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## Discursive presentations of Slovenia's EU Council presidency in Serbian, Croatian, and Macedonian media

### ABSTRAKT

Artykuł przedstawia prezentację Słowenii w dyskursie medialnym w Serbii, Chorwacji i Macedonii (głównie na podstawie wydań internetowych prasy) w okresie od listopada 2007 do kwietnia 2008 roku. Położono nacisk na ledzenie konstruowania własnej tożsamości Słowenii poprzez budowanie wielostronnych relacji oraz zastosowanie symbolicznej geografii w dyskusjach medialnych na temat przewodnictwa Słowenii w Radzie UE. Artykuł koncentruje się na tym, jak różne narodowe dyskursy przedstawiają realizowanie prezydencji przez Słowenię, a jak przedstawiają jej 'dawniejsi bracia' w obrębie 'byłej Jugosławii', jak prezentowana jest pozycja Słowenii w odniesieniu do symbolicznej dawnej dychotomii Bałkany – Europa. Artykuł wskazuje na różnice w określaniu roli Słowenii w procesie prezydencji przez słoweńskie i pozasłoweńskie dyskursy medialne, co wyrażało się w prasowych nagłówkach, artykułach wstępnych czy tzw. lidach.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** słoweńska prezydencja w Radzie UE, serbskie, chorwackie i macedońskie media, konstruowanie tożsamości, własne i obce określenie roli, symboliczna geografia

### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Slovenia joined the EU in May 2004. Just four years later, from January to June 2008, this country was the first new EU member state to assume the presidency of the European Council (hereinafter: the presidency).<sup>2</sup> On this occasion, in the

<sup>1</sup> This research was conducted as part of the bilateral project *Media Constructions of "Balkan" National and Cultural Identity in Transition: From Yugoslavia to Europe*, led by Andreja Vezovnik (University of Ljubljana) and me. I thank Andreja for her comments on a previous version of this article. I am also grateful to two anonymous colleagues for their helpful suggestions. All errors are mine.

<sup>2</sup> The Slovenian presidency was part of the first 'trio presidency' (Germany–Portugal–Slovenia) that took place from January 2007 to June 2008. The Slovenian EU Council presidency within the trio form is discussed in Boštjan Udovic and Marjan Svetlicic, *Trio Matters? The Case of Slovene EU Council Presidency*, [in:] "World Crisis. Revolution or Evolution in the International Community? Third Global International Studies Conference", 17–20 August 2011, University of Porto, Portugal, at: <http://www.wiscnetwork.org/porto2011/getpaper.php?id=729>. Last accessed 3 December 2012.

European media discourse outside Slovenia, intense attention was given to this 'model pupil', as Slovenia was frequently described.<sup>3</sup> This event was also given great significance in official Slovenian discourse: Prime Minister Janez Janša referred to the presidency as "a major challenge—one of the greatest Slovenia has faced since its independence."<sup>4</sup>

I examine the discursive presentation of Slovenia in Serbian, Croatian, and Macedonian media from November 2007 to April 2008; that is, immediately before and in the first months of the presidency. I analyze media discussions of Slovenia's presidency by examining identity construction through self-positioning and other-positioning, sometimes realized through references to symbolic geography. The findings were expected to be quite challenging: Slovenia is a former Yugoslav country, and so the discursive positioning of Slovenia was expected to be interwoven with the positioning of other former Yugoslav countries. In the discourse linked to its presidency (i.e., the EU Council presidency's discourse), Slovenia's potential positive role regarding the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU was frequently emphasized because one of the self-defined objectives of the Slovenian presidency was to strengthen the Western Balkans' prospects of European Union membership<sup>5</sup>.

The main question addressed by this article is how media abroad approached and used the event of Slovenia's rotating presidency to (re)formulate Slovenia's identity (and, simultaneously, the identity of other former Yugoslav countries). The aim was to examine how different national discourses in former Yugoslav countries 'responded' to and 'interpreted' Slovenia's self-positioning, and whether there were differences in how three of its former 'Yugoslav brothers' positioned the country. I also examined where Slovenia was positioned in relation to the dichotomy of the (Western) Balkans versus Europe in this period in the media discourse and whether there were changes in public discourse regarding this dichotomy compared to earlier years.<sup>6</sup> What new identity parameters emerge in the discourse analyzed, and how do these affect the dichotomy of the West versus the Balkans that has been widely used and critically analyzed in cultural studies? Was new content ascribed to the terms 'the Balkans' and 'Europe'? What is the relation of the role(s) defined in Slovenia's self-positioning in its presidency program and the role(s) ascribed to Slovenia in foreign other-positioning discourses? I pay particular attention to positioning devices expressed in the headlines, kickers, and leads of the newspaper articles (see Section 2).

The research questions posed here inevitably call to mind symbolic geography and positive and negative connotations of geographical terms. As is shown, the term

<sup>3</sup> See: Ljiljana Šarić, *Domestic and Foreign Media Images of the Balkans*, [in:] Ljiljana Šarić et al. (eds.), *Contesting Europe's Eastern Rim: Cultural Identities in Public Discourse*, Bristol, 2010, 51–73.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.eu2008.si/en/The\\_Council\\_Presidency/index.html](http://www.eu2008.si/en/The_Council_Presidency/index.html). Accessed 23 August 2012.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.eu2008.si>. Accessed 3 December 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Some findings related to South Slavic discourse are presented in Ljiljana Šarić, *Balkan Identity: Changing self-images of the South Slavs*, "Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development", 25, 5–6 (2004), p. 389–407 and in L. Šarić, *Domestic and Foreign Media Images...*

*Western Balkans* is among the key terms used in positioning contexts (see Section 4). Thus the remainder of this section provides some general remarks on the conceptualization and naming of geographical spaces. I also comment on the key term of this analysis, positioning, as understood in psychology, and specifically on positioning and identity construction in media discourse. Section 4.1 examines Serbian media, Section 4.2 Croatian media, and Section 4.3 Macedonian media. Conclusions follow in Section 5.

