

REPRESENTATION OF THE SLAVIC ETHNICITY IN THE ITALIAN NEWSPAPER “LA REPUBBLICA”

Magdalena Nigoević¹, Nikolina Vukančić²

¹University of Split, ²High School Ivana Trnskoga Hrvatska Kostajnica

Abstract

The article describes the way in which the Italian daily newspaper represents and constructs the image of Slavic ethnicity (EU member states only). The aim is to provide the general insight into the image the Italians have about the Slavic countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) in order to observe whether there are some fixed patterns of presenting these countries/nations in the Italian daily newspaper. For the purpose of this study, the corpus of newspaper articles containing terms related to the names of the countries involved in the analysis is used. The newspaper articles were obtained from the digital version of Italian daily newspaper *La Repubblica* and they include all the articles in the period of six months, i.e. from 1st June 2016 to 31st December 2016. Once the occurrences are identified, the categorical apparatus is established to analyse the articles according to the topic and the position within the article. The quantitative analysis was applied and the empirical results were presented.

Keywords: Slavic ethnicity, Slavic countries, EU member states, Italian daily newspaper *La Repubblica*, content analyses.

Introduction

Through their either implicit or explicit activities, media contents in contemporary societies, mainly considered an essential source of information and knowledge, manage to construct the public opinion via choosing particular content and particular fashions of their presentation, discovering simultaneously different perspectives in observation and different patterns of thought. The specific ability to influence the salience of both topics and their images among the public has been called the agenda-setting role¹ of the news media (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). The selection and display of contents by journalists focuses the public's attention and influences its perceptions. Different studies point to the importance of the media in shaping European image surrounding different ethnicities.² Therefore, we consider it important to have an idea about how Slavic EU Member States – SEUMS³ are portrayed in the news. Although explicit forms of discrimination in European news are hardly seen nowadays, the broad generalizations and lack of background information are still widespread practices across the news media.

The aim of this work is to provide the general insight into the image the Italians have about the SEUMS in order to observe whether there are some fixed patterns of presenting these countries/nations in Italian daily newspaper *La Repubblica* and to determine potential similarities and differences in their presence and in the "portrayal". Other than being a fundamental source of information, the Italian daily newspaper *La Repubblica* justifies our choice of the research subject as being a communication channel as well, which helps us to create the perception of the current topics. The overall objective is to contribute to the general insight into the image the Italians have about these six countries and the role of Italian daily press in the process of constructing that image.

Slavic ethnicity

The ethnicity is perceived as a sense of belonging or attachment to a particular kind of group (Connor, 1993; Horowitz, 1985), usually connected with the primordial basis for nation building or as a social construction or a choice to be made (Anderson, 1991). The real nature of ethnicity is difficult to explain since it is "both a property of self-identification, a route to self-affirmation, and a collective phenomenon grounded in the interaction and political mobilization of the group" (Downing & Husband, 2005, p. 14).

The dominant standpoint nowadays is that communities, such as ethnic groups and nations, are "imagined" (Anderson 1991)⁴, i.e. that for a great part they rely on the belief in common origins, but it does not suggest that they are any less real, less important and less significant. Ethnicity, ethnic theories and ethnic identity have been prominent concepts in scholarly thinking over the last 50 years. They have been disputed, studied and analysed from a variety of theoretical approaches.⁵ Nevertheless, ethnicity is generally defined "in terms of a set of criteria, including a common religion, common ancestry, shared cultural values, shared history, a shared sense of 'we-ness'" (Cento Bull, 2003, p. 42). In the European context, Slavic ethnicity is considered to be a bearer of certain cultural identity. The history of Central and Eastern Europe Slavic countries is full of conflicts, political tensions and economic difficulties. Therefore, the narratives constructed about Slavic ethnicity are not always positive.⁶ It is important to consider that Westerners sometimes hold distant opinions towards Eastern Europeans who are seldom "treated with reservation and patronising behaviour" (Udovič & Podgornik, 2016, p. 118). Although their current social and economic conditions have considerably changed within the European Union, the portrayal of Slavic countries as those "behind the Iron Curtain" occurs and is being maintained.

