

# Islamophobia and Media Representation of Refugees in Serbia

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## Abstract

This article seeks to respond to the following questions: How do the print media in Serbia report on refugees, asylum-seekers and refugee affairs; what effect is achieved through this type of media representation; and is there "Islamophobia pushing" through media. In the course of the media analysis this study examined various national dailies as well as the leading websites during the year of 2015 by focusing on specific articles that are able to contribute to the overall aim of the study. A total of eight Serbian newspapers were sampled: Alo, Informer, Kurir, Pravda, Telegraf, Danas, Politika and Blic as well as various leading websites. Although the wars in the former Yugoslavia ended twenty years ago, consequences of these wars are still visible in the Western Balkans and as will be demonstrated on the case study of Serbia in particular. In the past Islamophobic incidents in Serbia, a post-conflict society, were not rare. Islamophobic incidents to some extent are still present in Serbia, especially in the areas of paramount importance such as the media and therefore this phenomenon will also be analyzed in the context of media representation.

Keywords: Media, Refugees, Migrants, Serbia, Islamophobia.

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# Sırbistan'da İslamofobi ve Medyada Mülteci Temsilleri

# Öz

Sırbistan medyasının mültecileri haberleştirme biçimlerini tartışan bu makalede, mültecilerin ve sığınmacıların yazılı basında yer alma şekilleri ve bu tür temsillerin neden olduğu etkiler araştırılmakta ve medyada İslamofobik bir eğilimin mevcut bulunup bulunmadığı sorunsalına cevap aranmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda gerçekleştirilecek medya analizi kapsamında, 2015 yılında faaliyet gösteren çeşitli ulusal gazeteler ve önde gelen websitelerinde yayınlanmış olan belirli makaleler incelenmiştir. Çalışmanın örneklemi; Alo, Informer, Kurir, Pravda, Telegraf, Danas, Politika ve Blic olmak üzere sekiz Sırbistan gazetesinden ve çeşitli önde gelen websitelerinden oluşmaktadır. Eski Yugoslavya'daki savaş döneminin sona ermesinin üzerinden yirmi yıl geçmiş olmasına rağmen, savaşın sonuçları Batı Balkanlar'da görünürlüğünü devam ettirmekte olup, bu çalışma bağlamında Sırbistan örneği özelinde ortaya konacaktır. Bir post-çatışma toplumu olan Sırbistan'ın geçmişinde İslamofobik olaylar nadir değildir. Sırbistan'da İslamofobik eylemler, özellikle medya gibi büyük öneme haiz alanlarda halen daha mevcut olduğundan dolayı, bu çalışmada söz konusu olgunun medya temsilleri bağlamında çözümlemesi gerçekleştirilecektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Medya, Mülteciler, Göçmenler, Sırbistan, İslamofobi.

# Introduction

The media play an important role in framing public policy and discourse about immigrants and refugees. In addition to disseminating policy messages, the media also construct and promote particular positions on these issues (Fleras & Kunz, 2001). The study performed by a team of experts from Canada suggests that the uncertainty paired with the media's proclivity to focus on negative rather than positive news stories, can lead to extreme negative reactions to immigrants and refugees-their removal from the human race through dehumanization. In turn, through the removal of the constraints imposed by humanity and kindness considerations, extreme behaviors toward members of these groups may be released. These behaviors may be justified on the grounds that they are required in order to protect the in-group from the "threats" that immigrants and refugees are seen to pose. Thus, the media may not only promote dehumanization of immigrants and refugees through depictions that highlight potential threats to the host society, but also provide ready justifications for the dehumanization and consequent outcomes. In short, negative portrayals of immigrants in the press are dehumanising and can engender the sense that that a social crisis is looming, if not already taking hold (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013). The media has an important role in society as it helps bring important issues to the attention of the community as it is the case of the ongoing European refugee crisis. Media coverage of the issue has, however, been mixed. In 2015 Syrian refugees in particular became increasingly visible in both mainstream and social media as more and more refugees arrived in Europe. Social

media in this article will not be discussed but it is worth mentioning very briefly that social media have also been heavily used by Syrians themselves (Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2013; Carleen & Ying, 2015; Wall & Zahed, 2015), as well as by Europeans who are sympathetic to their struggle, but there is also a backlash that is evident in spaces such as the Twitter hashtag #refugeesNOTwelcome (Rettberg & Gajjala, 2015).

