherhood and unity’, was complemented by distinct, institutionally recognized and objectified national identities existing at sub-state level – Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian and so on. After the reforms that culminated in the adoption of a new constitution in 1974, sub-state loyalties and identifications progressively became so strong that abstract citizens of Yugoslavia were non-existent: all forms of political representation were adapted to Yugoslavs who also had a distinct sub-state national affiliation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> At the same time, however, the number of Yugoslav citizens identifying solely as ‘Yugoslavs’, a category meant to cover those not committed to any of the nations or nationalities, was in fact on the rise (Sekulic et al. 1994; Jović 2003).

However, it is important to note that the relationships between particular national identities, on the one hand, and the overarching Yugoslav layer of identification, on the other hand, were not equal. While non-Serbian republican elites generally expected Yugoslavia to be a genuine multi-national federation, the increasingly influential nationalist-minded elites in Serbia saw the federation primarily as a compromise solution that allowed all Serbs to live in one state (Conversi 2000, 348). This was due to the fact that a disproportionately large number of the Serbian population lived outside the borders of the Republic of Serbia proper, while other republics embraced a much larger part of the respective constitutive nations, with Slovenia being by far the most ethnically homogenous of all the republics. In a context where most republics were increasingly functioning as nationalizing states, that is, states conceived as being *'of and for'* a particular core nation (Brubaker 1996; Hayden 1992), such disparities were bound to give rise to mutually incompatible visions of the future. At one end of this spectrum was the Serbian proposal, which argued in favour of strengthening federal institutions. This was the only solution, short of redrawing inter-republican borders, that would allow Serbian republican elites to exert more influence over Serbs living outside Serbia, and thus better perform their role as leaders of a nationalizing state, a state of and for ethnic Serbs. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Slovenian republican leaders were proposing a further weakening of federal ties. Again, this was the only way, short of transforming their republican borders into state borders, of allowing them to achieve a better fit between the political and the national unit. In both cases, the implementation of these proposals required significant and, mutually incompatible, changes in the matrix of collective identifications.

#### **Discursive construction of collective identity and difference in television news**

Processes of identity construction, maintenance and transformation are inextricably linked to processes of marginalization, stigmatization and exclusion. Any kind of identity is, therefore, always relational, defined not only by the material it encloses, but also by the things it excludes (Woodward 1997). Discursive construction of identity follows similarly two-folded patterns. While fostering unity and identification with the in-group, it also involves emphasizing difference and distancing from the out-group (De Cillia et al. 1999). Deictic or indexical expressions, such as the personal pronouns *'we'*, *'our'* and *'them'*, or adverbs such as *'here'* and *'there'*, whose meaning is, in part, determined by the context of utterance, are of particular importance in this respect. They serve to establish the deictic centre, that is, the specific anchorage point from which a text is being written or an utterance made. This centre also helps

readers or hearers to position themselves as either insiders or outsiders with respect to selected groups, parties and so on represented in a particular text (Chilton 2004, 56) In a world of nation-states, the in- and out-groups established by deictic expressions are often defined in national terms, and hence function as ‘banal’, largely unnoticed reminders of national identity and difference (Billig 1995).

The analysis of deictic expressions alone, of course, provides only limited insight into the discursive construction of collective identities: it merely reveals *where* various speakers position themselves vis-à-vis different in-groups and out-groups, and *whom* they consider to be part of these in- and out-groups. However, distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are rarely neutral: ‘they’ are not represented simply as different, but also as qualitatively inferior or (less often) superior to ‘us’. Positive self-representation is, therefore, regularly accompanied by negative ‘other’ presentation. Although this dual strategy can operate through a wide variety of different discursive layers (Van Dijk 2006, 356–83), we decided to focus our analysis on the layer of lexical choices. More specifically, we focus on the choice of labels, phrases and verbs used to describe different actors and actions involved in reported events. The principal reason for focusing on lexical choices lies in the fact that these lexical choices can also be viewed as strategies of legitimization. As Berger and Luckmann (1991, 112) point out, the basic legitimating explanations are built into vocabulary itself. Hence, by applying a particular word to a particular event, action or actor, we are also automatically applying a particular interpretation of that same actor, action or event, and thus potentially contributing to either its legitimation or its delegitimation.

While these and other discursive strategies and devices involved in identity construction are amply discussed in the literature devoted to the analysis of simple utterances, plain written texts or conversations, it is less clear how we are to approach them in analysing a multi-modal and multi-layered text such as a television news bulletin. For example, which of the many layers of voices and modes of address present in a bulletin – coming from presenters, journalists, interviewees (Marshall and Werndly 2002, 62–4) – should we treat as representative of television’s own deictic centre and lexical choices? A useful, although not unproblematic, distinction is one customarily drawn between institutional and accessed voices, that is, the voices of those speakers who speak on behalf of the organization producing the bulletin – news anchors, news readers, journalists and correspondents – on the one hand, and the voices of external sources contributing their views to the broadcast (Selby and Cowderly 1995, 129). The line between the two is of course fuzzy, as all accessed voices, simply by the virtue of being included in

the broadcast, already bear an imprint of the institution itself. However, given that the number of case studies covered in this chapter prevents us from providing a comprehensive analysis of all the different layers of voices at play in a television bulletin, we have decided to focus our analysis on institutional voices only. For each of the periods in question, we isolated all those parts of news bulletins that were dedicated to the chosen event and could be treated as representative of the television's voice.