From the perspective of SEUMS it would be almost impossible to reconstruct the main features of the Slavic identity because they have all followed different paths and have frequently created and disintegrated the geographic and political landscape.⁷ Nevertheless, from the point of view of Western Europe, comprising also the Italian standpoint, the Slavs are perceived as sharing the common experience of being part of the former Eastern Bloc and the linguistic similarities of the Slavic languages in culture, religion, history, and political tradition.

Slavic EU Member States in general numbers

Observing the data from Eurostat 2015, Udovič and Podgornik claim that Poland is the largest of the SEUMS, measured by the size of the territory or the population. "In terms of population, Poland is followed by the Czech Republic and in terms of territory, by Bulgaria. On the other hand, Slovenia is geographically and demographically the smallest of the SEUMS. However, in economic terms, Slovenia has the highest GDP per capita, being economically

the most developed among SEUMS” (Udovič & Podgornik, 2016, p. 123).

According to ISTAT (Italian Statistical Institute) data from 2016, among SEUMS, it is Poland that has the primacy over other Slavic countries with its residents dwelling in Italy, precisely 97,986 of them, i.e. 1.95% of all foreign residents. Bulgaria is less present, with 58,001 residents, i.e. 1.15% of all non-Italian citizens. On the other hand, other Slavic countries represent less than 0.5% of the total number of foreign residents: Croatia with 18,050 citizens (0.36%), Slovakia with 8,505 residents (0.17%), Czech Republic with 5,805 residents (0.12%); Slovenia with 2,564 (less than 1%) citizens dwelling in Italy is the least numerous country.⁸

Methodology

For the purpose of this research, the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* (the third most read newspaper with 2,080,000 readers per day) has been used.⁹ It was chosen because of the unrestricted access to its digital newspaper archive and the possibility of an uninterrupted search (Bell, 1991). Furthermore, it belongs to the so called "quality press" (Clark, 2006), and according to some sources, it is the most widely known centre-left newspaper. Based on the newspaper articles, content analysis has been performed. The methodology of this paper regarded the determination of frequency of the articles containing terms related to the names of the countries involved in the analysis. The criterion for the analysis of the content of selected articles was the establishment of categorical apparatus used to analyse the articles according to the topic (sports, news, travel/tourism, foreign policy, culture, crime news, economics/finances, technology, health, home/kitchen, school, fashion) and according to the position within the article (headline, subheadline, along with picture, within text). The main topic of selected articles is sometimes not related to the section of the article, i.e. the topic of the article does not always correspond to its newspaper section. Therefore, all of the 3918 articles were read by both authors and, after discussion, agreed about the main topic. Such an approach to analysing the articles has proved the fact that a certain discrepancy exists between the topic of the article and the very section which the article appertains to: thus, the articles with the topic "culture" do not always occur in the homonymous sections pre-established by *La Repubblica*, but, possibly, in the section "news"

or "politics". Furthermore, in this case, culture and politics may be intertwining throughout an article, with culture consequently being more prominent.

The research sample contained all the occurrences of names of selected Slavic countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia,), while the unit of the analysis was an article containing one of the mentioned occurrences. Newspaper articles were obtained from the digital version of Italian daily newspaper *La Repubblica* and they include all the articles in the period of six months, i.e. from 1st June 2016 to 31st December 2016.

Interpretation of data

During the research period, there were 3,918 occurrences regarding the countries analysed in the research. More than one third (i.e. 38.5%) of the total number of occurrences refer to Poland (see Table 1). The second most present country is Croatia with 23% of total number of occurrences; Slovakia and Czech Republic follow Croatia with 10%, Bulgaria with 8.1% and Slovenia with 7% of total number of occurrences occupy the last two places among Slavic countries. The results indicate that Poland was in the ascendancy over the rest of Slavic countries.

Table 1: *The distribution of occurrences according to the presence of a country in corpus*

	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Poland</i>	1059	38.5
<i>Croatia</i>	981	25.0
<i>Slovakia</i>	418	10.7
<i>Czech Republic</i>	420	10.7
<i>Bulgaria</i>	317	8.1
<i>Slovenia</i>	273	7.0
Σ	3918	100.0

Concerning the number of occurrences with regard to the topic of the article, the topics such as 'economics/finances', 'sports', 'news' are the most numerous; other topics are less present ('travel/tourism', 'crime news', 'health'), some of them are even negligible ('home/kitchen', 'school'), whereas the topic 'fashion' has no occurrences at all. According to this research, sport is a supranational and neutral category and, therefore, its presence is indisputable, as well as the occurrence of the various news. The topics presented in the following interpretation relate to the three major areas of contemporary society, i.e. 'economics/finances', 'culture' and 'technology'.