The main questions this article seeks to respond include how do the print media in Serbia reports on refugees, asylum-seekers and refugee affairs, what effect is achieved through this type of media representation and is there "Islamophobia pushing" through media. In the course of the media analysis this study examined various national dailies as well as the leading websites during the year of 2015 by focusing on specific articles able to contribute to the overall aim of the study. A total of eight Serbian newspapers were sampled: Alo, Informer, Kurir, Pravda, Telegraf, Danas, Politika and Blic as well as various leading websites including Balkan Aljazeera, B92, Dveri, Sandzak Press, Sandzak Live, Slobodna Bosna, Srbin.info, Vijesti.ba. Articles were selected by typing in the key words "asylum seekers", "refugees", "Islamophobia" as well as other commonly used Serbian expressions into websites and newspaper website search tools which could have contributed to the study.

These newspapers and websites were chosen to represent a range of differing regions in Serbia and to ensure a balance between broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. These newspapers and internet sources were also selected because they represent a range of political allegiances. The method of content analysis to examine the articles as a method which enables a more objective evaluation as well as discourse analysis as a method of studying the ways in which language is used in texts and contexts have been employed. Much of the recent research on the above-mentioned topics in the print media has been from a linguistic perspective, analyzing and identifying commonly used words and phrases (Baker & McEnery, 2005; Baker et al., 2008; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008). But there have also been studies which use a discursive method. Despite increasing media coverage, there are surprisingly few research studies looking at how refugees and asylum seekers have been discursively constructed. A great deal of research has been carried out on the media and on its representation of minorities. For the most part these studies have reached similar conclusions that the media usually present minorities in a stereotyped way and in connection with negative topics (Hargreaves, 1995; van Dijk, 1991; Finney & Robinson, 2007). Moreover, the coverage of minorities can be linked mainly to a few topics, such as immigration, crime, cultural differences and ethnic/race relations (Finney & Robinson, 2007). Less research has been done specifically in connection with the topic of migration and refugee affairs, and most of what has been done is the work of British and American researchers (Vicsek, Keszi & Márkus, 2008). Thus, there is an urgent need to feel this literature gap by providing more case studies and this article aim is to do so.

#### Case Study – Serbia

According to the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (Republic of Serbia), between January and December 31, 2015, the state border of the Republic of Serbia was passed by nearly 600,000 migrants from the Middle East and Africa. This number is significantly higher than the number of asylum seekers in 2014 (Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia, 2016). The majority of refugees aimed to seek asylum in the European Union. Despite some improvements in implementing the Asylum Law, the authorities in Serbia failed to provide effective access to international protection. Of 485,169 registrations, only 656 applications for asylum were submitted, and mostly discontinued; of 81 refugees interviewed by the end of November, 16 were granted refugee status and 14 subsidiary protections. In July 2015, as thousands of refugees entered the country daily, a registration centre was opened at Preševo, near the Macedonian border. Reception conditions were inadequate for the numbers arriving, and insufficient care was provided to vulnerable individuals. Most refugees travelled directly to the Hungarian border until September, when Hungary introduced restrictions on asylum for those entering from Serbia, which it considered a safe country of transit. Refugees then headed for the EU through Croatia. The police continued to ill-treat and financially exploit refugees and migrants. In November, the authorities allowed only Afghan, Iraqi and Syrian nationals to enter the country; others were arbitrarily identified as economic migrants and denied entry (Amnesty International, 2016). As a post-conflict society striving to join the EU, Serbia is still facing major problems, including when it comes to refugee crisis. In April 2015, Human Rights Watch documented extortion and police abuse of asylum seekers and migrants in Serbia as well as flawed registration procedures. Serbia has obligations under international law, and as a European Union candidate country, is expected to provide humane reception conditions for asylum seekers. It should work to fulfill those obligations and support – not hinder – those stepping up to do the job that the state is failing to do. It should also ensure that asylum seekers' prompt access to registration is not dependent on them paying bribes (Human Rights Watch, 2015). But these kinds of "events" were not covered by the media. To the contrary, much more has been put in sensationalist context when Islamophobia and refugee crisis were concerned.