Because this analysis deals with the identity-building force of some geographical terms and their roles in discourse, among other topics, a few remarks on the conceptualization of geographical spaces such as Europe and the (Western) Balkans<sup>7</sup> are necessary. Because most geographical spaces are beyond one's (immediate) experience, people necessarily think in metonymies and apply them in language about geography. Speaking in cognitive linguistic terms, each conceptualization of a space is a construal: this implies experience and sensory activities, but also that there is no 'objective conceptualization' that includes all the characteristics of the objects conceptualized. Acts of conceptualization necessarily imply choices. Observers choose, for example, those features of objects that are most visible. Observers cannot isolate themselves from their bodily experiences and overall knowledge of objects, or from their social contexts. No observer can see the entire entity labeled 'Europe', except for its image on a map. His conceptualization of Europe thus happens at a very abstract level: it is based either on an abstraction triggered by a (geographic) map, or on impressions of concrete parts of Europe. An image of Europe is adapted to and influenced by diverse social and ideological frames (e.g., the observer's personal experiential frame, or the dominant society and its cultural frames). One way of conceptualizing Europe is imagining parts of Europe as a political entity—that is, the EU. Thinking of Europe as the EU is simply one of the many possible ways of thinking about this entity, and one among many construals of Europe. That construal is ideological, but each and any construal of Europe is ideological and selective.

Adopting a non-essentialist perspective<sup>8</sup>, I argue that there are no inherent characteristics of geographical terms (e.g., of Europe, the Balkans, or the Western Balkans) that make them appropriate or inappropriate, even if they are construed ad hoc to serve certain political and pragmatic purposes. However, all geographical

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<sup>7</sup> There is a vast literature on the construction of the Balkans and use of a term *Balkan* as an identity label in which the Balkans function as a dark and negative European Other. See, for example, Nicole Lindstrom and Maple Razsa, *Balkan is Beautiful: Balkanism in the Political Discourse of Tudman's Croatia*, "East European Politics and Societies" 18, 4 (November 2004), p. 628–650, Nicole Lindstrom, *Between Europe and the Balkans: Mapping Slovenia and Croatia's 'Return to Europe' in the 1990s*, "Dialectical Anthropology" 27, 3–4 (2003), p. 313–329, Andreja Vezovnik, *Krekism and the Construction of Slovenian National Identity: Newspaper Commentaries on Slovenia's European Union Integration*, [in:] *Contesting Europe's Eastern Rim*, Ljiljana Saric et al. (eds.) and L. Saric, *Domestic and Foreign Media Images...*

<sup>8</sup> Adrian Holliday, *Culture as Constraint or Resource: Essentialist versus Non-Essentialist Views*. "The Japanese Learner" 20 (March 2000). Available at: <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/education/eal/jl-archive/jl-bestof/18.pdf>. Accessed 9 January 2013.

terms can become subject to discursive manipulation and means used in positioning—that is, (de)legitimization in discourse: the 'old' terms because of their complex discourse history (e.g., the Balkans), and the new terms because they seem to lack a 'natural' basis or because they have acquired negative connotations in some of their usage contexts (e.g., the Western Balkans).

Geographic terms and symbolic geography relate to the superordinate categories applied in this analysis, self-positioning and other-positioning, which were initially used in psychological research<sup>9</sup>. The concept of 'position' originates in marketing and refers to communication strategies that allow one to place a certain product among its competitors<sup>10</sup>. Langenhove and Harré emphasize that positioning and positions are general metaphors introduced to “grasp how persons are 'located' within conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story-lines”<sup>11</sup>.

Although that research has constantly emphasized language as a main means of positioning, not so many initial analyses have dealt with language. Self-positioning and other-positioning have been more closely linked to discourse analysis in recent research<sup>12</sup>. Positioning theory aims at unpacking “the discursive procedures by which rights and duties are allocated, ascribed, claimed, disputed, fought over, and so on in the course of actual real-time conflict situations insofar as one can obtain records of them”<sup>13</sup>. Needless to say, situations do not necessarily have to involve explicit conflicts. In recent positioning studies,<sup>14</sup> a positioning act by which someone has been positioned by others or has positioned himself is assumed to have two phases. The first phase involves the attribution of certain qualities of, for example, a person's character, which equals an identity construction. This phase is sometimes supported by biographical reports on somebody's past behavior. In the second phase, there occurs what Davies and Harré<sup>15</sup> originally termed 'positioning': the person being positioned is assigned or refused a cluster of rights and duties to perform certain kinds of acts. Both phases presume a local moral order, a cluster of collectively located beliefs about what right things have to be done<sup>16</sup>. Local moral orders belong to identity parameters in a society.

<sup>9</sup> R. Harré and L. van Langenhove provide an overview of their applications [in:] Rom Harré and Luk van Langenhove (eds.), *Positioning Theory*, Blackwell, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Luk van Langenhove and Rom Harré, *Cultural Stereotypes and Positioning Theory*, “Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour” 24, 4, 1995, p. 362.

<sup>11</sup> Op.cit.

<sup>12</sup> E. g. Fathali Moghaddam and Rom Harré (eds.), *Words of Conflict, Words of War: How the Language We Use in Political Processes Sparks Fighting*, Praeger, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Ciarán Benson, *From Dr. No to Dr. Yes: Positioning Theory and Dr. Ian Paisley's Endgame*, [in:] Fathali Moghaddam and Rom Harré (eds.), *Words of Conflict ...*, p. 140.

<sup>14</sup> F. Moghaddam and R. Harré (eds.), *Words of Conflict ...*

<sup>15</sup> Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré, *Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves*, “Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior” 20, 1 (March 1990), p. 43–63.

<sup>16</sup> F. Moghaddam and R. Harré (eds.), *Words of Conflict ...*, p. 9–10.

It is impossible to avoid positioning in any discursive act. Adopting a position involves the use of rhetorical devices by which speakers stand in various kinds of relations (e.g., of power, competence, or moral standing)<sup>17</sup>.

Positioning in discourse is realized through various discursive strategies; for example, through legitimization and delegitimization (a positive representation of the self and a negative representation of the Other), which are linked to a positive or negative evaluation of an entity's features, frequently realized in usages of words or phrases with negative connotations<sup>18</sup>. (De)legitimization, evaluation, and metaphorical representation often simultaneously appear and contribute to positioning, as shown in the analysis of the media material. Furthermore, positioning in media discourse relates to texts' storylines, which often reveal discursive presentations of rivals and supporters of certain ideas and worldviews in terms corresponding to a few functions that Propp<sup>19</sup> identified in Russian fairytales. Surprisingly, the narrative structure of the media material frequently reduces discourse participants' profiles to two opposite roles: hero and helper on the positive side, and villain on the negative side. The hero is a major character, the key person the story is told around. The helper appears at critical moments to support the hero. The villain struggles directly against the hero. Typically morally bad, the villain highlights the goodness of the hero. These roles are stereotypes, and stereotyping appears to be a frequent strategy in discursive positioning.