Regarding the fact that today's world is in the state of consumerism, the closest topic related to the very consumerism in the categorical device is the topic of 'economics/finances'. With reference to that, observing the components of the topic a in the Table 2, it is evident that out of total number of occurrences, it is Poland that, with its 34.7% dominates in the field of 'economics/finances', whilst other Slavic countries are almost evenly present in the research corpus: Croatia (11%), Slovenia (15.7%), Slovakia (13.7%), Bulgaria (15%), and Czech Republic, being the least presented (10%).

Table 2: *The number of occurrences in the articles regarding the topic*

topic:	a) economics/ finances		b) culture		c) technology	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Bulgaria	60	15.0	32	9.7	6	7.0
Croatia	44	11.0	32	9.7	4	4.7
Czech Republic	40	10.0	24	7.3	14	16.3
Poland	139	34.7	21 4	65.0	39	45.3
Slovakia	55	13.7	9	2.7	16	18.6
Slovenia	63	15.7	18	5.5	7	8.1
Σ	401	100. 0	32 9	100. 0	86	100. 0

Observing Table 1, it is indisputable that Poland is represented as the dominant Slavic country. Yet, this is not the only case of Poland's ascendancy among other Slavic countries. If countries are compared on the basis of occurrences found in the articles which regard the topic 'culture' (see topic b in the Table 2), then Poland with its unreachable 65% has an incomparable primacy over Croatia (9.7%), Slovenia (5.5%), Slovakia (2.7%), Bulgaria (9.7%) and Czech Republic (7.3%). These data show how Italy indisputably favours Poland in the field of culture, while other countries' cultures are regarded as somewhat negligible.

When comparing data which indicate Italy's perception of technology (topic c in the Table 2) in Slavic countries, Poland is once again the leader of the chart: with its 45.3% of occurrences, Poland confirms its domination among Slavic countries,¹⁰ followed by Slovakia (18.6%) and Czech Republic (16.3%). From the Italian point of view, other Slavic countries such as Croatia, Slovenia and Bulgaria, are considered irrelevant, especially Croatia with its 4.7%.

The results obtained from analysing the position of occurrences in articles show that the majority of occurrences take place in the text itself, i.e. 3,524 out of the total number of 3,918 occurrences, which is 89.9% of all occurrences (see Table 3). According to the number of occurrences, subheadline has the second place, with 192 occurrences, i.e. 4.9% of 140 occurrences, i.e. 3.6% can be found in headlines, while the fewest occurrences, 62 or 1.6%, are found in the interpretations next to the pictures. These results are not that surprising considering the fact that the text makes the largest part of an article.

Table 3: *The number of occurrences regarding the position in articles*

	f	%
headline	140	3.6
subheadline	192	4.9
picture	62	1.6
text	3524	89.9
Σ	3918	100

When confronting other selected countries (see Table 4), the presence of Croatia along with the pictures (45.2%) could be explained with the fact that 54.2% of all occurrences related to 'travel/tourism' refer to Croatia. Appealing visual input is usually presented along with the texts that relate to tourist attractions and travelling.

Considering the vicinity and the long maritime border between Italy and Croatia, this country is the popular tourist destination for Italians. Being the most numerous countries in the overall occurrences, Croatia and Poland are also the most cited in the headlines (respectively 37.1% and 34.3%).

Table 4: *The number of occurrences regarding the position of SEUMS*

	BU	CRO	CZ R	PO	SVK	SLO	Σ
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<i>headline</i>	6.4	37.1	7.9	34.3	10.7	3.6	100.0
<i>subheadline</i>	5.7	32.3	15.1	24	14.1	8.9	100.0
<i>picture</i>	3.2	45.2	11.3	29	8.1	3.2	100.0
<i>text</i>	8.4	23.8	10.6	39.6	10.5	7.1	100.0
Σ	8.1	25	12.7	38.5	10.7	7	100.0

Conclusion

Conducting such a research is challenging and has some disadvantages: the frequency of their occurrences is not a valid indicator of intensity or importance: an abundant qualitative analysis would be crucial to get a more reliable perception.