## Islamophobia

The President of the Sandzak Committee for Human Rights stresses that Islamophobia has mostly been spread by the media. The newspapers that dominate in this regard are Informer, Kurir, Alo, Telegraf and Pravda (daily newspapers known for giving considerable space to right-wing extremists). According to the same source, area of Sandzak, which is predominantly inhabited by Muslims since the time of the so-called Bureaucratic Revolution and the rise of Slobodan Milošević, was marked by media as a dangerous place, the center of radical Islam. The stereotypes that were then created on the local Muslims have lasted until today. Some are even more pronounced. The media still hold to these images, now especially the tabloid press. The greater importance is given to the corresponding created stereotypes rather than facts that refute them. But the President of Sandzak Human Rights Committee emphasizes that the blame to some extent is also on the local media especially Sandzak press. The image that is sent to the world is very problematic, and thanks to this portal Islamophobic attitude is even bigger. If you write that a Sandzak Embassy has been opened somewhere in the world, even though this is in fact only a club at an Islamic centre, then this is a purposeful manipulation. When the news relates that pensions in Serbia will be reduced, the media will indicate this as pensions being reduced in Sandzak alone. Anyone who reads this will understand that the information is limited to Sandzak, not that it is actually happening throughout Serbia. Such misinformation and rumors, if constantly repeated, become dangerous. This creates a growth in dissatisfaction and strengthens the antagonism against the government and of extremism; this is something that has to be fought on both sides (Perovic, 2015).

It is important to note that the impulse was already being sent for decades by the leading intellectuals. Dobrica Ćosić, one of the leading Serbian ideologists, arguably, had the strongest impact in Serbian society and in particular his interpretation of the history of the twentieth century has immeasurable extent. Many other prominent figures, including academics, university professors as well as politicians had strong impact on creating the image of "others". Serbian historian and academic Milorad Ekmečić on the occasion of the promotion of his book *"The Long Passage Between Slaughter and Farming*", maintained that Muslim fundamentalism is largely to be blamed for the 1992 disintegration of Yugoslavia (Ekmečić, 2007).

As analyzed by Cigar, Serbian experts on the Orient had an important role, particularly in view of the fact that "*Muslims are an especially vulnerable community due to specific geopolitical circumstances...and because their position in fact is a hurdle on the path to the establishment of a Greater Serbia*" (Cigar, 2001). Professor Darko Tanasković, Islamologist, holds in his book "*Islam and Us*" that the religious dimension of the Bosnian war has been hushed up given that opening of "the terrifying abyss" of a religious war reality would have questioned the fiction about "chetnik aggression" and the "the new world order's" approach to the ex-Yugoslav crisis and other similar crises all over the globe. For him, that was definitely a religious war, meaning that many Muslims were perceiving it as jihad (Tanasković, 2006). Professor Tanasković, today's Serbian Ambassador to UNESCO, in his other book "Neo-Ottomanism" claims that in the Balkans, Turkey also pursues its own religious politics through the Directorate for Religious Issues which closely cooperates with local Islamic communities and assists them logistically and in human resources. According to him, Turkey thus maintains a certain level of control over the course of Balkan Islam so as to suppress the influence of Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Human Rights Committee in Serbia claims that the terrorist attack of September 11 played into the hands of Serbia's thesis about Islamic fundamentalism, at present referred to as "new Balkan Islam." No doubt that Tanasković was among those creating the atmosphere of Islamic danger in the 1980s. Therefore, after September 11 he emerged as someone who used to "forewarn the world about metamorphoses of the Islamic phenomenon in the Balkans." (HOPS, 2011). Tanasković promotes a thesis of Islamic fundamentalism whose activities are considered the most perilous for Yugoslavia and more important than Serb-Croat relations. He points to the realization of Islamic ideas in Sandzak and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in that regard puts special emphasis on Albanians. He warns of the danger of "Albanization", which for him entails Islamization. According to Tanasković, Albanization entails the disappearance of Christian churches, cemeteries, population and, by extension, the building of mosques and the spreading of the Muslim lifestyle (Jevtić, 1989).