### **Discourse in context: the Yugoslav media landscape**

To explain patterns of discourse structures and strategies appearing in a particular text, they need to be examined in the context of the wider cultural, social and institutional constraints (Van Dijk 2007). Similarly to their counterparts elsewhere in the region, Yugoslav post-communist elites treated the media in much the same way as their communist predecessors: as instruments of control belonging to the ruling party (Gallagher 2000; see also Cvetičanin 1997; Veljanovski 2002). At the same time, journalists and editors were often complicit in sustaining such attitudes, treating democratically elected representatives with virtually unlimited trust. In such a media environment, the increased openness of public debate was a rather mixed blessing, resulting in the creation of highly exclusive public spaces (Snyder and Ballantine 1997). Additional problems were created by the fact that the Yugoslav media market was, similarly to most other institutions in the federation, segmented along republican and thereby mostly also national lines (Snyder 2002, 213–17). Except for a handful of pan-Yugoslav media, all the major media, including the two television stations examined in our study, were controlled at republican level and addressed to respective ethnically segmented audiences. When the established pan-Yugoslav routes of exchange of news items among republican media crumbled in the late 1980s, republican audiences were increasingly served a diet of news reinforcing the positions of respective nationalist-minded republican elites. In the general climate of insecurity, the combination of a media system segmented along ethnic lines, and a still largely unprofessional journalistic culture, more or less willingly subjected to respective nationalist elites, ultimately resulted in the creation of increasingly self-enclosed communicative spaces, which fostered diametrically opposed interpretations of the same events. As the next section demonstrates, this pattern of divergent interpretations was already clearly visible in mainstream television news coverage well before the outbreak of the conflict in Slovenia. However, at least during the military trial in 1988, the conflicting interpretations presented by TVL and TVB were not yet fuelled by nationalist sentiments.

### **Case study I: 'The trial of the four' (18–27 July 1988)**

The military trial that took place in the capital of Slovenia in the summer of 1988 was the culmination of a long sequence of clashes between the weekly magazine *Mladina* [Youth], an organ of the Slovenian Socialist Youth Association, and the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA). In the early months of 1988, the magazine issued several articles that disclosed the abuse of power and corruption in the YPA. Not being used to public criticism, the military establishment was visibly upset and reacted by accusing *Mladina*'s editor and two journalists, along with an army officer, of leaking a secret document.<sup>5</sup>

'The trial of the four' is often regarded as the crucial turning point in the early history of Slovenia's democratization, which transformed democratization into an explicitly national project (Carmichael and Gow 2000, 150–6; Pavković 1997, 106–9; Mastnak 1997, 93–112). Key to this development was the fact that the trial simultaneously offended two disparate sets of core values cherished by different oppositional movements in the republic: one inspired by universalistic principles, the other by particularistic, nationalist ideals. The Army's insistence on holding a military trial against civilians in peacetime, without civilian representation, and outside of the gaze of the public eye, prompted renewed demands for a stricter separation of military and civilian institutions, unimpeded access to information of public interest and the unrestricted right to freedom of speech.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the fact that the trial was conducted in Serbo-Croatian rather than Slovenian suddenly began to be perceived as a direct assault on Slovenian national sovereignty and equality, and was used to fuel fears of national assimilation.<sup>7</sup> Although this combination of ideologically disparate concerns was not entirely new, the trial was the first occasion when this ideological amalgam was backed by a fully formalized alliance, the Committee for Protection of Human Rights. Furthermore, the trial not only homogenized the opposition, but simultaneously facilitated its rapprochement with the Slovenian communist leadership. While initially cautiously defending the YPA against criticisms levelled by the Committee, Slovenia's communist authorities changed their position during the trial and ended up supporting some of the points raised by the opposition (Gow 1992, 86). Although the four men were ultimately found guilty and sentenced to imprisonment, the Slovenian authorities were very 'relaxed' in their enforcement of this punishment

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<sup>5</sup> One of the accused journalists was Janez Janša, who subsequently became Slovenia's first defence minister and later leader of one of the biggest centre-right parties, and was finally appointed as Prime Minister in 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Some of the criticisms levelled at the YPA could of course be applied to any army, yet in the given context, the YPA served as a convenient symbol for what was perceived to be lacking in Yugoslavia at large.

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that Serbo-Croatian was the official language of command in the YPA virtually ever since its establishment, and also served as the lingua franca among the Yugoslav nations. Although the trial was far from being the first occasion when such use of Serbo-Croatian was contested, it is nevertheless clear that the key reason should be sought in the broader context of heightened nationalist tensions rather than the choice of language as such.

(Carmichael and Gow 2000, 153). Also, finally, the trial successfully galvanized public support on a mass scale. The mass protests, gathering momentum since early June, reached their peak during the trial itself, when the Committee boasted the support of more than a thousand different groups and over one-hundred thousand individuals, many of whom joined the daily protests (Mastnak 2002, 102).

### **TVL: Defending citizens' rights to public information**

The close analysis of the coverage provided by Television Ljubljana, however, calls for a more cautious appraisal of the role of the trial, particularly with respect to its alleged homogenizing effect on public discourse. According to one journalist's testimony (Bizilj 1996, 111), this was a period fraught with insecurity and confusion: while the representative body of TVL's journalists was among the first to join the Committee for Protection of Human Rights, reporting remained cautious and scarce, thereby exposing the television to repeated accusations of conservatism. During the trial, reports about the event featured in most bulletins, yet never appeared as the first, most important news of the day. The analysis of deictic expressions revealed that, throughout the period, anchors and journalists continued to speak from a multi-layered deictic centre, poised between the wider membership in the Yugoslav state community – the 'we in Yugoslavia' (for example 24 July 1988) – and the more narrow affiliation with the Slovenian republic and nation – 'we the Slovenians' (for example 22 July 1988). When talking specifically about the trial, however, TVL mostly abstained from using deictic expressions that would invoke membership of either the Slovenian nation or the wider Yugoslav community. Instead, the anchors, announcers and journalists assumed the position of 'us, the journalists', acting on behalf of the public and seeking information about the trial. The main 'other' that crystallized in these reports was the YPA, more precisely the Military Court, which was constantly represented as impenetrable to the public, therefore forcing the journalists to rely on information provided by third parties. The following excerpt is a case in point:

In Ljubljana, the trial continued [...] Today, we still have no official information about that, none whatsoever. We can therefore report only about what we get to know from the Committee for Protection of Human Rights, and about what we extract in front of the building of the Military Court. (19 July 1988)

This line of identification and argumentation remained unchanged throughout the duration of the trial, and was also reconfirmed in the one and only explicit commentary produced by TVL during the trial. The commentator identified herself primarily as a journalist and representative of the public,

emphasizing the total lack of official information about the trial. From this position, she defended the protesters in Ljubljana and their reaction as ‘understandable’:

The reaction of people in Ljubljana was understandable, since the lack of information left the impression that something is being hidden. [...] In these days, nobody provided any consolation to us journalists, the people, all of us [...] We have several information agencies in the Army and in the republican organs, yet this time they failed the test. Certainly someone owes us, the public, the nation, the people, several answers. (27 July 1988)

The use of deictic expressions in the above excerpt reveals the double-layered nature of the deictic centre assumed by TVL: while the journalist is clearly more sympathetic to ‘the people in Ljubljana’, her reference to ‘information agencies *we* have in the army and in the republican organs’ represents both the republican organs and the army as ‘our own’. Another thing to note is the fact that, although the journalist is clearly marking her membership in the totality of ‘the public, the nation, the people’, this community does not embrace the whole of the Slovenian nation nor the wider Yugoslav population. Instead, ‘information services’ in both the republican representative bodies and the army are accused of ‘failing the test’, since they were unable to provide public information. This suggests that, from the point of the commentator, the other is not simply the army – as a federal institution – but rather all those agents – be they Slovenian or not, republican or federal – that failed to observe the universal rights of the freedom of speech and access to public information.

This delineation of the self and the other is markedly different from the one adopted by the Slovenian republican leadership at the time, whose criticisms of the trial were based primarily on nationalist rather than universalistic criteria. By the fourth day of the trial, the Presidency of Slovenia began openly questioning the legality of using Serbo-Croatian language in Slovenia, claiming that such a decision was not in line with the republican nor the federal constitution. Towards the end of the trial, the leader of the League of Communists of Slovenia (LCS) openly called into question the legitimacy of any state that does not guarantee the free use of the Slovenian language and its full equality. He emphasized the historic loyalty of the LCS to the Slovenian nation, and even claimed that the vital interests and sovereignty of the Slovenian nation might be under threat.<sup>8</sup> The LCS here acted as the representative of the Slovenian national self, opposed to the federal state. We could, therefore, conclude that, while both

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<sup>8</sup> Milan Kučan’s interview for TVL, broadcast during *TV Tednik*, 28 July 1988. Cf. also Balažic 2004, 282–3.

the LCS and TVL ultimately ended up following the arguments defended by the Committee, their positions were markedly different: while the Slovenian republican elite chose to follow arguments inspired by nationalist, particularistic values, TVL's reporting of the trial and underlying vision of the self and the other was based on universalistic principles. The nationalization of public discourse in Slovenia was, therefore, far from complete.

#### **TVB: defending the military court**

TV Belgrade's (TVB) treatment of the trial was noticeably different from that offered by TVL, as well as from positions defended by the Slovenian republican elite. The coverage broadcast on the second day of the trial provides a case in point. TVB first aired a news item produced by TVL, reporting on the growing numbers of protesters and their unruly behaviour. However, this item was followed by an extremely critical commentary, which used the preceding report to authenticate an unmistakably negative interpretation of the protests. At the same time, the court was consistently described in a positive light, associated with legal and ethical standards, hence public access to information was clearly not deemed to be a sufficient reason for the protests:

Facing the court building the way you saw, they tried to provoke reactions from the authorities, however the Ljubljana military court is operating as usual despite obvious pressures, because the dignity of the judicial authorities is safeguarded through legal and ethical consistency. [...] The rallies around the court building and the calls by the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights are a result of the undisguised aspiration to influence the court's work, and even its final ruling. [...] It is good that the Presidency of the Slovenian Socialist League has condemned the actions of the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights, because ahead of the trial assurances came from Ljubljana that there would be no pressure brought to bear on the court's work. These assurances were offered by those who can and must be trusted. A mistake was obviously made somewhere. (19 July 1988)

The above excerpt is interesting for another reason: it demonstrates that the main other identified by TVB's commentator was not the Slovenian republic or nation as a whole. Instead, only specific groups inside Slovenia, particularly the Committee, but also the protesters who 'tried to provoke a reaction', were identified and dismissed for taking the side of those prosecuted. In contrast, Slovenia's republican

leadership is commended for having condemned the activities of the Committee. Yet the commentator's sympathies for the current Slovenian political elite are only half-hearted. The last two sentences mark Slovenian leaders out as a weak link in the wider Yugoslav self, describing them as 'those who can and have to be trusted', but who proved incapable of securing order and are therefore unworthy of trust. Nevertheless, and in much the same vein as TVL, here TVB still maintains a relatively strong sense of a collective Yugoslav self, endangered not by any of its constituent nations as a whole, but rather by misguided individuals and groups or untrustworthy representative bodies – all of whom are seen as dangerous, but ultimately replaceable or disposable.