Positioning in its original sense applies to communication between individuals in which they assign or refuse a cluster of rights and duties. Positioning of political subjects, such as states, also implies assigning or refusing rights and duties. This assigning of duties in relation to states and the EU Council presidency's discourse resembles what the social research understands as states' 'roles'. For example, Kajnc<sup>20</sup> discusses various roles of Slovenia during its presidency in, for instance, foreign policy, justice, and domestic affairs, mentioning the roles of leadership, broker, bargainer, and organizer<sup>21</sup>. These roles can be understood as positions. Kajnc highlighted that in the 'super-priority' of the presidency—bringing the countries of the Western Balkans closer to the EU—Slovenia exercised a bargaining role<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> L. van Langenhove and R. Harré, *Cultural Stereotypes ...*, p. 362

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Paul Chilton, *Analysing Political Discourse* (Routledge, 2004, 46) states that legitimization establishes the "egitimacy" of a political actor's acts and is linked to coercion. For evaluation, see also Susan Hunston and Geoff Thompson, *Evaluation in Text*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. The American Folklore Society, 1968.

<sup>20</sup> Sabina Kajnc, *Channels of Cooperation: A Case Study of Slovenia's Presidency of the EU*. EPIN Working Paper, Brussels, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Op.cit., p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Sabina Kajnc, *Die slowenische EU-Ratspräsidentschaft 2008*, „Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte“ 32 (2008). <http://www.bpb.de/apuz/31044/die-slowenische-eu-ratspraesidentschaft-2008?p=all>. Accessed 10 January 2013.

has played a central role in openly racist discourses towards other former Yugoslavs. However, the presidency's discourse seems to be a certain turning point and a site of discursive transformation. The dominant xenophobic othering discourse observable in Slovenian media since joining the EU and up to 2008 has been transformed into a new version, in which a superior position of a helper is assumed in order to distinguish Slovenia from the Balkans. This idea can be traced in the material examined in Section 4 and 5. It was often expressed in statements by Slovenian Prime Minister Dimitrij Rupel, which were reproduced in the media.

According to Nilsson and Wennäs Brante<sup>42</sup>, acts of positioning begin with the claim that the one being positioned has certain rights and duties, and has or lacks relevant attributes. The strength of the successful assignment of rights and duties depends on that first step, an essential prepositioning stage. However, claiming certain attributes is absent from Slovenia's self-positioning: this important first step is missing. Slovenia's construction of an active helper position relies solely on certain presuppositions in the program's statements. Active self-positioning is observable in the definition of actions; that is, Slovenia's aims. One such action is to strengthen ("to strengthen the European perspective [sic] for the Western Balkan countries"; *Programme*, 3). The presupposition implied by the verb 'strengthen' is that the prospects of EU membership for the Western Balkans are weak. This implied state of affairs, however, lacks any specifications. The program (p. 3) further states: "Our goal is also to take further steps to enable accelerated introduction of European standards in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania". This also emphasizes Slovenia's superior position. Presuppositions in this formulation relate, first, to the keyword "European standards": these standards have to be introduced. Some steps towards these standards have been made (hence 'further steps'), but not all. A second presupposition is that the introduction of European standards has been too slow (hence the need for accelerated introduction). Third, Slovenia is able (hence the use of 'enable') to accelerate the introduction of these standards. All of these presuppositions are possibly problematic because they lack any explanatory detail. For example, the term 'European standards' lacks any specification, but it is used for a positive evaluation—the standards must be positive if they need accelerated introduction. In relation to Kosovo, Slovenia's aim is to "actively encourage efforts to bring about a solution that will ensure long-term stability of the Western Balkans" (*Programme*, 3). The presupposition here is that the long-term stability of the Western Balkans is uncertain. The Slovenian role is again active, now not only expressed with the verb 'encourage', but also additionally explicated by the adverb *actively*. A further presupposition is that a solution resulting from Slovenia's active role is likely. It is not specified in the immediate context who the agent of the efforts

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<sup>42</sup> Lars-Erik Nilsson and Eva Wennäs Brante, *Do I Have to Say Yes? A Positioning Theory Perspective on Prioritizing and Dividing Work in School*, [in:] F. Moghaddam and R. Harré (eds.), *Words of Conflict...*, p. 31–45.

is; that is, *whose* efforts Slovenia aims to encourage. However, the preceding context disambiguates the agent: it is the EU.

In the fourth paragraph of the program (*Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy*), an other-positioning step is visible: the Western Balkans is divided into three categories: 1) Croatia and Turkey: "Under the Slovenian Presidency, accession negotiations with Croatia and Turkey will continue on the basis of their progress towards fulfilling EU membership criteria" (*Programme*, 3); 2) other former Yugoslav countries and Albania: "Our goal is also to take further steps to enable accelerated introduction of European standards in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania" (*ibid.*), and 3) Kosovo: "The Presidency will pay particular attention to Kosovo. Expectations of the key role of the EU in Kosovo are justified, and the Presidency will, while maintaining a high level of the EU unity [sic], actively encourage efforts to bring about a solution that will ensure long-term stability of the Western Balkans" (*Programme*, 3). The first two categories both include countries that were not part of the former Yugoslavia. In relation to Category 1, an active role by Slovenia is not overtly expressed because the Slovenian presidency is mentioned only as a timeframe for the "accession negotiations" that "will continue." Categories 2 and 3 imply an active Slovenian role ("to take further steps to enable; will actively encourage efforts"). The Western Balkans is construed as a heterogeneous category because it includes entities that did not belong to the former Yugoslavia. Interestingly, the program mentions no historical or cultural connection of Slovenia to any of the Western Balkan countries -- this is in accordance with the discursive creations of the image of Slovenia as a European country ultimately different from the Balkan other. Such a reference could have provided supporting arguments in self-positioning as an active helper.