Dr. Miroljub Jevtić, Professor of Political Science at Belgrade University, in his book "*The Problem of the Birth Rate in Kosovo*", also warned that the Muslim world might realize its objective to live in the Balkan territory in line with "Allah's words" only if Muslims became numerically superior, that is if they acquired the numerical strength for realization of that objective. Jevtić wrote "Hence advocacy of a high birth rate…for its goal is the conquest of the geographical territory, which presupposes settlement of Muslims from Turkey, that is Turks, in the Balkans." According to Jevtić, religion was amply used in the advocacy of a high birth rate as Muslims faced a religious obligation to give birth to a large number of children. Jevtić considered that the international Islamic masterminds and planners have as their primary task the Islamization of the whole of Serbia as the first step in their conquest of Europe (Jevtić, 1991).

In a series of articles published in magazines and dailies, and also in the military weekly *Vojska*, Professors Darko Tanasković and Miroljub Jevtić regularly depicted Islam as an inferior, retrograde and violent system and religion. They also focused on the phenomenon of the treason of Bosnian Serbs, who allegedly had converted to Islam. At the time of the most virulent anti-Islamic campaign in late 1991 and early 1992, when it became clear that Bosnia and Herzegovina would not remain within the framework of Yugoslavia, Darko Tanasković interpreted Bosnia and Herzegovina's appeal for help to Turkey as "a tacit renewal of the position of Islamic converts…and they are for Serbs, worse enemies than Turks themselves". Tanasković warns: "To threaten a Serb with a Turk is even archetypically more ominous than to threaten him with a German." (Jevtić, 1991).

Ilić observed that among others, two experts from the nineties, Dr. Darko Tanasković and Dr. Miroljub Jevtic, Professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences, both have regular guest appearances in the media and deal exclusively with a single theme: the threat of radical Islam in Kosovo and Bosnia. In this regard, Tanasković is well known in performing his hypothesis from the theory of Neo-Ottomanism and long-term planning Turkish impact on the former Ottoman Empire territories (Ilić, 2014).

One of the events that caused the biggest media hysteria is a visit of the Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Srebrenica Genocide. On that occasion, there was an incident in which Serbian Prime Minister, Aleksandar Vučić, as he was leaving the Potočari Memorial Center was attacked. Part of those present shouted "Vučić out" but also there was also a placard reading "For one Serb we will kill 100 Muslims", but it is still unknown who these demonstrators were as Mr. Vučić himself after the incident stated that he received information that hooligans might have come from soccer supporting groups from Serbia. This incident in Srebrenica completely shifted the focus in the media, from the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Srebrenica Genocide when more than 8000 Muslims were killed, to a number of conspiracy

theories that filled the front pages. The Prime Minister on the other hand was praised for his professional demeanor and his ability to lower tensions (by politicians all over the world, OSCE and several local NGO's). This entire event was preceded by media hysteria about the adoption of the Resolution on Srebrenica in the United Nations whose failure to be adopted represented the condition of the prime minister of going to Srebrenica. Regarding marking the 20th anniversary of the Srebrenica, the Bosniac National Council issued a statement that it is unacceptable to conduct organized intimidation, threats and arrests against Bosniaks who attended the 20th anniversary of the Srebrenica Genocide by various Serbian services. (Bosniac National Council, 2015).

Another event that marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Srebrenica in 2015 is an initiative of non-governmental organizations in Serbia that have called for an end of genocide denial against Muslims in Srebrenica and announced action #sedamhiljada in Belgrade (Nikolić, 2015).

The Ministry of Interior have banned all public gatherings in Belgrade on the 20th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre, citing security risks as a reason as right-wing organizations Dveri and Zavetnici, as well as members of the Serbian Radical Party, also announced contra demonstrations at the same time (Dragojlo, 2015). This decision shows a lack of understanding of the political elites that the freedom of peaceful assembly is a fundamental human right that can be enjoyed and exercised by individuals and groups, unregistered associations, legal entities and corporate bodies. Assemblies may serve many purposes, including the expression of diverse, unpopular or minority opinions. Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly state that only peaceful assemblies are protected. An assembly should be deemed peaceful if its organizers have professed peaceful intentions and the conduct of the assembly is non-violent. The term "peaceful" should be interpreted to include conduct that may annoy or give offence, and even conduct that temporarily hinders, impedes or obstructs the activities of third parties. Counterdemonstrations are a particular form of simultaneous assembly in which the participants wish to express their disagreement with the views expressed at another assembly. The right to counterdemonstrate does not extend to inhibiting the right of others to demonstrate (Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly, 2010). The fact that third parties would use peaceful assembly as a pretext for violence, does not give the state the right to prohibit the peaceful assembly. It never may be necessary to prohibit peaceful assembly, whose participants are completely nonviolent, because of the threat of violence by others. Not even by international standards or under the Constitution ban on peaceful assembly whose participants are completely non-violent cannot be justified because there is a threat of violence by third parties. There is no dispute that in society there are extremists, violent groups that oppose this event. This, however, does not justify that the state has not provided the conditions to maintain the assembly for participants that is believed that will not be violent. (Beogradski centar za ljudska prava, 2013). The state could and should have been banned assemblies of those who threatened with violence. Even if the state, in principle, is permitted to prohibit a non-violent assembly just because third parties are threatening with violence to participants, the state cannot apply such a measure if it itself is responsible for the failure to take all appropriate preventive measures to prevent or stop violent contra demonstrations ("Beogradski centar za ljudska prava", 2012).