### **Case study II: the run-up to the conflict (16–25 June 1991)**

By late March 1989, the Serbian republican elites had gradually extended their control to the two Serbian provinces, Vojvodina and Kosovo, as well as the Republic of Montenegro. This secured them four of the eight votes within the federal bodies, and thus allowed them to block any proposals coming from Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia or Bosnia–Herzegovina. The first multi-party elections, which took place across the federation in 1990, resulted in communists losing their power in Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia–Herzegovina, but retaining a commanding position in Serbia and Montenegro. This outcome further deepened the division between the governing elites of Serbia, the two provinces and Montenegro, on the one hand, and those in power in the remaining republics (Cohen 1995, 159–60). In the early months of 1991, this division led negotiations at federal level into a deadlock. All attempts to break this deadlock proved unsuccessful, and on the eve of the conflict in Slovenia, Yugoslavia's highest representative body, which was also responsible for directing the federal army, still lay beheaded. Even more ominously, the deployment of YPA units in crushing anti-Milošević demonstrations in Belgrade sent a clear signal that a substantial proportion of the Yugoslav elites was willing and able to use the only truly powerful and fully functioning federal institution to silence domestic dissent. By then, Slovenia was already a long way down the path of building a national state. The incoherent amalgam of nationalist, anti-communist and pro-democratic values now provided the ideological basis of the *Demos* coalition, bringing it to victory in the first multi-party elections in April 1990. The republic-wide plebiscite on the issue of independence, organized in December 1990, attracted an enormous turnout of over 93 per cent, with more than 88 per cent casting a vote in favour of independence. This result enabled the government of Slovenia to claim full democratic legitimacy to transform the republic into a fully sovereign national

state. The following six months were a period of accelerated building of national-state institutions. This was expected to culminate in late June 1991 with a formal declaration of independence.

#### **TVL: building a Slovenian national state**

In the days preceding the declaration, most TVL news anchors and journalists were enthusiastically participating in the building of a Slovenian national state, duly reporting on the gradual establishment of new national institutions and bringing news of activities building up momentum for ‘D Day’. Gone was the critical distance established between journalists and the authorities during the trial in 1988. Instead, TVL was now habitually adopting positions and interpretations expounded by the republican government itself. In contrast to 1988, most deictic expressions were now unambiguously pointing to Slovenia and Slovenians: announcers were positioning themselves as members of a clearly delineated Slovenian national self, whose republic was bound to be transformed into a fully fledged national state. The belief in the inevitability of secession was so strong that announcers and journalists regularly treated Slovenia’s statehood as a *fait accompli*, even before the actual proclamation of independence. On one occasion, one of TVL’s anchors referred to Slovenia – effectively still only a republic within the larger Yugoslav state – as ‘the state of Slovenia’, that is, an already sovereign entity (20 June 1991). In another news bulletin, Dimitrij Rupel was labelled as ‘the Slovenian foreign minister’, despite the fact that his official function at the time was that of a Republican Secretary for International Cooperation (17 June 1991). What is more, the journalist presented Rupel’s meeting with the foreign minister of neighbouring Austria as an entirely unproblematic, legitimate meeting of two foreign ministers of equal standing, without even mentioning Yugoslavia’s foreign minister.

Deictic expressions signalling attachment to a wider Yugoslav ‘we’, still so unambiguously present in 1988, had by this time almost disappeared. Federal institutions were increasingly portrayed as entirely ineffective, facing imminent collapse and potentially threatening. In the eyes of TVL, however, the federal threat had little to do with democratization: in contrast to 1988, federal institutions were no longer seen as an obstacle to Slovenia’s further democratization, but rather as an obstacle to its project of building a sovereign national state. The policies of the Yugoslav Peoples’ Bank, for example, were presented as obsolete, creating an excessive burden for Slovenian banks and hampering the economic development of Slovenia (for example, 20 June 1991). In a similar vein, the Federal Assembly was criticized not primarily for being undemocratic, but rather for its failure to ensure adequate representation

of various national interests of all Yugoslav nations and, instead, functioning as an extended arm of the Serbian government. The following excerpt, taken from a news report on developments in the federal assembly, provides a telling example of TVL's perception of the relative position of the Slovenian self vis-à-vis the remaining Yugoslav republics and their representatives: 'Belgrade probably wouldn't even mind if Slovenian and Croatian delegates no longer came to the session of the aforementioned assembly' (20 June 1991). Evidently and quite unsurprisingly given the political developments at the time, Slovenian representatives are seen as being in a similar position to Croatian ones, both endangered by the growing influence and arrogance of 'Belgrade'. At the same time, individual Yugoslav republics were regularly portrayed as virtually independent states, functioning almost entirely outside of a common federal framework: as one journalist commented when reporting on a meeting between Serbian and Slovenian economists, the negotiations between the two republics began to resemble 'negotiations between two states' (18 June 1991).

While TVL's coverage was now almost entirely devoid of identification with the wider Yugoslav 'we', an alternative layer of supranational identification was seen to be taking its role, namely identification with the wider European community. For example, when describing a new postal stamp that was about to be issued with the declaration of independence, the anchor explained: 'In the background of the symbol of Slovenia's identity, the ecological green is shading into the blueness of the day, or the blueness of Europe, tomorrow's common European home' (17 June 1991). At the same time, repeated warnings coming from the European Community (EC) as well as the USA made it clear that Slovenia's membership in this wider community was not to be taken for granted: on the eve of the armed clash, both the USA and the EC were reluctant to accept Yugoslavia's disintegration. However, TVL's lexical and editorial choices suggested that these stances were not to be taken too seriously. The following sentence, used by an anchor when introducing a report on the US Secretary of State James Baker's visit to Belgrade, is particularly telling: 'His current mission is clear: this country needs to be brought to its senses, so that it will remain the same as it is now' (21 June 1991). From the point of view of the journalist, Baker's views were merely temporary, as well as unnecessarily patronizing. Moreover, Baker's short statement about developments in Yugoslavia was followed by a lengthy exposition from the Slovenian president Milan Kučan, who confirmed the anchor's spin on the event.

