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SILENCE OR OUTRAGE

HOW SOUTH EAST EUROPE'S MEDIA DEAL WITH THE PAST

Christian Spahr

The term "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" is not easy to translate into other languages. In English "coming to terms with the past" would probably come closest. The expression has become an accepted term that the Germans have somehow added to the international political lexicon. The English Wikipedia entry on "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" devotes five pages to attempts of coming to terms with Germany's 20th century history. Political scientist Eckhard Jesse from Chemnitz has defined three pre-conditions that are necessary if a political process of coming to terms with the past is to be successful. First, there needs to be wrongdoing, then an end to this wrongdoing and finally a process of democratisation.¹ If this definition is applied to the media, then it is clear that they have a double role to play in the process of coming to terms with the past. On the one hand, the media act as the chroniclers of political crimes, the end of dictatorships and the ensuing changes to the political system. On the other hand, many members of the media have also played their own nefarious part in these dictatorships, either by supporting criminal behaviour or even by sabotaging attempts to bring an end to dictatorships and introduce change.

Coming to terms with a country's political past and coming to terms with the past of its media is closely linked, as the mass media are the key to changing public opinion. It is only with their support that a general acceptance of new

1 | Cf. Ulrich Batts, Günther Jakobs, Eckhard Jesse and Josef Isensee, "Vergangenheitsbewältigung durch Recht. Drei Abhandlungen zu einem deutschen Problem", Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen und Reden zur Philosophie, Politik und Geistesgeschichte, 16, Duncker und Humblot, Berlin, 1992, 716.

political systems and democratic structures, not to mention a new perception of history, can be achieved. In South East Europe, this can be seen not only in the way the media deal with the Communist era, but also in their handling of the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s. There is a need to improve both good quality reporting and critical self-reflection on the part of the media.

BULGARIA: LIBERALISATION AND TABOOS

By the mid-1980s, there was already a tendency in Bulgaria, the second-largest country in South East Europe, for the media to adopt a more nuanced attitude to communist ideology. Taking its lead from the neighbouring Perestroika-supporting media in the Soviet Union, the party newspaper *Rabotnichesko Delo* (Workers' Deed) led the way by proffering a moderate degree of criticism. Other media soon followed suit, albeit with the appropriate amount of caution. This liberalisation of the media, which was condoned by the country's political leadership, meant that certain former taboos could now be addressed, such as the country's poor economic situation, corruption and excessive bureaucracy.²

At the same time, the state also chose to severely restrict reporting at key moments, such as in 1989, when a part of the country's Turkish population was expelled shortly before the political system broke down. Heavily infiltrated by state security personnel, the media were forced to toe a party line that envisaged an ethnically homogenous socialist state. Around 360,000 people were forced to leave the country. Earlier, the regime had already forced 800,000 Bulgarian Turks to change their first names and surnames to Slavic equivalents, such as changing "Mehmet" to "Milan". Anyone who resisted ended up in an infamous labour camp on an island in the Danube near the small town of Belene. The state media justified this Slavification with insinuations that Bulgaria's Turks wanted to form a breakaway autonomous republic, and

When part of the country's Turkish population was expelled shortly before the political system broke down, the media were forced to toe a party line that envisaged an ethnically homogenous socialist state.

2 | Alexander Andreev, "Die Medien in Bulgarien in den 80er und 90er Jahren: von moderater Staatsferne zur populistischen Staatsferne", 2004, 1-2 (via e-mail to the author, 7 Jan 2013).

that the Turkish army was already massing on the border.³ The communist propaganda machine came up with some fanciful expressions to describe the name-changing and expulsions: "the revival process" and "the big excursion".

About 20 of the country's journalists have addressed the state repression of the country's Turkish population at that time as well as the communist labour camps so far.

The state repression of the country's Turkish population at that time as well as the communist labour camps that operated for decades still barely get a mention by today's media.

About 20 of the country's journalists have addressed these issues so far. The dearth of reporting on the fate of the Bulgarian Turks under the communists probably owes a lot to the fact that many Bulgarians still refer to the 500 years of Ottoman rule in Bulgaria from 1396 to 1878 as the "Turkish yoke". But there is also only limited enthusiasm amongst the media to start digging into the country's communist past.