Some of the headlines in that period were: "Muslim soldiers burned villages and killed their own people, not Ratko Mladic and the Serbs: Canadian general reveals the truth about Srebrenica!" ("Muslimanski Vojnici", 2015), "Vučić shot in the head: See attack of enraged Muslims on Vucic!" ("Vučić pogođen u glavu", 2015), "If this is a genocide: Mladic in Srebrenica frees Muslim women and children!" ("Ako je ovo genocid Mladić", 2015), "Kidnapped because of the truth on Srebrenica: In the book he proved that there was no genocide!" ("Kidnapovan zbog istine", 2015), "Definitely on the Bosniak side: Read who will come on July 11 in Potocari" ("Nedvosmisleno na strani", 2015), "A secret agreement between the US, Britain and France on Srebrenica?" ("Tajni dogovor SAD", 2015), "Scam of the West: Britain- Serbs, teach your children that you are genocidal!" ("Enuka zapada Britanci", 2015), "Organized Lynch: Sarajevo allowed assassination of Vucic!" ("Linč organizovan", 2015), "VIDEO lynching in Potocari: See how the enraged masses attacked Vucic shouting Allah Akbar!", ("Video linč u Potočarima", 2015).

Certainly, these are not the only incidents that marked the year 2015. The term Siptar used in Serbian language is considered derogatory for Albanians when used by South Slavic peoples, due to the negative connotations associated with that word. This term is used for Albanians living in Kosovo (95,6% of Kosovo population are Muslims). Just in 2015, the State Commissioner for Protection of Equality in two cases (submitted by the organizations of civil society against media) decided that the use of the term Siptar represents a violation of Law on Prohibition of Discrimination (Annual Report for 2015). Along with the Commissioner, Press Council<sup>1</sup> also in the case "Youth Initiative for Human Rights against daily newspaper "Informer" found that usage of the term Siptar had violated Section 1 of Chapter IV (Responsibility of journalists) at which the journalist must oppose all those who violate human rights or promote any kind of discrimination, hate speech and incitement and violated Section 4 of Chapter V, where is stated that journalist must be aware of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media and the need to do everything to avoid discrimination based, inter alia, on race, religion etc. and also confirmed that usage of this term is offensive and that as such it should not be used in the Serbian media. (Press Council, 2015). However, although these decisions have been made, this has not prevented the media from abusing the term.

Cyberspace is also used to spread intolerable image of "others". Some of these initiatives are political ones, including actions by political parties (such as Dveri) while others include webpages, forums and initiatives (Srbin.info, Srpski nacionalisti, Stormfront, SNP Nasi) mostly ultranationalist that spread Islamophobic content. In order to demonstrate these claims we will mention only some of the headlines: "Who and when allowed Vucic to share Serbian land to Muslims" ("Ko je i kada ovlastio", 2015), "Patriotic block Kosovo and Metohija: Belgrade allows

<sup>1</sup> The Press Council is an independent, self-regulatory body that brings together publishers, owners of print and online media, news agencies and media professionals. It has been established for monitoring the observance of the Journalist's Code of Ethics, solving complaints made by individuals and institutions related to media content. The Press Council is also authorized to mediate between aggrieved individuals, institutions and editorial staff, and to pronounce public warnings in cases when determined that the violation of ethical standards as defined by the Journalist's Code of Ethics has occurred. The Press Council is engaged in the education of media professional to act in accordance with the Journalist's Code of Ethics and works to strengthen the role of media in Serbia.