After this division, the next passage of the program introduces another quasi-geographical term, "the countries of Eastern and Southern neighbourhood" [sic] (p. 3). The word 'neighbours' occurs immediately again in the phrase 'the EU and its neighbours': "the Presidency will strengthen cooperation with the countries of Eastern and Southern neighbourhood [sic]. Economic cooperation and enhanced people-to-people contacts between the EU and its neighbours will be in the focus".

Interestingly, it is not explicit either in the English or in the Slovenian version of the program whose neighborhood is implied in the phrase 'countries of Eastern and Southern neighbourhood' [sic]. Slovenia's? The EU's? Somebody else's? The category of a neighbor is a relational category: if A is a neighbor, there must be a B to whom A is a neighbor. Furthermore, the concept of neighborhood implies some kind of closeness. However, by construing neighborhood to be a non-relational category, Slovenia distances itself from what is implied by neighborhood. There is no mention of Slovenia's relation and its possible closeness (at any level, geographical or other) to any of the implied countries. Thus, here as well, Slovenia's position is based on empty spaces and silence.

Official Slovenian EU discourse in the program and, for instance, official statements that quote the program were recontextualized in parts of the European public discourse, including media discourse discussed in the following sections. In these recontextualizations, other-positioning of Slovenia blends with self-positioning.

## 4. Positioning Slovenia in South Slavic media discourse

### 4.1 Serbian media

The broader discursive frames to which the Slovenian presidency discourse was linked in Serbian media is discussions about Kosovo's independence (proclaimed on 17 February 2008), and presidential elections in Serbia held in January and February 2008. Another discursive frame often interwoven with these two is Serbia's prospects of EU membership (e.g., signing the Association and Stabilization Agreement). Events in other countries of the former Yugoslavia were also occasionally present, for example, proclaiming the exclusion zone (see Section 4.2), and strained relations between Slovenia and Croatia. The majority of texts use either direct quotations or reported speech to reproduce the words of Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel. Rupel is the main social actor present in all three sub-corpora examined. Another relatively prominent social actor is Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša.

A few texts only discuss the Slovenian presidency and its goals. In "Vecernje novosti", only one article was found that evaluates the presidency in greater detail: "Dežela Closes Circle" (2 January 2008).<sup>43</sup> A quote from that article illustrates occasional references to Slovenia's recent history as part of the former Yugoslavia ('the first country that left the Yugoslav federation') in the Serbian media: "18 years after Yugoslavia's dissolution, Slovenia, the first country that left the Yugoslav federation, took over the EU presidency . . . . It is announced from 'the dežela' that Slovenia will serve as an engine for the other countries in the region that have been trying to join the European train . . . Is the Slovenian presidency a symbolic closing of the circle prior to the final effort of some Western powers to detach Kosovo from Serbia too?"

Notably, these references are absent from the presidency program (as they are from the Croatian media; see Section 4.2). The official Slovenian presidency discourse is recontextualized ('it is announced from *dežela*'), and a train-metaphor ("Slovenia will serve as an engine") is used in reported speech<sup>44</sup>. The train metaphor is part of the voice of the author that wrote the article. The metaphor seems to rely on

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<sup>43</sup> 'Dežela' is a Slovenian word meaning 'country'. The use of the word as a pseudo-geographical term in Serbian and Croatian media can indicate both a familiar tone and mocking.

<sup>44</sup> On train metaphors in South Slavic media, see L. Šarić, *Balkan Identity* . . .



and further elaborate the position of Slovenia as a helper. Interestingly, this article explicitly mentions the symbolic nature of the Slovenian presidency, which is related to Slovenia being the first country that left the Yugoslav federation, and to a possible positive attitude of some other countries towards an independent Kosovo. Slovenia's past agency is expressed (Slovenia left), but Kosovo is not an agent in the event of leaving the entity it belonged to at that point: instead, "some Western powers" are ascribed agency. A presupposition is that some Western powers detached some other units, including Slovenia, from Serbia in the past (hence the phrase 'detach Kosovo too': . . . *odvoje i Kosovo od Srbije?*); this phrase relativizes the Slovenian agency implied in "Slovenia . . . left the federation". The metaphor of the European train in this context conveys the symbolic geographic position of Slovenia: it is part of the same train as other countries 'in the region', although it assumes a leading position.

Discourse in "Vecernje novosti" by and large accepts the self-position of Slovenia (defined in the presidency program and related official discourse) as a helper. That position is observed from a pragmatic perspective: Serbia's own position is such that it needs Slovenia as a helper. This is reflected, for example, in the report "Russia Designs Map," which quotes Sonja Licht, a member of the Foreign Policy Council at the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "We are not in a position to refuse anybody's help, and so we need Slovenia, which holds the EU presidency, because Slovenia confirmed that the Western Balkans will be its high priority, and we cannot move forward without the Western Balkans" (18 January 2008).

Significantly, the expression "we cannot refuse anybody's help" implies that one is hesitant about the help; 'anybody' implies that the subject is actually in a desperate situation and has no choice. In this quote, the geographic self-positioning of Serbia in relation to the Western Balkans is not clear; that is, it is ambiguous whether the Western Balkans includes or excludes Serbia.

Contexts in which Slovenia is positioned as a helper, and which affirm Slovenia's self-position defined in the program, frequently use the noun *pomoc* 'help', and the verbs *ponuditi* 'offer', *podržavati* 'support', *zalagati se* 'advocate', and *braniti* 'defend', which all imply Slovenia's position as an active agent. Another important noun emphasizing the helper role is *prijatelj* 'friend'; for instance, in the article "Dežela Recognized [Kosovo]" (5 March 2008). That article uses reported speech paraphrasing words by Dimitrij Rupel, who "repeated that Slovenia is Serbia's friend that defends her interests in the EU".

"Danas" also published a 'framing' text introducing the Slovenian presidency, headlined *Lively and Attractive Austria for Poor People* (28 December 2007). This article presents multiple voices: it is partly based on foreign media reports (a comment by Reuters, a report published in a Greek newspaper, and comments by foreign political analysts), and partly on the voice of the author of the article. Interestingly, this text makes no reference to the presidency's priorities, to the Western Balkans, or to Slovenia's position (of a helper, or other). Instead, by

presenting fragments of foreign discourses that contribute to other-positioning and self-positioning, and different voices from entirely different sources, it aims to draw a broad image of Slovenia. The article juxtaposes Slovenians' stereotypes about themselves with stereotypes by other former Yugoslavs about Slovenians. By mentioning both Slovenia's positive moves and issues (e.g., introducing the euro) and less successful ones (e.g., inflation, limited press freedom), it seeks an unbiased image.