Fragmented efforts – the Stasi documents hold the key

The media are causing confusion rather than aiding in addressing the past. This is the criticism levelled by Professor Ivaylo Znepolski, Head of the Institute for Studies of the Recent Past in Sofia. However, researchers agree that it is not so much that the newspapers, radio stations and TV channels are ignoring the crimes carried out by the communists completely. But most of the attempts of the media to come to terms with the past are fragmented and somewhat arbitrary. "A newspaper might publish interviews with victims of the regime and communist political legends in the same edition. As a result, good and bad are mixed in the public's perception and this causes confusion", is how Znepolski describes what he sees as a typical example. "Another newspaper might run a series of serious investigative articles on the past, while at the same time publishing articles extolling the virtues of Todor Zhivkov and his daughter." Zhivkov ruled Bulgaria as a dictator from 1954 to 1989.

3 | Simone Böcker, radio broadcast "Exodus – die Vertreibung der bulgarischen Türken vor 20 Jahren", SWR2 Wissen, 29 Dec 2009, <http://swr.de/swr2/programm/sendungen/wissen/-/id=5627266/property=download/nid=660374/16wnssw/swr2-wissen-20091229.pdf> (accessed 11 Mar 2013).

There are no clear dividing lines in Bulgaria, and so far there has been no broad consensus about the past or any generally accepted view of events in the country's recent history based on shared social values. Researchers like Znepolski also claim that the media actually give more coverage to the perpetrators than to the victims and allow the former to voice their opinion: "that was simply the way it was back then." As a result, interviews with communist politicians or their memoirs are the main source of material for the media's attempts to come to terms with the past. Znepolski claims that even former heads of the secret service are not frowned upon, and indeed the public affords many of them a legendary status. Other publications use anonymous secret service sources, so that as a result it is impossible to verify them.⁴ The tabloidization throughout South East Europe is also complicating a serious debate about the past.

The role of the media in the past has still not been properly researched, even though documents belonging to the former Bulgarian Stasi should have provided a good starting point for a public investigation into the communist era. The archive was not properly opened up until 2008 and even then not to the same extent as in other post-communist countries. In 2006, shortly before Bulgaria joined the EU, a law was passed which provided for the investigation of politicians, judges and journalists. The government body responsible for these investigations confirmed that even years after the fall of communism ten per cent of the managers at the country's state radio station were former informers of the state security apparatus.⁵ Besides that, a number of important documents were also destroyed during the collapse of the communist regime, so there are probably many crimes that go unreported. Many observers agree that the relatively late and somewhat half-hearted attempt to wheedle out former Stasi informers and other former regime functionaries in the government and media has hampered the democratic process in Bulgaria in the recent past.

4 | Cf. Alexander Andreev, "Geheimdienste, Mafia und Politik", *Südosteuropa Aktuell*, 27, Munich, 1998, 117 et seqq.

5 | "Bulgariens Stasi. Zahlreiche Journalisten belastet", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29 Dec 2008, <http://faz.net/frankfurter-allgemeine-zeitung/feuilleton/-1743381.html> (accessed 11 Mar 2013).

Critics complain that even today the media do not give sufficient coverage to the activities of former informers. This may well be down to a widespread lack of enthusiasm amongst the public to dig up the country's past more than 20 years after the fall of communism. Mishandling of the Stasi documents in previous years may well have contributed to this feeling. During the country's period of transition, the secret documents were repeatedly misused during election campaigns and, according to a report by Deutsche Welle, "people got tired of hearing about them and stopped paying much attention to new publications by the Stasi Commission". The writer Vladimir Zarev made the following observation: "The public are no longer interested in the Stasi past as they think it's pointless to keep going over the events of that terrible time. They have a superficial understanding of what went on, but the details of

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these processes have deliberately been kept hidden. This is why the people have been in a trance-like state for the past 20 years."⁶ There have been a number of instances of journalists reporting on suspected informers on the basis of information contained in secret service documents, only to find themselves being sued for slander or libel, and this had also had the effect of dampening reporters' enthusiasm for the subject. There is a lack of appropriate legislation or sufficient self-regulation within the print media to provide serious investigative journalists with adequate protection.