According to the data obtained, Poland appears to be the most present country in the corpus. Poland is widely known for being populous, catholic country and more than 100,000 Poles live in Italy. These facts alone could justify the attention given to Poland by the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*. It is important to note, as Udovič & Podgornik claim, that "Poland and the Czech Republic are (in nominal numbers) the most prominent actors in cultural diplomacy among SEUMS" and that "Poland is the best performer" of cultural diplomacy (Udovič & Podgornik, 2016, p. 126). Furthermore, Poland has managed to balance technology and culture as two opposite sides, and has found the way to make them equally presented, which was generously recognized in Italian journalistic area.

On the other hand, there is no similar situation among other Slavic countries: among these three categories (economics, culture, technology), Italy is focused on the aspects of economics rather than on culture and technology when it comes to Croatia, which with 10% of occurrences gives priority to economics, whereas culture (9.7%) and technology (4.7%) are

less present in the research corpus, which makes these Croatian (and Slovenian as well as Bulgarian) aspects less important for Italy.

Similarly to Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia also stand out in the articles regarding the topic of technology: Czech Republic with its 16.3% and Slovakia with its 18.6%. Poland has apparently found a way to stand out and offer its cultural and technological development to the Central Europe, in this research specifically to Italy, to connect culture, which should be cherished as such, and technology, which needs financial assets to benefit its development. As far as the position of the occurrences of SEUMS is concerned, almost 90% of all occurrences are within the text of the article. The headlines and subheadlines are reserved to the countries that show major presence in the overall data, Poland and Croatia. Furthermore, the articles in which Croatia is mentioned are frequently accompanied by the visuals.

Examining how the newspapers portray different ethnicities involves identifying which types of topics receive the greatest attention and the way these topics are presented. Many opinions about Slavic ethnicity are made on the basis of the newspaper articles. During that process, journalists help establish predominant beliefs, assumptions and values concerning the selected countries. However,

there is a reasonable doubt whether these images correspond to the perception of the Italian public or they stand for the way in which these countries/nations represent themselves beyond their borders, in the European media landscape.

References

- » Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Rev. ed.). London: Verso.
- » Banks, M. (1996). *Ethnicity: anthropological constructions*. London and New York: Routledge.
- » Bell, A. (1991). *The language of news media*. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell.
- » Caviedes, A. (2015). An Emerging 'European' News Portrayal of Immigration? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41, 6, 897-917. Retrieved from URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2014.1002199> (15/01/2020).
- » Cento Bull, A. (2003). *Collective Identities: From the Politics of Inclusion to the Politics of Ethnicity and Difference*. *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, 2, 3/4, 41-54.
- » Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS (Ed.) (2016). *I polacchi in Italia. Caratteristiche attuali, cambiamenti e prospettive*. Roma: IDOS Edizioni.
- » Clark, C. (2006). *Views in the news. A textbook*. Milano: LED.
- » Connor, W. (1993). Beyond reason. *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, 16, 3, 373-389.
- » Cordell, K. (1999). Introduction: aims and objectives. In K. Cordell, (Ed.). *Ethnicity and Democratisation in the New Europe* (pp. 3-10). London and New York: Routledge.
- » Corte, M. (2008). *Noi e gli altri. L'immagine dell'immigrazione e degli immigrati sui mass-media italiani*. Padova: Cestim. Retrieved from URL: http://www.cestim.it/argomenti/08media/08media_corte-articolo-univr.doc (12/12/2019).
- » Dearing, James W., Rogers M. Everett, 1996, *Agenda-setting*, Thousand Oaks, CA, SAGE.
- » Downing, J.D.H., & Husband, C. (2005). *Representing "race": Racisms, ethnicities and media*. London, UK: Sage.
- » Farnen, R.F. (Ed.) (2004). *Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- » Horowitz, D.L. (1985). *Ethnic groups in conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- » Kaufmann, Ch. (2005). *Rational Choice and Progress in the Study of Ethnic Conflict: A Review Essay*. *Security Studies*, 14, 1, 178-207.
- » McCombs, M. & Reynolds, A. (2002). News influence on our pictures of the world. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.). *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (pp. 1-18). Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- » McCombs, M.E. (2014). *Setting the agenda: The mass media and public opinion*, (2nd ed.). Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- » Pijpers, R. (2006). "Help! The Poles Are Coming": Narrating a Contemporary Moral Panic. *Geografiska Annaler, Series B: Human Geography*, 88, 1, pp. 91-103. Retrieved from URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.0435-3684.2006.00207.x> (10/09/2019).
- » Udovič, B. & Podgornik, A. (2016). Cultural Diplomacy of Slavic European Union Member States: A Cross-country Analysis. *Baltic Journal of European Studies*, Tallinn University of Technology, 6, 2 (21), 117-136.