Also disapproving of Slovenian actions, "Danas" explicitly relies on foreign media. For example, the text "Reprimands from Brussels to Janša and Rupel" (14 January 2008; kicker: *EU Criticism of the Current Slovenian Presidency*) was based on an analysis of the German newspaper "Die Welt". The self-assigned helper position of Slovenia was questioned using a strong evaluative phrase describing its doings as "really non-coordinated actions" (*upravo neusaglašeni . . . koraci*). An assessment of Slovenian "counterproductive actions" in relation to Slovenia's position towards the Western Balkans implies a contrary position to that of a helper: "really non-coordinated, accidentally or not, Slovenian actions could be counterproductive for the Western Balkan countries on their path to the EU".

Some articles in "Vecernje novosti" put Slovenia in its not-so-distant historical context as part of the Yugoslav federation, and this also seems important in "Danas". For example, the article *Government Censors Texts by over 500 Journalists* (10 January 2008) negatively evaluates the Slovenian government's attitude toward press freedom and questions the widespread discursive image of Slovenia as a model country: "this former member of the SFRY in European public space has been treated as a model transition country in many aspects. However, [it is] not [a model] in all aspects. Slovenia is not a model of media freedom. Quite the opposite, threatened media freedom in Slovenia has been discussed all over the EU".

Indicatively, this disapproving article uses the notion of the Balkans to criticize Prime Minister Janša, whose government blamed the critics of suppressed media freedom for telling lies and purposely discrediting Slovenia during its presidency: "This reaction by Janša—and not only this one—testifies that the Balkans do not end at the Sutla River, as the wise Krleža thought". This observation refers to the Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža, who was actively engaged in discussing and rethinking the dichotomy of the Balkans versus Europe<sup>45</sup>: the function of this quote is to rethink Slovenia's self-positioning as non-Balkan and the other-positioning (inside and outside the EU) of Slovenia as a model country.

"Politika" featured no framing text, as did "Vecernje novosti" and "Danas". Many articles express a critical attitude towards Slovenia's policy, especially its relation to the U.S. This policy is repeatedly characterized with the extremely negatively connoted word *vazalstvo* 'vassal attitude'; for example, in the article *Slovenian*

<sup>45</sup> Ingrid Hudabiunigg. *Contested Identities: Miroslav Krleža's Two Europes versus the Notion of Europe's Edge*, [in:] Ljiljana Šarić et al. (eds.), *Contesting Europe's...*, p. 173–188.

*Pursuit of Internal and External Enemy* (28 January): "vassal relations of official Ljubljana and the U.S.". Slovenia's role of a helper to Serbia can be traced, but that role is more frequently critically questioned than affirmed. Much criticism is directed towards Prime Minister Janša and Foreign Minister Rupel; for example, the 21 January article expressed a negative attitude using the verb *deceive* in the headline *Rupel Deceives Serbian Retirees*. "Politika" also positioned Slovenia negatively with regard to moves by Slovenian politicians towards other former Yugoslav countries. For example, the 30 January article *Croatian Shield for Rupel's Head* evaluates Rupel's actions and statements as an "effort to impose his own conflict with his neighbors on Europe".

'Zapadni Balkan' - 'Western Balkans' as a political term is frequently used in "Vecernje novosti"<sup>46</sup> in comments on and quotes from various political documents and statements; for instance, European Commission documents, statements by Slovenian, Serbian, and other European politicians, and in reports on statements by EU foreign ministers. Twenty-nine occurrences of *Zapadni Balkan*, four of *jugoistocna Evropa*, *jugoistok Evrope*, and 46 occurrences of *Balkan/balkanski* were found. The terms *jugoistocna Evropa* 'Southeastern Europe' and *jugoistok Evrope* 'European southeast' also occasionally appear. In "Vecernje novosti", five occurrences of the pseudo-geographical term 'dežela' ('country' in Slovenian) were found; for example, it is used twice in reference to Slovenia in the 'framing text' mentioned at the beginning of this section. The use of 'dežela' in Serbian and Croatian media indicates either familiarity or mocking discourse.

In "Politika", the terms *Zapadni Balkan* and *Balkan/balkanski* meaning 'Balkan(s)' occurred much less frequently (three occurrences of *Zapadni Balkan* and nine of *Balkan/balkanski* were found); *jugoistocna Evropa* did not occur at all, and *regija* 'region' occurred only once. The Balkans and related terms are not frequently used in negatively evaluative contexts, and they only occasionally contribute to negative other-positioning of discourse participants.

## 4.2 Croatian media

The Slovenian presidency discourse was most regularly linked to the broader discourse of Slovenian–Croatian relations. It was interwoven with discussions about an omnipresent topic: the Ecological and Fisheries Exclusion Zone (Croatian *Zašticeni ekološko-ribolovni pojas*). Klemencic<sup>47</sup> assumed the strained relations of Slovenia and Croatia to be a potential problem during the presidency, observing that "relations with Croatia can easily be politicized as part of the parliamentary election campaign". This actually proved true.

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<sup>46</sup> It seems appropriate to provide this type of information only for the two sources with sufficiently large corpora: "Vecernje novosti" and "Politika".

<sup>47</sup> M. Klemencic, *A Star Pupil...*, 30.

Discussions about the exclusion zone belong to a larger discursive frame of the Slovenian-Croatian border dispute, which has been ongoing since Slovenia's independence. According to Voh Boštic<sup>48</sup>, this dispute includes four individual disputes: Slovenia's access to international waters, control of the Bay of Piran, preservation of the direct border between Croatia and Italy, and the Dragonja River and four villages in disputed territory. The border dispute culminated in a decision by the Slovenian government in September 2008 to block Croatia's accession negotiations with the EU. Significantly, the decision occurred just before Slovenian parliamentary elections. The reason for the blockade was Croatia's inclusion of clauses in its negotiation documents that could have served as a legal prejudice for settling the border in the disputed territories. Slovenia lifted the blockade after the signing of the 'Pahor–Kosor' agreement in 2009. That agreement establishes an ad hoc arbitral tribunal and envisages a procedure in which that tribunal will decide on the disputed issues<sup>49</sup>.