Print media too close to powerful interests

The past reluctance within the media themselves to make efforts to come to terms with the past is probably also due to the fact that a considerable number of media owners used to belong to the former elite. According to Znepolski, those opposed to the regime had neither the opportunity nor the financial resources to take over the former state media during the collapse of communism. The various media companies were divided up amongst a "reconstituted, ex-communist elite" as the democrats only looked on helplessly.⁷

6 | Vessela Vladkova, "Bulgarien: Der lange Arm der Stasi", Deutsche Welle, 17 Apr 2009, <http://dw.de/bulgarien-der-lange-arm-der-stasi/a-4179075> [11.03.2013].

7 | Conversation with KAS staff member Denica Zheleva, 15 Jan 2013.

Similar patterns were also seen in other East European countries such as Romania, where former heads of communist media companies were registered as the new owners of the former state and party newspapers during the first few years after the collapse of the old regime, and basically took over the old media infrastructure.⁸

Although new independent media companies soon also started up in Bulgaria, the newspaper sector in particular was still subject to significant political influence from the old power elite in the 1990s.⁹ The relationship between journalists and politicians remained very close compared to other post-communist states and the fact that many new newspapers were started up by political parties in the early days after the collapse of the communist regime may have also contributed to this situation.

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A gradual change in values, but also new uncertainties for journalists

Generally speaking, the totalitarian view of the press as a pillar of state power has only slowly given way to the modern idea of the press as a supervising body with a responsibility to the public and democratic values. The journalism courses offered by state universities have also had to go through a slow process of change, but as yet there seems to be no real consensus amongst Bulgarian media experts as to whether this change has actually been fully achieved. According to Professor Znepolski's institute, the media are officially free from political influence, but the professor believes there are clear indications that politicians and the media "still work closely together and maintain links that they hide from the public at large".

8 | Simone Schindwein, "Zwischen Propaganda und Kommerz – Medien(un)freiheit in Südost-, Mittelost- und Osteuropa", Netzwerk Recherche, 2007, 67, <http://netzwerkrecherche.de/files/nr-studie-pressefreiheit.pdf> (accessed 11 Mar 2013).

9 | Pavlina Krasteva, "Journalismus in Bulgarien siebzehn Jahre nach dem Systemwechsel. Eine qualitative Studie zum Selbstverständnis von bulgarischen Pressejournalisten", MA Thesis, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, Apr 2007, 17, http://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/1986/1/MA_Krasteva_Pavlina.pdf (accessed 11 Mar 2013).

Today, several generations of journalists work together in Bulgaria: those that lived under communism and are influenced by its ideology; others that started in journalism immediately after the changes in 1989 and who were actively involved in reporting the dramatic changes at the time; and finally a generation of much younger journalists with no first-hand experience of the turmoil of transformation.¹⁰ These committed, politically untainted and often much lower-paid younger media staff have so far been very welcomed by many publishers and broadcasters. They are often the ones who seized the initiative when it comes to transparent, critical reporting, although they have not always been able to assert themselves. On top of this, their jobs are increasingly at risk in a shrinking job market.

Since the second half of 2012 experts see a new trend towards consolidation of ownership in the print media. This is likely to make independent reporting more difficult and could even undermine some of the progress made over the last 23 years. A potential newspaper monopoly brought about by the merger of two large media groups could further strengthen the ties between politics and the media. In reporting on a media survey conducted with the support of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the researcher Orlin Spassov expressed the conclusion that the media plurality achieved after the fall of communism is already in the process of being reversed: "There is currently a trend towards standardising of reporting."¹¹ Most print media until the resignation of the Brissow government in February 2012 tended to be almost exclusively positive in their reports on leading politicians in government, and while there are some cases of radical criticism, balanced points of view are rare. In the *Press Freedom Index 2013*, produced by Reporters Without Borders, which takes into account factors such as the legal independence and political autonomy of journalists, Bulgaria – already the lowest-ranked of the EU countries – dropped to 87th place worldwide.¹²

10 | Krasteva, n. 9, 1.

11 | "Bulgarische Printmedien: Polarisierung und Wettbewerb mit dem Web – Jahresreport 2012 der Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung und der Stiftung Mediendemokratie", KAS Veranstaltungsbeiträge, 17 Jan 2013, <http://kas.de/medien-europa/de/publications/33299> (accessed 11 Mar 2013).

12 | Reporters Without Borders, *Press Freedom Index 2013*, <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2013,1054.html> (accessed 11 Mar 2013).