Siptars to have an army" ("Patriotski blok Kim", 2015), "Novi Pazar Serbs outraged: They want to build a mosque in the Serbian neighborhood" ("Srbi Novog Pazara ogorčeni", 2015), "Brussels: Vucic agreed that Siptars in Kosovo receive its own country code" ("Brisel: Vučić pristao", 2015), "The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality does not allow the Albanians to be called Siptars!" ("Poverenica za zaštitu", 2015), "Russians on Vidovdan came to Gazimestan: Siptars surrounded them with Kalashnikovs" ("Rusi na Vidovdan", 2015), "Siptars threatened to slaughter Serbs" ("Šiptari pretili da ce zakolju Srbe", 2015), "Turks conquers Germany like Siptars Kosovo" ("Turci osvajaju Nemačku", 2015). The laws prohibit and sanction acts and hate speech as a form of public expression of hatred and discrimination. In the last decade Serbia was faced with major problems in this regards and in 2015 there were several incidents worth mentioning. Hate speech in the media is reduced in 2015 but in Serbia Islamophobic incidents happened. TV Pink is the leading commercial station (with national coverage) in the Serbian television broadcast market and gained a strong reputation for its entertainment programming including reality show program Farm. In this program, it is not the first time that Muslims were discriminated but the latest incident happened when one of the participants, Tamara Đuric, started screaming and yelling "I will fuck all the Muslims and criminals". She was disqualified from the reality show on the ground of hate speech (which was attributed to the Muslim singer from Novi Pazar, Semir Dzankovic, another participant in the show who was also disqualified due to violent behaviour). However, after several days Tamara Đuric was invited to come back to the show and compete until the end where she was the runner-up on the national television ("Farma ko šovinistička farsa", 2015).

Feelings of the local Muslims were also affected by Miroslav Lazanski, a well-known Serbian military analyst who, according to the leading Bosniak/Muslims media ("Skanadalozni govor mržnje Miroslava", 2015b) in recent months has a role in an active propaganda against Bosniaks and Islam ("Skanadalozni govor mržnje Miroslava", 2015a). Media state that under the guise of some expert Lazanski is spreading scandalous hate speech against Bosniaks, Muslims and incites hatred. In a talk show program, Lazanski stated that he was shocked by seeing Muslim girls in hijab at a religious school in Travnik which reminded him to prison. He added that "If that is 21<sup>st</sup> century then that is terrible" ("Skandalozni govor mržnje o Bošnjakinjama", 2015).

The connection between football and some forms of extreme violence are widespread in Serbia, and Novi Pazar is no exception. The football club of Novi Pazar plays a key role in the region, attracting thousands of spectators at every football match. Still, football matches and conflicts linked to the football club affiliation are prominent in Novi Pazar. According to the respondents, there could be numerous reasons for these conflicts. Sympathies for the club, minority/majority relations in Serbia and political affiliation have been mentioned as the main reasons behind altercations. In the most severe cases, these altercations grow into a violent conflict. This violence can be manifested as symbolic violence (insults on the ethnic and religious basis) or as direct physical altercations. Several instances of fights, stabbings and, in the worst scenario, murders have been recorded on this basis (Cultural Centre DamaD, 2015).

Only in 2015 there were several serial incidents, including one against football club Rad

whose supporters had the transparent "There will be war" but they also burned the flags of Albania, Kosovo and Turkey ("Radovci: Biće rata", 2015) while the other significant incident happened during the game in Cacak against football club Borac when Borac fans chanted nationalist slogans and insulted the visiting players ("Novi Pazar uputio", 2015).

One of the incidents happened with hate flyers which had scandalous hate speech and were found on November 15, 2015 in the center of Belgrade, in front of the primary school. Those flyers had messages such as "Muslims are aggressive and bloodthirsty" or "Muslims become bloodthirsty murders who hate all the other religions." ("Muslimani su agresivni", 2015). Another problem is graffiti, which represent a form of hate speech. It is generally taken as the speech directed against a person or persons by race, religion, ethnicity etc. Their impact should not be underestimated because they intimidate the population, which is threatened, but also encourage those like-minded creators of hate graffiti. Hate graffiti in Serbia was not rare in the past and in 2015, the Islamic Community of Serbia expressed concern and strongly condemned hate graffiti in Novi Sad ("Death to Muslims"), adding that this is a way of calling for lynch of members of this religious community ("Govor mržnje", 2015).