The exclusion zone came into effect in 2004, excluding EU member states, but on 1 January 2008 it also began to be enforced for EU members. The implementation of the exclusion zone primarily affected Italy and Slovenia. Its enforcement faced strong opposition from Slovenia. Its implementation was interpreted as Croatia disregarding EU rules. Realizing that EU negotiations were endangered, the Croatian Parliament amended the exclusion zone in March 2008 and decided that starting on 15 March 2008 the exclusion zone would not be enforced for EU members<sup>50</sup>.

The media articles in the period examined regularly construct a negative image of Slovenia, relating it to the attitude of Slovenian politicians to the exclusion zone. Linked to this image is an image of Croatia as a victim.

Only "Novi list" published 'framing texts' related to the presidency—one on 31 December 2007 (*Slovenian EU Presidency*), and another one on 5 January 2008: *Small Country for Big Presidency*; this last one is the only article in the material examined that published all the priorities of the Slovenian presidency in a separate framed text section. The final conclusion of the text, the first part of which is also the lead of the article, announces an ambiguous and indeterminate position of Slovenia in relation to Croatia: "The outlook of what Croatia really can expect from Slovenia in the next six months is more uncertain than weather forecasts. Slovenia supports Croatian ambitions and announces its wish to help in accelerating negotiations. However, last year Slovenia did a lot to slow the negotiations down". The position of Slovenia in the context of its presidency is contextualized in the broader frame of strained Slovenian-Croatian relations related to the border dispute in the preceding

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<sup>48</sup> Anže Voh Boštic, *Slovenian–Croatian Border Dispute: A Political Perspective*, Ljubljana, 2009.

<sup>49</sup> On the details related to the "Drnovšek–Račan" and "Pahor–Kosor" agreements, see Vasilka Sancin, *Slovenia–Croatia Border Dispute: From 'Drnovšek–Račan' to 'Pahor–Kosor' Agreement*, "European Perspectives – Journal on European Perspectives of the Western Balkans" 2, 2 (October 2010), p. 93–111.

<sup>50</sup> According to the 2011 decision that resulted from the negotiations with the EU, Croatia can proclaim an exclusion zone for third countries, but not for EU members.

period. In addition to these two texts, an extensive comment on the presidency appeared on 26 January in an article headlined *Slovenia Causally Manages Europe* that evaluates extensive Slovenian preparations for the presidency in an objective manner and relies in detail on statements by Janez Lenarcic, the Slovenian state secretary for European issues, and the head of the government's communication office, Anže Logar.

In "Jutarnji list", a 26 March 2008 article *Jelincic's Nationalism Becomes 'Mainstream' Politics towards Croatia*<sup>51</sup> relies on a commentary published in the Slovenian newspaper "Delo" in which a Slovenian author analyzes the Slovenian attitude to Croatia by Slovenian politicians. The author characterizes that attitude as an instrumentalization of Croatian–Slovenian relations for specific electoral goals. Discussing the political instrumentalization of Croatian–Slovenian relations (e.g., by conservative parties) would have been much needed in the period examined, but was virtually absent from the rest of the Croatian sub-corpus.

"Vecernji list" and "Slobodna Dalmacija" provided much more relevant material than "Novi list" and "Jutarnji list". A striking feature of articles in "Vecernji list" is the frequent implicit and explicit presence of Dimitrij Rupel in headlines, kickers, and leads. Some examples of relevant headlines referring to and evaluating Rupel's activity are: *Rupel like Fly on Elephant's Back* (13 December), *The Man Who Does Not Hide His Sense of Superiority* (14 December), *Despite Rupel's Peculiar Communication, Croatia Still Wants Dialogue* (29 January), *Sanader: Rupel Passed Measure* (30 January), *Futile Lies by Rupel* (4 February), and *Our Neighbor Rupel Prohibited Access to His Summer House* (10 February). Through different discursive strategies observable in these headlines (e.g., a simile in *Rupel Like Fly...*) as well as in leads and elsewhere in the articles, Rupel is represented as an actor performing disputable actions. The prominent parts of these articles contain negatively evaluative language in comparisons, attributes, or descriptions of actions. For instance, negative evaluation is realized in choices of verbs: activities ascribed to Rupel are *lagati* 'to lie' (this verb was repeatedly used), *uvrijediti* 'to offend', *prislušivao zaposlene* '[he] listened in on his employees', and *zabranio pristup* '[he] prohibited access'.<sup>52</sup> Only the headlines of a few articles express neutral or positive attitudes (e.g., *Rupel: Slovenia Wants Croatia in UE*, "Vecernji list", 9 February).

In "Slobodna Dalmacija", the priorities of the Slovenian presidency were rarely thematized. Only two instances were found: the article *You Must Resolve Exclusion Zone Urgently*, of 9 January uses reported speech paraphrasing European Commissioner Rehn, who "stated that he is looking forward to cooperation with Slovenia, which . . . defined Western Balkan countries' accession process to the EU as one of its presidency's priorities". The use of reported speech allows distancing of the newspaper and the author from the quote, including from the connotations of

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<sup>51</sup> Jelincic is the leader of the Slovenian National Party, now a non-parliamentary party.

<sup>52</sup> This last phrase is found in a 10 February article that deals with a private matter, Rupel's summer house.

Western Balkan countries. Also the second instance, the 7 April article: *Possible Referendum on Croatia's EU Accession in Slovenia* mentions Slovenian priorities related to Western Balkan countries in a context using reported speech: "[Janša] commented on the Slovenian politics toward the Western Balkan countries, which is one of Slovenia's priority tasks during its EU presidency".

In the articles that position Slovenia, both in "Slobodna Dalmacija" and "Vecernji list" -- these sources provided much more material than the other two -- I identified a few storylines<sup>53</sup>:

- a) *Discourse of Slovenian obstruction*. This discourse relates to the problems with Croatia's accession to the EU. It counterposes Slovenia, reversing Slovenia's self-ascribed position observed in the presidency program. This storyline presents Slovenia as an agent, but not as a helper. Instead, Slovenia is positioned as an obstructer (i.e., Propp's villain).