Most media sector experts agree that many Bulgarian media outlets are currently not making any profit. There are a very large number of media outlets in a relatively small market, which makes further consolidation even more likely. However, further concentration of ownership may not be enough to solve the industry's financial problems. If there is a lack of any corresponding investment in the quality of the journalistic product, especially as they are in direct competition with free sites on the internet. Newspapers and magazines in particular would benefit if they could find a way of presenting complex issues in a clear way and thus provide their readers with a certain degree of orientation. Dealing with the country's communist past would be a good example of this. The media could also shed some light on their own history and so gain the public's trust.

Former Yugoslavia – the media as a catalyst for nation states

Communism is not the only reason why the media in South East Europe has lost some of its credibility. The wars in former Yugoslavia provided many examples of media complicity in political crimes and the difficulty of dealing with these issues. What had taken place over decades in the communist system, namely the development of political power with criminal characteristics, occurred in an accelerated fashion during the Balkan conflict.

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As Yugoslavia collapsed, the media found themselves facing an additional dilemma in dealing with the legacy of communism, as they not only had to adopt a position on political change, but also found themselves in the middle of an ethnic conflict. They were put under pressure by the political elite to reinterpret the past and the present in ways that favoured their own ethnic group and to actively help to create a new collective identity. Their job was to help people feel they belonged to a particular national group. The media basically interpreted what was happening in the conflict between the peoples of the Western Balkans solely from the perspective of "their" country, integrated this view into their rewriting of history and effectively created a new historical continuum.

Irrespective of what was actually happening on the front line, in the end it came down to one simple interpretation – one innocent nation suffering at the hands of another. A report by the journalist association Netzwerk Recherche (Research Network) put it like this: “Them and us – these are the two basic concepts that social identities and associated demarcations are based on. As a general principle [...] reports, articles and headlines are aimed at the ‘us’ group. The Milošević regime used this as a means of mobilising support during the conflicts of the 1990s.”¹³ In Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia alike, the media quickly became a party to the war. They ignored the crimes committed by their own side and focused entirely on alleged atrocities carried out by the enemy. This way of dealing with issues was still in evidence many years after the wars had ended¹⁴ and can still be seen today, albeit to a lesser extent.



Slobodan Milošević was the first head of state to be charged with genocide at a war crimes tribunal in 1999. | Source: a-birdie / flickr (CC BY-NC).

13 | Schindwein, n. 8, 54.

14 | Cf. Radenko Udovičić, Ozren Kebo, Tanja Topić and Benjamin Butković, “Vergangenheitsbewältigung und die Rolle der Medien”, Media Plan Institut and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Sarajevo, 20 Nov 2005, 75, http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_7668-544-1-30.pdf (accessed 11 Mar 2013).

Slobodan Milošević had made some concessions to press freedom in the 1990s, in the belief that the media would then support him in his nationalist campaigns. The media landscape in Serbia had also been privatised in an “uncontrolled and almost random way”, and once again the new owners came from the existing power elite.¹⁵ As a result, most of the media not only showed no opposition to the conflict being waged by the warlords, but actually served as part of their propaganda machine. For American war reporter and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Roy Gutman, one of the most unsettling aspects of the regional media was “how easily members of the press moved from journalists to propagandists”.¹⁶ The media proved to be an important tool in the destruction of the multi-ethnic society.

Reporters in uniform

Today, journalists have to take responsibility for more than just verbally supporting war propaganda. In some cases, particular military operations were actually encouraged by media reports, or at least intensified by them. During the Serbian advances on Vukovar in Croatia in 1991 and Zvornik in Bosnia in 1992, some reporters apparently marched into the occupied areas wearing military uniforms. Meanwhile, some of those who took part in the fighting and were later convicted of war crimes stated they did what they did because of the reports they had seen on television.

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In the case of Zvornik, Serbian state television aired images of the Serbian national flag being hoisted on top of a mosque while martial music played in the background.¹⁷ Prior to the Vukovar massacre, in which more than 200 Croatian civilians were killed, the media had spread false reports of Croatian soldiers killing 41 Serbian children in a primary school. The reports were traced by to a Reuters

15 | Schlindwein, n. 8, 57.

16 | United States Institute of Peace, “Prime Time Crime: The Media and the Balkan Wars”, Apr 2013, <http://usip.org/publications/prime-time-crime-media-and-balkan-wars> (accessed 11 Mar 2013).