**TVB: defending the Yugoslav self**

At the other end of the federation, TVB provided a completely different view of the same events. In one news bulletin, several minutes were dedicated to a detailed exposition of sympathetic statements issued by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and the German Bundestag, as well as by Yugoslavia's Foreign Minister Budimir Lončar. The latter were presented in a particularly positive light, described as 'direct, open and critical' (19 June 1991). The use of deictic expressions equally left no doubt as to where TVB's sympathies lay: Lončar was referred to as 'our federal secretary' (ibid.). In contrast, official reactions coming from Slovenian representatives were dealt with in passing, and were quickly dismissed as excessively narrow and guided solely by concerns for Slovenia's own future, rather than the future of Yugoslavia as a whole.

Slovenian officials, if the interview with Slovenian president Milan Kučan in the Vienna-based *Der Standard* is anything to go by, are interested in the warning solely in the context of the international recognition of independence.  
(19 June 1991)

The above positioning is symptomatic of TVB's prevailing stance in this period, and is similar to the attitude adopted in 1988: again, TVB is siding with federal institutions and their representatives. The main other, however, is now no longer limited primarily to certain groups inside Slovenia. Instead, all major Slovenian institutions and representatives are portrayed in a negative light, and descriptions of their actions and statements are regularly accompanied by delegitimizing attributes. Furthermore, Slovenian representatives are now recurrently bunched together with Croatian ones, and collectively described as internal enemies, threatening the Yugoslav self from within. It is precisely these internal enemies that are also seen as being responsible for the inefficiency of federal institutions. For example, when reporting on yet another failure to organize a meeting of the Federal Presidency, TVB's commentator had no qualms about who should be blamed, and placed the responsibility squarely on Slovenian and Croatian representatives. Without discussing the exact reasons for their absence, the commentator dismissed such behaviour in typically populist terms that had become the hallmark of public rhetoric in Milošević's Serbia during the 'anti-bureaucratic revolution': he described it as 'irrational', as 'political manoeuvring' and, as such, entirely illegitimate, particularly in the light of the growing insecurity faced by the general population.

We could almost start the weekly overview with the question whether it makes sense for journalists to continue doing it, or should the job perhaps be

taken over by some other professions that are more accustomed to understanding irrational behaviour [...] Political manoeuvring has continued, ruining what was likely to be the last chance of members of the ill-fated Yugoslav presidency and leaders of the republics at least assembling in Belgrade on Thursday. Mesić and Drnovšek, Tuđman and Kučan failed to show up. They did not receive prior guarantees, they have said. For what? In a country where no-one guarantees any longer your savings deposit or a full wage for an honest job or a pension for all your years of service, do politicians have the right to ask for any kind of guarantees? (22 June 1991)

Similar negative representations of Slovenian and Croatian representatives were commonplace in TVB's reporting at the time, and provided a suitable basis for the escalation of hostility that was to erupt. The necessary complement of such othering and scapegoating was the invocation of national unity. With the realization that the process of transforming Slovenia and Croatia into independent states was well under way, the announcers and journalists of TVB started to agitate fervently for Yugoslav unity. On the day of Slovenia and Croatia's declaration of independence, TVB's anchor opened the bulletin in a dramatic manner, appealing to the public as part of a Yugoslav self, living in 'the country of Yugoslavs':

Dear viewers, good evening. What will happen with Yugoslavia tomorrow? This question is being asked by many inhabitants of our country, almost all the world agencies and foreign journalists accredited in our country. [...] Today, there would be more than enough reason coming from the land of the Yugoslavs for such dramatic questions. (25 June 1991)

However, one should not be misled by this passionate embrace of the Yugoslav self. As the dismissive attitudes towards Slovenian and Croatian representatives suggest, TVB had little sympathy for their vision of Yugoslavia's future. This meant, by implication, that TVB's position was closer to that expounded by the Serbian leadership. Once it became clear that Yugoslavia's representative bodies were unable to prevent the secession of the two northwestern republics, and, therefore, incapable of protecting the interests of Serbs in Croatia so important to Serbian nationalist elites, TVB's attitudes towards federal institutions became increasingly impatient. Commenting on yet another attempt to organize a meeting of the Federal Presidency, a journalist stated: 'Jugoslovenima je već dojadilo da predviđaju šta će biti sa predsedništvom' (19 June 1991). TVB was, therefore, sending a clear message not only about who was to blame for the present situation, but also about a growing need to react – if necessary, in ways that would

circumvent the authority of the Federal Presidency. The above analysis suggests that, on the eve of the armed conflict, the crucial steps of warmongering propaganda, namely identifying the enemy and disqualifying their arguments (see Valić 1997), as well as solidifying a sense of collective unity and mobilizing support for action, were well under way. What was left was the legitimation of an appropriate response that would eliminate, or at least subordinate, the enemy.

### **Case study III: the ‘Ten-Day War’ (26 June–7 July 1991)**

Despite the highly unfavourable position adopted by the United States and the EC, Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence simultaneously on 25 June 1991. Ante Marković, the federal Prime Minister and thus the highest-ranking political authority in Yugoslavia given the deadlock of the Federal Presidency, had made his position clear several days earlier: any unilateral attempts to change the internal or external borders of the federation were to be regarded as ‘contrary to a peaceful and democratic solution to the crisis’ and treated as ‘illegal and illegitimate’ (quoted 21 June 1991). On 25 June, he signed an order to deploy the federal armed forces to ensure continued federal control over federal borders. At the same time, the Slovenian government deployed its Territorial Defence (TD) forces to assume sovereign control over what it deemed to be Slovenia’s own territory and borders.