The most prominent keywords in kickers, headlines, and leads signal the discourse of Slovenian obstruction. These choices are significant (words with negative connotations were chosen). Moreover, obstruction discourse relies on the position of these words (e.g., in kickers, headlines, and leads), and their usage frequency (the keywords repeatedly occur). *Blokirati* 'block' and *blokada* 'blockade' meet these criteria. "Vecernji list" often uses *blokada* (13 instances) and *blokirati* (12 instances). In "Slobodna Dalmacija", the 31 January article "Slovenia Blocks Three Chapters" repeated *blockade/to block* several times (e.g., "unofficial Slovenian blockade that has lasted since 2006"). In the storyline of Slovenian obstruction, the following nouns also regularly appeared: *zastoj* 'halt', *katastrofa* 'catastrophe', *pritisci* 'pressures', *prijetnje* 'threats', and *ucjene* 'blackmail'. They are often combined in the most prominent parts of the text; for example, both *blokada* and *katastrofa* occur in the kicker and headline of an article on 1 February in "Slobodna Dalmacija": [Kicker] *Blockade. President Mesic on Ljubljana's Attitude to Croatia's EU Accession*; [headline] *Relations with Slovenia at Brink of Catastrophe*.

The discourse of Slovenian obstruction is frequently linked to Slovenian Foreign Minister Rupel: he is positioned as an obstructer, and various attributes ascribed to him support this position (e.g., a liar: "In an impossible manner, using lies and imputations, Rupel has intensified the strategy towards Croatia," 31 January; *Liar Frames Croatia*). The same text can illustrate utilization of a war scenario in the storyline of Slovenian obstruction. This scenario is realized when actions by Slovenian politicians and steps at the state level are interpreted as steps in a war: lexemes related to war are used in the kicker *Diplomatic War in Brussels. Slovenian Foreign Minister Attacks Our Country in European Parliament*. The war scenario is also utilized in a 7 April text ("our neighbors open a new battlefield").

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<sup>53</sup> The term *storyline* is used synonymously with *discourse* or *narrative* in positioning theory.

- b) *Discourse of a Slovenian plot (in relation to Croatia) in which Croatia is positioned as a victim.* This discourse is closely related to a). This storyline also counterposes Slovenia in relation to its self-position in the presidency program. An example of such a positioning is found in the sub-headline *Sacrificing Croatia*, which contains the word *žrtvovanje* 'sacrificing' in the article *Sanader: NO! to Blackmails from EU* (26 January) in "Slobodna Dalmacija". The discursive positioning of Slovenia as an obstructor to Croatia is linked to and stands in opposition with positioning Slovenia as Serbia's helper, observable in the same article in the framed text headlined *Russian Jaws*: "It is assumed in Zagreb that the EU has decided to pull Serbia out of the Russian jaws, and so it offered Belgrade accelerated negotiations and numerous developmental benefits". In the first part of this statement, agency is hidden in the impersonal phrase *procjenjuje se* 'it is assumed'.
- c) *Discourse of Slovenia's helper role (in relation to Serbia).* This is realized, for instance, in a 29 January article (*Slovenija Opens EU Door to Serbia*). This discourse is most in accord with Slovenia's self-positioning in the presidency program, but the scope of the helper position (help to whom?) is much narrower. A short framed text at the end of the article, sub-headlined *Slovenians Are Embarrassment for EU* shows how negative evaluation and delegitimization can be realized through the structure of a text. This comment quotes the Austrian agency that allegedly qualified the Slovenian presidency as an embarrassment on discovering documents that showed that actions by Slovenian diplomats were guided from the U.S. However, by placing this comment at the end of the text discussing Slovenia's position towards Serbia, the extremely negatively loaded word *blamaža* 'embarrassment' evaluates not only what it did in its original context (Slovenia's relation to the U.S.), but also Slovenia's position as Serbia's helper: the helper position is negatively evaluated from a disapproving Croatian perspective.

Regarding geographical terms, in the largest corpus of "Vecernji list", *zapadni Balkan* 'Western Balkans' is used only on rare occasions and exclusively in direct quotations and reported speech narrating Slovenian statements. *Jugoistocna Europa* 'Southeastern Europe' was used more frequently, in contexts paraphrasing Slovenian and Croatian politicians. Additionally, the neutral noun *regija* 'region', having the same denotation, was used much more frequently (e.g., *zemlje u regiji* 'countries in the region') than the other two. Single occurrences of *balkanski* were almost exclusively used in negatively evaluative contexts (i.e., *balkanska argumentacija* 'Balkan argumentation'). In "Novi list", *zapadni Balkan* 'Western Balkans' was found relatively frequently, as well as *regija* 'region', whereas *jugistocna Evropa* 'Southeast Europe' and *Balkan* 'Balkans' were less frequently attested.

"Slobodna Dalmacija" used the word 'dežela' four times in references to Slovenia (e.g., Dežela is the kicker of the article headlined *Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel Tells Slovenian Fishermen: Fish like Before* (4 January). Dežela is also used in a headline on

1 February: *Only Dežela Obstructs Croatia* and on 6 February in a kicker (*Seamen from Dežela (Janša Demands Activating Border Agreement)*). Dežela is used in negatively evaluative contexts linked either to undesirable actions of Slovenian diplomacy (notably, Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel or Prime Minister Janez Janša), or to negative actions of undefined actors metonymically referred to as dežela. In "Vecernji list", dežela was used only once in a humorous context ("to travel to dežela with an identity card", headline *Donkeys to Get EU Passports!* 15 December 2007).

To sum up, in the two larger sub-corpora of Croatian newspapers, Slovenia is positioned as an obstructer (of Croatia) and as a helper (to Serbia). Both of these roles are strongly linked to the political contexts (troubled relations of Slovenia and Croatia related to the exclusion zone, and Slovenia's supportive attitude to Serbia's signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU). This discourse assigns Slovenia a new position absent from its presidency's discourse. In construing these positions, "Slobodna Dalmacija" and "Vecernji list"<sup>54</sup> often used negatively evaluative language, especially in commenting on issues related to both the Slovenian presidency and Croatia. This language may have contributed to a negative attitude towards Slovenia that was developing in Croatia in 2008. The use of negatively evaluative language was more pronounced in "Slobodna Dalmacija" than in "Vecernji list" and it was more pronounced in these two sources than in "Novi list" a critical attitude toward Rupel and Slovenian diplomats in general is present in *Novi list* as well, but overtly negative evaluation (e.g., by using harsh attributes) is absent from headlines and kickers. The use of negatively evaluative language may relate to which newspapers show a greater tendency toward tabloidization versus serious journalism, and to which attitudes in individual newspapers are more pronounced: liberal or nationalistic views.