17 | Želimir Bojović, “Milosevic Media Face War Crimes Spotlight”, Balkan Transitional Justice, 24 Jun 2009, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/article/milosevic-media-face-war-crimes-spotlight> (accessed 11 Mar 2013).

correspondent in the region, who was later fired. There is no doubt they contributed to the support gained by the paramilitary groups.¹⁸ “When lies start to arrive from the front, they stimulate people in the field to kill”, claimed a spokesman for the Serbian public prosecutor’s office, which launched investigations into journalists in 2009 for alleged involvement in war crimes.¹⁹ Kemal Kurspahić, former editor-in-chief of the Bosnian anti-nationalist newspaper *Oslobođenje*, referred to “prime-time crime”, a term normally applied to describe detective shows on television. In reality, it is very difficult to prove a link between TV reporting and attacks on the ground.



The main building of the state broadcaster RTS in Belgrad was target of a NATO airstrike in April 1999. Today it is nothing but ruins. | Source: Paradastos / flickr (CC BY-NC).

Serbian state media also played a key role in the Kosovo conflict with NATO. Serbian footage was often broadcast on American and European TV, while NATO itself only had a limited amount of its own material available. This threatened to change the political perception of the conflict in the West, one of the main reasons why NATO chose to attack media installations in Serbia. On 23 April 1999 eleven people were killed when the headquarters of RTS, the Serbian state broadcaster, was bombed in Belgrade. The NATO spokesman at the time, Jamie Shea, justified the attack by

18 | Anes Alić, “Balkans: Media and war Crimes”, ISN, ETH Zurich, 24 Jun 2009, <http://isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?id=102376> (accessed 11 Mar 2013).

19 | Bojović, n. 17.

saying: "RTS is not media. It is full of government employees who are paid to produce propaganda and lies. [...] And therefore, we see that as a military target."²⁰ Freedom of expression in Serbia was already officially restricted and had been for some time. Following a government decree, radio and TV stations had to follow instructions given to them by political leaders. However, a few independent stations still tried to produce their own programmes.²¹

Warmongers under pressure from their own colleagues

Warmongers amongst journalists found themselves under growing pressure when peace finally arrived. The worst of the agitators were thrown out of the Journalists' Association of Serbia shortly after the fall of Milošević in 2000.²² In 2006 journalist organisations criticised the election of a candidate in the Serbian province of Vojvodina, because at the beginning of the 1990s she had been a manager of a radio station that had broadcast hate messages.²³ The investigations into journalists in connection with war crimes carried out by the Serbian public prosecutor's office were welcomed by at least some members of the media, although there was no real consensus amongst Serbian journalist associations as to whether this process would really serve the cause of justice. If nothing else, the influence of the former agitators within their own professional community appears to have been significantly reduced.

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However, this does not mean that the nationalist point of view has been marginalised within media in former Yugoslavia. As a result of their traumatic experiences during the wars, each ethnic group in the region has its own version of the truth that is represented in history books and education systems, just as it is in the media. Minimal sentences or pardons for war criminals by the other side are a regular source of outrage and are portrayed by the media as signs of contempt for the victims and an attack on their own

20 | "Targeting Serb TV", Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), 23 Apr 1999, http://pbs.org/newshour/bb/europe/jan-june99/serb_tv_4-23.html (accessed 11 Mar 2013).

21 | Schlindwein, n. 8, 54.

22 | Bojović, n. 17.

23 | Dinko Gruhonjić, "Rundfunk in Serbien: Ohne neues Personal keine Vergangenheitsbewältigung", Deutsche Welle, 29 Jul 2006, <http://dw.de/p/8tqS> (accessed 11 Mar 2013).

nation, while at the same time making little or no mention of the excesses of violence shown by their own forces. But it can also be more subtle. Journalists sometimes give “the impression of being neutral, but this is often belied by a choice of details that serve to reduce ‘our guilt’, while highlighting ‘their guilt’”.²⁴ Ethnic rhetoric continues to play a recognisable role in debates on the region’s future. While the often criticised “hate speech” found in the regular media may now tend to be tempered with more reasonable forms of debate and is no longer a mass phenomenon, it is still widespread on the internet, for example, as has been shown in a study carried out in Bosnia.²⁵

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The Serbian mass media still has little enthusiasm for actually dealing with its recent past, although there are some exceptions, such as the radio station *B92*, the news magazine *Vreme* (time), the daily newspaper *Danas* (today) and even the news agency *Beta*, which also addresses sensitive issues from the country’s past. In Croatia exposés by the daily paper *Jutarnji list* (morning paper) and occasional articles in weekly publications are also worth a mention. Besides that, there is a real dearth of well-researched articles in both countries, according to a recent expert assessment provided by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.²⁶ Interest in the wars of the 1990s is declining, while much more attention is being given to the Second World War due to disputes over the way that conflict has been portrayed in the history books. Online media are filling the gap to some extent, for instance through their reporting on the war crimes tribunals in The Hague.²⁷

24 | Udovičić, Kebo, Topić and Butković, n. 14, 75.