#### **TVL: supporting the resistance of a national state**

TVL greeted the first signs of deployment of YPA troops with relative calm, trying to sustain the festive mood by inviting the audience to join the celebrations marking the establishment of a sovereign Slovenia. Yugoslav institutions, already completely discredited in the preceding days and months, were now transformed into a fully external other. The use of deictic expression and the label ‘Yugoslavia’ in the following excerpt clearly demonstrate that Slovenia was no longer seen as its part. Yugoslavia was now perceived as an entirely separate state, reacting to ‘our’, that is Slovenia’s, decisions:

Good evening. Yesterday evening Slovenia became independent. Today we are celebrating. [...] The evening certainly will not be any less pleasant given the fact that Yugoslavia already reacted to our [...] decision. (26 June 1991)

In the remainder of the same bulletin, these reactions were presented as unambiguously hostile to Slovenia. Reporting was tied to the Slovenian self, describing the situation at border crossings, the airport, or following the movements of YPA units from an unequivocally Slovenian perspective, and relying on quoted speech from Slovenian representatives. Visual images showed tanks and army vehicles driving on highways or through cities, regularly encountering street barricades made of trucks and buses. Apart from

these barricades, the coverage was both verbally and visually devoid of any military actors representing the Slovenian side, thus creating an image of Slovenia being engaged in entirely non-military forms of defence. Lexical choices are equally telling. The YPA and its metonymic substitutes, most often tanks and soldiers, are portrayed as active and aggressive, while descriptions of the self, metonymically present in the form of various roadblocks, signify firm, yet harmless, resistance, and occasionally suffering. The following example is a case in point: 'Army vehicles were brutally removing the erected barricades, several civilian vehicles are damaged' (26 June 1991).

Throughout the war, this image of the Yugoslav Army as an aggressor, bravely opposed by the Slovenian TD, was reconfirmed and reinforced by TVL on a daily and sometimes hourly basis. Although the YPA was intent on deploying a limited range of its forces, and initially approached the conflict as a limited action aimed purely at restoring order (Silber and Little 1997, 155–6), TVL presented its actions as a full-scale military invasion. Increasingly, the menacing Army was also functioning as the metonymic substitute for Yugoslavia itself. In the eyes of one anchor, the aggressive behaviour of the Army demonstrated 'what the true Yugoslavia is and what it looks like' (27 June 1991). In spreading such images, TVL closely followed the spin manufactured by the Slovenian government. The Slovenian Ministry of Information launched a massive propaganda campaign, which persistently portrayed YPA as an occupying army, consisting of conscripts unwilling to fight their own compatriots (Gow and Tilsley 1995, 105).

In line with this spin, the Slovenian side continued to be presented in a positive light, associated with the Slovenian self. When armed TD units began to appear as agents in the news, they were occasionally referred to as 'our army' (27 June 1991) and were mostly depicted as providing non-violent, but solid resistance to the aggressive onslaught of the federal army. A concomitant aspect of such a sympathetic portrayal of the self was the glossing over of the TD's own lethal attacks. When a YPA soldier was killed by a member of the TD, the euphemistic expression 'a victim has fallen' was used, evading any clear attribution of blame to TD (*ibid.*). Instead, virtually all action and responsibility for damage caused by the conflict was attributed to the YPA. At the visual level, this attribution was regularly supported by images of damaged buildings and roads, injured civilians, ambulances and the like. This was often combined with amateur footage sent in by viewers themselves, and occasionally accompanied by emotional commentaries provided by distressed journalists, shocked when faced with the

devastation. The following excerpt, accompanied by a mixture of TVL's own and amateur footage that included close-ups of destroyed houses and vehicles, a civilian's burnt body and crying civilians, provides an exemplary case. The reporter's commentary leaves no uncertainty about who is to blame, and his trembling voice, breaking into extended silences and sighs, further reinforces the image of authenticity.

Purportedly the shelling by the Yugoslav air force – how should we call them, the invading army in short [...] ended half an hour ago, we heard the comments by the local inhabitants, we heard how awful it was, yet what we see here goes beyond anything we expected, and ... here lie the dead truck-drivers, who were trying to somehow stop the march of the army with their trucks .. [sigh] the whole valley is full of holes left by grenades. (28 June 1991)

Such emotionally involved reporting and one-sided portrayal of victims, accompanied by the neglect of losses on the enemy's side, was to become one of the hallmarks of mainstream media reporting in the following months and years, as the focus of conflict moved from Slovenia to Croatia and then Bosnia–Herzegovina.<sup>9</sup>

#### **TVB: from defending the Yugoslav Federation to defending the Serbian nation**

At both visual and verbal level, representational strategies employed by TVB during the conflict were mirroring those characteristic of TVL. The positioning of TVB's announcers was of, course, diametrically opposed: journalists and anchors sided with the YPA, and borrowed their legitimating rhetorical strategies from the statements pronounced by the federal Prime Minister Marković before the outbreak of the war. Slovenia's decision to secede was regularly described as one-sided, as shown by the following excerpt, while YPA's intervention was presented as fully legitimate and legal, aimed solely at defence. Compared with TVL's coverage, discussed earlier, the roles of the villain and the hero were reversed: in TVB's view, YPA was the one engaged in defence, while Slovenia's TD was engaged in illegitimate resistance.