Media coverage cannot be observed isolated from the Serbian society context from the 1990s as this narrative has remained dominant even today. Intellectual elites, distinguished professors, writers of textbooks, academics and other academics also have had a strong role in the education of Serbian youth. The way that history is taught, especially concerning wars in the 1990s is subject to constant changes and revisionism. Stojanovic who performed comparative analysis of history textbooks and concluded that, the education in Serbia and the region has always been an important lever of power. In the midst of the war in Bosnia in 1993-1994, new history textbooks were published to create new, politically useful model of historical memory that makes a framework to justify the wars. This justification has been ongoing even in current textbook. Those textbooks used by 20 generations of young, fabricated national and historical consciousness. Historical facts were adjusted to the needs of the politicians; some facts were changed or deleted while others were reinforced in order to present a new mythical narrative. After the change of government in 2000, history books remained the same. In 2002 they were changed again but their essence remains the same and reflects continuity with Milosevic's system of values (Perovic, 2015, p. 54).

## **Migrant Crisis**

Migrant crisis also hit Serbia. Political officials acted in accordance with democratic principles and Serbia has received acclaim from the international community, however, tragedy of this magnitude could not pass without incident. Quite a few media outlets did not report professionally or critically. At this place, it is necessary to show examples from various sources used in order to demonstrate the claim that some of the media that were used in this research did not report under good journalism standards: "Albanians and Wahhabis in Presevo: They take asylum seekers to the mosque and recruit them for radical Islam!" ("Albanci i vehabije u

Preševu", 2015), "Infected migrants escaped from quarantine: Does tuberculosis threatens Serbia?" ("Zaraženi migranti pobegli", 2015), "Shameful: Croats settled refugees in the Orthodox cemetery" ("Sramotno Hrvati smestili", 2015), "Not only rumors: Among migrants there are terrorists" ("Nisu samo glassine", 2015), "Serbia needs to make a centre for 400,000 migrants now? This is the latest blackmail from Brussels to Serbia!" ("Srbija da napravi", 2015), "Hungarian Prime Minister: Islam has never been a part of Europe, these are the rules of another world" ("Mađarski premijer", 2015), "Duda: Migrants bring epidemics and diseases" ("Duda: Migranti donose", 2015), "They rob monasteries, break things and attack us: This is how Serbs complain about the asylum seekers!" ("Pljačkaju manastire", 2015), "What is happening: Migrants brought disease to Serbia, all are hiding identities and raise 400,000 euros daily" ("Šta se to dešava migranti", 2015), "More refugees: Migrants will soon Islamize Serbia!" ("Sve više izbeglica", 2015). Notable headlines in this context included also among others: "Scary: In phones of the refugees, images of executions and flags of ISIS found" ("Jezivo: U telefonima", 2015), "SNP: Serbia should not become a reception center for migrants!" ("SNP: Srbija da ne bude prihvatni", 2015), "1,000 jihadists are already in Serbia - just waiting for the signal to attack" ("Dzihadista je već u Srbiji", 2015), "Germans want to introduce visas to Serbia again: And that's because of the asylum seekers!" ("Nemci hoće da uvedu", 2015), "Migrants destroy jobs to the prostitutes: Get them out of the park, we will have nothing to eat! ("Migranti uništavaju", 2015), "Popovic: Serbia must not become a quarantine!" ("Popović: Srbija ne sme", 2015), "Nervous asylum seekers: Fighting in a refugee camp in Vienna" ("Nervozni azilanti", 2015), "SNP: A large number of terrorists goes through Balkan route!" ("SNP: Veliki broj terorista", 2015).