25 | Radenko Udovičić, “The Internet – Freedom Without Boundaries? Analysis of comments on portals and recommendations on better communication”, Media Plan Institut and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Sarajevo, 2010, 6, http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_20598-1522-2-30.pdf (accessed 11 Mar 2013).

26 | E-mail to the author, 8 Jan 2013.

27 | Cf. Henri Bohnet, Anja Czymmeck, Michael A. Lange and Sabina Wölkner, “Das Haager Kriegsverbrechertribunal und die Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung in den Ländern des ehemaligen Jugoslawien”, in this edition of the KAS International Reports.

In contrast, a study supported by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung showed that already in 2005 Bosnian media were much more interested in the war crimes carried out in the former Yugoslavia. This may partly be due to the fact that Bosnia-Herzegovina is more often perceived as a victim of the conflict. However, an analysis of the Bosnian media led to the conclusion that their reporting also displayed a distinct lack of real balance and quality. A good example would be the fact that, during ten years, the Bosnian media failed to explain to the public how the International Criminal Court works or what the prosecutors are saying.²⁸

There remains a lack of objective journalistic analysis in the region, as the arrest of the alleged Serbian war criminal Ratko Mladić two years ago showed. The Serbian media were not particularly interested in the serious charges brought by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, which accused the former general of the Bosnian Serb Republic of being responsible for genocide, ethnic cleansing and terror against the civilian population. Most newspapers and broadcasters did not even question how Mladić had been able to hide out in Serbia for so many years and who had helped him. Those reports that did look at the issue with some degree of objectivity were mainly interested in the fact that an important obstacle to EU membership had now been removed. A lot of the media actually treated Mladić like a pop star and came out with sensationalist headlines such as "He survived three heart attacks!" or "Bury me next to my daughter!". Only the weekly paper *Vreme* asked how Mladić had been able to get medical treatment for so many years without being discovered at a time when there was an international warrant out for his arrest.²⁹ Many critical observers see this kind of superficial reporting as a sign that the country is still not ready to come to terms with its past. Another reason is the fact that the media is dominated by tabloid journalism, which is not ideally suited to dealing with complex issues in a balanced way.

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28 | Udovičić, Kebo, Topić and Butković, n. 14, 2.

29 | Marija Ristić, "Serbian Media About Mladic – Turning Horror into Showbiz", *Balkan Transitional Justice*, 31 Dec 2012, <http://balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbia-turning-horror-into-showbiz> (accessed 11 Mar 2013).

OUTLOOK: MOVING AWAY FROM STEREOTYPES

Those in the media who are genuinely interested in addressing issues of justice and reconciliation often still find themselves in the minority. This raises the question: to what extent can media development cooperation provide positive impulses? From a professional perspective, training in investigative journalism is a good idea, especially in legal matters. There is also still work to be done to fill the gaps in journalists' knowledge about how international institutions operate and about established methods of coming to terms with the past. At the same time, people working in the media are an important group of professionals that can help society move away from stereotypical thinking. Thus, ideally, non-governmental organisations that work with the media in the region should support the questioning and scrutiny of biased or partisan reporting. One way to do this is to promote the exchange of ideas between journalists from former enemy nations at media conferences and workshops. This gives media professionals the opportunity to put what might seem like unassailable truths into some kind of perspective and to recognise how similar the challenges are that they and their colleagues face while carrying out their day-to-day work. International programmes can also support the development of new independent media, especially on the internet. This will help promote new perspectives when dealing with the past. The media were formerly seen as important instruments to be used by dictators and warlords for their own benefit, and today they have an equally important role to play in helping to build modern democracies and consolidate peace in the Balkans.

Research by Denica Zheleva and Irina Kharuk