Good evening, dear viewers. A difficult, dramatic day is behind us, with a lot of elements of war in Slovenia. At the basis of everything that you saw last night, and that we will see tonight, lies Slovenia's unilateral, arbitrary decision to occupy the Yugoslav state border in its territory. In an attempt to protect the state border in line with the Constitution and decisions of the federal

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. N. Skopljanac Brunner, 'An Analysis of Media Presentation'; and H. Turković, 'The Content Analysis of HRT News Programmes', as well as the contributions by Đurić and Zorić and Džihana and Sládeček in this volume.

government, the Yugoslav People's Army has met with armed and other forms of resistance, above all by the Slovenian Territorial Defence. (28 June 1991)

Another element to note in the above excerpt is the fact that the role of the hostile other was now no longer accorded only to Slovenia's representatives, whether politicians or the armed forces. Instead, the whole of Slovenia was identified as the enemy who had performed an illegitimate, unilateral act.

Similarly to TVL's descriptions of TD's activities, TVB's portrayals of YPA's moves were regularly accompanied by modal verbs and nominal phrases that avoided any reference to violence and force, thus presenting the Army as an entirely non-violent actor. When the use of force was acknowledged, TVB supported it without hesitation, deeming YPA's application of force entirely unproblematic and justified. The burden of illegitimacy lay entirely with TD units, whose activities, according to TVB, forced YPA into adopting extreme measures:

Since the barricades that were put up were not sufficient to secure the movement of armoured units towards the border, guns spoke out. In situations like this, the response to force is force. On the Ljubljana–Zagreb road, an armoured YPA unit had to shoot its way through. (28 June 1991)

Similar to the pre-war period, however, this resolute support for federal institutions had clear limits. While applauding the unyielding stance of the army, TVB still retained a rather negative, impatient attitude towards the Yugoslav Presidency and the Prime Minister. This impatience was only in part due to the inability of federal institutions to hold the federation together. Especially when attention shifted to the conflict in Croatia, it was becoming clear that TVB's primary concerns lay with the Serbian nation, not Yugoslavia as a whole. The following excerpt, taken from a commentary, is particularly interesting. The commentator is clearly dissatisfied with the Federal Presidency's reactions, and keeps demanding more resolute action and depicting the members of the Presidency as 'tired' and acting in an entirely inappropriate manner. Those seen as suffering from these actions are no longer Yugoslavs in general, but primarily one particular group, namely, Serbs in Croatia. The commentary sends a clear message: federal authorities are unable to solve the crisis and prevent the suffering of Serbs, and it is time for somebody else to stand up for the interests of the Serbian people:

It remains unclear why the state presidency failed to announce yesterday already if and what measures it would take in case its decision was not honoured. [...] And instead of being in permanent session in this war situation

as the war commander, the state presidency has scheduled its next session in three days' time only. That some of our precious politicians seem to be tired is also shown by a statement of a presidency member [...] Asked if he knew that the situation in Borovo Selo was dramatic, Tupurkovski answered that the presidency had agreed to discuss the situation in Croatia, and the status of the Serb people in that republic, as early as during next week. Only next week may be a good time for Tupurkovski to have this discussion, however it would really be worth hearing what the Serbs in Borovo Selo, Dvor na Uni, Pakrac, Knin and other areas with a Serb population in Croatia would have to say to his statement. (5 July 1991)

#### **Case Study IV: international recognition (10–20 January 1992)**

Despite the crushing symbolic defeat of Yugoslav unity during the conflict in Slovenia, the state-like behaviour of republican authorities and growing public support in Western European states (Danchev and Halverson 1996), diplomatic recognition of the self-declared new states was still not in clear sight. After the three-month moratorium on the implementation of declarations of independence ended in early October 1991, Slovenia and Croatia resumed the building of sovereign states, yet it would take another two months for the outside world to accept the irreversibility of the dissolution. In the light of the simmering conflicts in the Soviet Union, and decentralizing pressures in Western European states themselves, hasty recognition could set a dangerous precedent. For the EC it was imperative to ensure that the Yugoslav case would be seen as unique and the procedures for recognition of Slovenia and Croatia inapplicable to other cases in Europe (Caplan 2005, 64–72). The fulfilment of this task was placed in the hands of the Arbitration Commission, appointed in November 1991 and chaired by Robert Badinter. In the end, political pressures prevailed over legal considerations: although the Commission recommendations stipulated that only Slovenia and Macedonia be granted recognition, the EC decided to deny recognition to Macedonia, but extend it to Croatia (Silber and Little 1997, 200–201). The official act of recognition was scheduled for 15 January 1992.

#### **TVL: exiting 'the Balkans', entering 'Europe'**

In the meantime, TVL had fully established itself as the voice of a newly established national state, eagerly awaiting international recognition. As the moratorium on the implementation of the Declaration of Independence came to an end, the television symbolically marked its new identity by renaming itself

TV Slovenija (TVS). In January 1992, its bulletins echoed this completed transformation of the collective self that now corresponded to the new Slovenian national state. Deictic references to ‘us Slovenians’ and ‘our state’ abounded, and anchors were proudly opening bulletins with announcements of yet another international recognition of Slovenia’s independent statehood, as in the following example:

Good evening. Slovenia and Croatia got recognised by yet another country, albeit a minuscule one, the Republic of San Marino. The note about the recognition of our state among other things states that San Marino thereby confirms its solidarity with the suffering of Slovenia’s inhabitants in the struggle for independence. (14 January 1992)