Ombudsman of the Republic of Serbia Saša Janković appealed to the media and public figures to refrain from outbursts of distrust towards refugees from Syria and other Islamic countries, because they are not in any way to blame for the terrorist attacks, but rather are themselves the victims of religious extremism, fleeing and seeking refuge. The Ombudsman recalled that terrorists are just trying to provoke fear and hatred of people of Muslim faith and that this is their basis for recruiting new terrorists. Mr. Janković in particular appealed to the media as the Ombudsman stated that excessively harsh images of violence on the front pages and screens cause additional suffering to families, disturbs the public, especially children, and do not honor the victims (Ombudsman's Statement, 2015). Regarding the announcements of some ultra-right organizations who planned to protest against migrants, The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality warned the public that the Constitution and the laws prohibit the spread of any religious, ethnic and racial hatred and discrimination and that the State could not tolerate this kind of behaviour. The Commissioner also called on the media when publishing news stories, reports and headlines to respect the journalism ethics. Commissioner strongly condemned discriminatory recommendation of the Association of Serbian Taxi Drivers to their members not to take immigrants as passengers, stating that this is another indication of how much xenophobia is present in Serbia.

On the complaint of the organization "Praxis" from Belgrade against the Association of Serbian taxi drivers, regarding the statement of Aleksandar Bijelić, president of the Association,

published in the electronic edition of the daily newspaper "Blic" of 24 March 2015, Commissioner found that the Association of Serbian taxi drivers has violated the provisions of the prohibition of discrimination ("Taxi Drivers Recommended", 2015).

One of the last incidents happened in late 2015 ("ICTY: Dodik svjedok", 2015) during the trial before the ICTY to Ratko Mladic in whose defense Milorad Dodik, President of Republika of Srpska, testified. Shortly, Dodik said that what are we seeing around the globe - the blood and suffering of innocent Western man and the establishment of Daesh/ISIL based on Sharia law – has its beginnings in a political movement of Bosnian Muslims. Dodik further claimed that as Serbs once did, the whole world today need to defend themselves, and they should not blame the crimes, in dealing with such evil. Testifying in defense of Ratko Mladic, Dodik said that Alija Izetbegović and his Party of Democratic Action, "in a sense were the forerunner of the current ideology of radical Islam that we see in the world" (Stjepanović, 2015).

## Conclusion

As observed in "International Review of How Media Cover Migration", the conclusions from many different parts of the world are remarkably similar: journalism is under pressure from a weakening media economy; political bias and opportunism that drives the news agenda; the dangers of hate-speech, stereotyping and social exclusion of refugees and migrants. On the other hand, there have been inspiring examples of careful, sensitive and ethical journalism that have shown empathy for the victims. Media can counter this threat and help people better understand the complex migration story by applying ethical principles, avoiding crude stereotypes, developing good newsroom practice and engaging with the audience. Hate-speech is widespread in the media. Often it can't be prevented when it comes out of the mouths of prominent public figures, but journalists should always remember that just because someone says something outrageous doesn't make it newsworthy (White, 2015, p. 6).

Particularly alarming are independent reports stating that the Government interference in freedom of the media continued. Thirty-four independent journalists were attacked or received threats which were not effectively investigated. The government interfered in media freedom through selective media subsidies and advertising. In November, the Prime Minister accused three investigative media outlets of working for foreign governments to destabilize the country (Amnesty International, 2016). Journalists also face political interference with their work (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Based on the annual reports of independent authorities (Ombudsman and Commissioner for Protection of Equality), reports of civil society organizations, the European Commission and monitoring media coverage of discrimination cases, it may be stated that discrimination does exist in Serbia, in various areas. The reasons for the existence of discrimination may be sought in the fact that a certain level of intolerance exists in any society, and also in the long-term consequences of the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia and armed conflicts that have led to grave economic and social problems in Serbia, a halt in the development of democracy and human rights and difficult post- socialist transformation. This resulted in the emergence of a culture of intolerance, with specific vulnerable social groups and their individual members exposed to it (ethnic minorities, religious communities and others) (Office for Human and Minority Rights, 2013).

The state has to address the issues of the education and the teaching materials which need to be adapted to foster awareness of diversity, the promotion of non-violent culture of equality and non-discriminatory practice. The very first step would have to be removal of contents that encourage prejudice and stereotypes in school textbooks and other teaching materials.

As media is identified as one of the weakest link, improving media reporting would need to be one of the major goals. Measures which might be helpful in preventing tabloid and scandalous reporting as well as the spreading of hate speech in the media might be achieved by preparing and organizing trainings and seminars for journalists and editors. All the above proposed measures should be taken in synergy of the state and non-governmental organizations with the implementation of a monitoring system.

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