Endnotes

1 The agenda-setting effects of the news media on people's attention to, comprehension of, and opinions about topics in the news primarily have been studied in political and business communication settings. (see McCombs, 2014; Dearing & Everett, 1996)

2 For immigrants of different ethnic groups and the surrounding media discourse in Italy see, for example, Corte (2008), Cavedes (2015).

3 The Slavs make up "the most numerous ethnic and linguistic body of peoples in Europe" (see: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Slav>). They include Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and Sorbs in the West, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Bosnians and Bulgarians in the South, and Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians in the East. They were divided into two branches of Christianity, Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, and had a long history of religious as well as political antagonism. In spite of animosity and political tensions inherited from the past, the Slavic ethnic groups throughout Europe are linked by cultural and historical ties. Udovič and Podgornik in their article about the role of cultural diplomacy in Slavic EU Member States use the acronym SEUMS – Slavic EU Member States (Udovič & Podgornik, 2016). These are Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The same acronym – SEUMS, will be used in the rest of the text.

4 "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion [...]" (Anderson, 1991, p. 6)

5 For an overview of the ethnicity literature see Banks (1996) and Kaufmann (2005); for the topics of nationalism, national identity, and ethnicity from cross-national perspectives see the extensive collection of essays Farnen (2004), for the ethnic politics see Keating (2001) or for the collective identities constructed around ethnicity see Cordell (1999).

6 At the time of the enlargement of the EU in 2004, the immigrant workers from new Eastern European member states feared as threats to borders of morality and identity in Western European societies. (Pijpers, 2016)

7 A short introduction to Slavic cultural cooperation in history, as well as some general data on territory, population, and economy of SEUMS can be seen in Udovič & Podgornik (2016).

8 Other Slavic countries replenish Italian area with their residents as well. Ukraine is the most numerous of all Slavic countries with its 230,728 residents (4.59% of all foreign residents in Italy), followed by The Republic of North Macedonia, with its 73,512 citizens, i.e. 1.46%. The remaining Slavic countries: Serbia (42,263 residents, i.e. 0.84%), Russia (35,791 residents or 0.71%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (27,199 residents, i.e. 0.54%), Belarus (8,529 residents, i.e. 0.17%) and Montenegro (2,721 residents, i.e. 0.05%) have their presence reflected in less than 1% of all the foreign citizens. (Source: ISTAT 2016)

9 The two most read Italian newspapers, *La Gazzetta dello Sport* (with 3,238,000 readers per day) and *Corriere della Sera* (with 2,107,000 readers per day) were not used because the former, *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, has its reading material mainly based on topics related to sport, while the latter, *Corriere della Sera*, has a restricted access to its archive. An interesting fact is that the four major national daily newspapers, *Corriere*, *Repubblica*, *Sole 24 Ore* and *Stampa* (neither of them related to sports) are read by 6,094,000 or 24% of all readers, while the leading sports newspaper, *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, itself has 3,238,000 readers. Source: Audipress Elaborazione: DataMediaHub. Retrieved from: <http://www.datamediahub.it/2017/09/28/readership-quotidiani-italiani-audipress-2017ii/> (3/2/2018).

10 From the report prepared by the Polish Embassy in Italy in collaboration with the IDOS Research Centre (*il Dossier Statistico Immigrazione*) in 2016, it appears that about 100,000 Poles live in Italy. Data on Polish emigration show that Italy is ranked the fifth among the countries to which Polish citizens move (after Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada). The report also highlights the change in quality of the professions chosen by the Poles in Italy, as the skilled workers are on the rise. It also underlines a considerable contribution that the citizens of Poland give to society and to the Italian economy. Retrieved from URL: <http://www.gazzettaitalia.pl/it/polonia-oggi-100-000-polacchi-vivono-in-italia/> (5/2/2018).