News of countries refusing to recognize Slovenia’s sovereignty was, by contrast, accompanied by clearly delegitimizing phrases and attributes. The excerpt below is a case in point, with the anchor establishing a clear contrast between the ‘long list’ of those states who had already recognized Slovenia as an independent state, and those disdainfully labelled as ‘waverers’, who believed that recognition was a harmful act – a belief the speaker clearly marks out as untrustworthy by labelling it ‘alleged’:

The list of countries that recognised Slovenia as a sovereign and independent state is [...] growing longer, yet one can also hear voices of those who think the recognition of, as they say, secessionist Yugoslav republics, is a dangerous act [...] After initial recognitions, Slovenia of course has no reason to wait for the waverers. (20 January 1992)

These rare ‘waverers’ now joined the list of TVS’s main others, among whom could be found the remaining federal institutions, including ‘the remnants of Federal presidency’ (20 January 1992) and especially the Yugoslav Army. Yet in 1992, the anchors and journalists no longer felt compelled to discredit the federal institutions. Instead, they merely reported on such claims coming from abroad, especially from the foreign press, increasingly pointing its finger at the Army as being the one to blame for Yugoslavia’s break-up. Serbia, now perceived as being at a safe distance from Slovenia, was no longer a significant, let alone threatening, other. Anything connected to Yugoslavia now represented only a very distant, no longer threatening, other. The gaze of TV Slovenia was directed westwards: ‘the West’, ‘the world’ and ‘Europe’ now assumed the prime role of Slovenia’s most significant other, one seen as mirroring the new Slovenian identity, associated with independence, democracy and Europeanization. While associating itself with ‘Europe’, TVS was also distancing itself from its former extended self, now

stigmatized, in line with the discourse of balkanism (Todorova 1997), as the unfathomable, eternally conflict-ridden 'Balkans'. The following extract clearly demonstrates that the lands that formerly constituted an integral part of Slovenia's extended self, including the former ally Croatia, were now considered not only entirely external, but also completely alien and opaque: 'In the Balkans, as always – an unclear situation, full of conflicts' (20 January 1992).

**TVB: the West as the new enemy**

At the same time, TVB was already engaged in full-scale warmongering, directed primarily at Croatia. Elements of nationalistic discourse sparsely appearing during the Ten-Day War period had by now been transformed into fully fledged hate-speech, aimed not solely at discrediting the enemy, but at eliminating it altogether (see Bugarski 1997). Defending the official government policy in Serbia, TVB openly adopted the position of the Serbian self, constantly reporting on the grievances of Serbs outside Serbia. Yugoslavia and Yugoslav representatives were still present as the extended self, yet one completely unable to defend Serbian interests. The list of main culprits for such a situation was no longer limited only to Slovenia and Croatia, but increasingly extended to include representatives of Western European states as well – in the following case the chairperson of the EC's Arbitration Commission and the EC's peace envoy Lord Carrington:

00:58 ... The Serb people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, thus, according to Badinter, got the epithet and status of a minority, although they are a constituent people. In the afternoon, in light of the euphoria over the emergence of new European statelets, the work of the joint commissions of the Conference on Yugoslavia resumed here at the expert level, because Lord Carrington no longer invites Yugoslav representatives, although this is a conference on Yugoslavia. (15 January 1992)

Slovenia was no longer seen as the main player in the events concerning TVB: it appeared solely in a passive position, as an object of international recognition. It is clearly an other, but an entirely insignificant one, disparagingly referred to as one of 'the new statelets'. The role of the main enemy was transferred to Croatia and its foreign allies. The list of countries that recognized Slovenia and Croatia's

sovereignty represents the first outline of TVB's new other – 'the West' – which was to assume centre stage in the coming years.<sup>10</sup>

### **Conclusions**

Despite all the contextual factors that pushed for disintegration, some of which are briefly addressed in the opening sections of this chapter, several obstacles had to be removed before the gory conflicts that spread across Yugoslavia could even become imaginable. The case studies covered in this chapter reveal a series of discursive shifts that had to be completed before the media stage was cleared for an all-out war between republics-turned-national states – shifts that have not received adequate empirically supported treatment in the existing literature. Over the course of the four years covered in our analysis, TVL and TVB gradually shifted from being the representative voices of respective republics in a wider federation, to functioning as instruments of two nationalizing states. The defence of democratic values and freedom of speech, clearly present in TVL's coverage in 1988, later gave way to nationalist principles. During the armed conflict in Slovenia, the two television stations engaged in fully fledged warmongering, starting with the naming of enemies and delegitimation of their positions, coupled with increasingly dramatic appeals to national unity, and followed by a one-sided portrayal of victims and neglect of losses on the enemy's side. Both gradually shook off identification with Yugoslav 'brotherhood and unity', though each in its own way. TVB replaced it with a vision of Yugoslavia that could, whenever appropriate, function as an extended protective layer of Serbian national interests, while TVL externalized everything Yugoslav as threatening and even alien. This led to the ultimate symbolic defeat of traditional forms of Yugoslav unity, thus clearing the ground for a confrontation of newly established nationalizing states alone. In subsequent months, as the focus of war moved from Slovenia to Croatia, the kind of war reporting that had begun developing during the conflict in Slovenia was to become a daily diet for the audiences of TV Belgrade and TV Zagreb. At that point, TV Ljubljana – now renamed TV Slovenia in order to symbolically mark its new identity – was proudly celebrating international recognition, reporting on the war in Croatia as a distant and irrational bloodshed. TV Belgrade, on the other hand, interpreted the international recognition of Croatia and Slovenia as an ominous signal of an anti-Serb conspiracy in Europe and the West, thus laying the foundations of anti-Western attitudes that were to persist in Serbian public discourse for several years to come.

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<sup>10</sup> See the contribution by Bakić and Pudar, Chapter 5.