Compared to findings in other sources, negative positioning of Slovenia as an explicit obstructer of Croatia was not observed in "Jutarnji list"<sup>55</sup>. Word choices in newspaper articles indicating that Slovenia acts in an unfair manner, using disputable means (e.g., lies) are frequently personalized': most often, these word choices were linked to Foreign Minister Rupel. In the representation of social actors, Rupel is among the most prominent. As a metonymy and symbol for Slovenia, he was presented as an enemy carrying out suspicious actions, and was repeatedly explicitly labeled with the overtly negative evaluating noun *lažljivac* 'liar' ("Slobodna Dalmacija"). Less overt evaluative language was employed about Prime Minister Janša. Positive to neutral evaluation was present in the representation of one Slovenian politician only (however, in contexts not directly related to the presidency): Janez Drnovšek, who died in February 2008. Several texts summarized Drnovšek's biography.4.3.

<sup>54</sup> This impression may be due to the corpus size for "Slobodna Dalmacija".

<sup>55</sup> I have not conducted a statistical analysis because of the structure of my material. My claims in this section are based on noticing repeated usages of negatively connoted words in kickers, headlines, and leads, and on the occasional presence of a metaphorical war scenario.



### 4.3. Macedonian media

There seems to be an evident cause-and-effect relationship between positioning of Slovenia in Serbian and Croatian media and the daily political interests of various political groups and/or ongoing conflicts that media texts reported. One could assume a different situation in Macedonian media because no explicit win-lose situation characterized Macedonian and Slovenian relations in this period, which could have influenced a positioning of Slovenia different from that observable in Croatian and Serbian media.

Regarding its relation with the EU, in the period analyzed Macedonia was a candidate country. Macedonia applied for EU membership in March 2004, and was granted candidate status in December 2005.

A broader discursive frame in the Macedonian media in this period to which the discourse on the Slovenian presidency was frequently linked was the 'name issue' that neither Slovenia nor the EU were 'in charge' of solving. The name issue has troubled relations between Macedonia, once a Yugoslav republic, and neighboring Greece since 1991. Macedonia's constitutional name is the Republic of Macedonia ( ). Greece has opposed the use of the name Macedonia without a geographical qualifier because a Greek region has the same name<sup>56</sup>. The name issue was why the United Nations introduced a provisional reference to the country in 1993: 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia'. This reference has been used by international organizations since then (including the EU; it is also used in the presidency's program, see Section 3) and by countries that do not recognize translations of the country's constitutional name. The name issue was a recurring topic in all three newspapers. It appeared as a peripheral topic in some articles commenting, for example, on Rupel's use of the reference 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' ("Dnevnik", 23 Dec. 2007, headline *Solidarity and Good Neighborly Relations*), and the main topic of some articles (e.g., *Name Not Condition for EU and NATO* "Dnevnik", 1 Feb. 2008). Another frequently recurring topic was Macedonia's chances of receiving a date in 2008 to start negotiations with the EU (e.g., *Will Macedonia Get Date for Negotiations* "Vecer", 8 Jan. 2008).

In many texts, a normalized, repetitive, and performative discourse dominated<sup>57</sup>. This discourse was much more widespread in Macedonian media than in Serbian and Croatian media from the same period. This discourse was used by both local politicians and representatives of EU institutions. Thematizing steps that candidate countries make towards EU accession, this discourse has a uniform form in many countries. "Each step on this passage [to Europeanization and transition] earns

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<sup>56</sup> Related to the name dispute is Macedonia's use of historical symbols and figures that some consider part of Greek culture.

<sup>57</sup> T. Petrovic analyzed this discourse in the Serbian context in *Serbia in the Mirror: Parodying Political and Media Discourses* (manuscript).

praise from European politicians, inevitably followed by a statement that the target destination is still far away, albeit not accompanied by a clear explanation of why this is so<sup>58</sup>, as a consequence, citizens of the candidate countries face vagueness and arbitrariness when it comes to their 'European future'. In the Macedonian discourse sample, the prospects for EU membership are regularly related to successful reforms, but these reforms are rarely specified. It is unclear what the country has attained and what it still must attain. This 'circular' and 'empty' discourse, reproduced in the form of direct quotations and reported speech in the Macedonian media, thematizes Macedonia's steps to EU membership frequently using modal expressions (e.g., 'possibility', 'possible', 'it would not be impossible'). For instance: "The Slovenian presidency does not exclude the possibility of Macedonia beginning negotiations for EU membership", "it would not be impossible for the date for starting the negotiations to be defined this year" ("Dnevnik", 17 Jan. 2008), *Getting Fate for EU Negotiations Possible* – headline ("Dnevnik", 17 Jan. 2008). Modal expressions are frequently part of conditional sentences introduced by an equivalent of 'if'.

The discursive position of Slovenia towards Macedonia occasionally observable in this sub-corpus is a supporter and friend: for example, in the headline of an editorial published on 1 January 2008 in "Utrinski vesnik": *Friend of Macedonia at Highest EU Position*<sup>59</sup>. This position is embedded in direct quotations and reported speech, and evoked by phrases such as ( ) '(best) friends', 'great friends', and 'the greatest lobbyist': "Slovenia will remain Macedonia's best friend on its EU path" ("Dnevnik", 15 Nov. 2007); "our greatest lobbyist Slovenia announced open support for Macedonia's European path" ("Vecer", 9 Jan. 2008). The idea of Slovenia supporting Macedonia is expressed in verbs and nouns meaning 'support' and 'help' ( ), which are most often part of quotations (the type that Smirnova<sup>60</sup> labels 'liberal structures') from Slovenian officials: "Janša asks that Macedonia be helped to start negotiations with EU" (kicker, "Vecer", 17 Jan. 2008); "the Slovenian minister said that the Slovenian presidency will strongly support MVR and other Macedonian ministries on their EU path" ("Dnevnik", 21 Feb. 2008). However, the helper seems to have no real power to influence the Macedonian EU path. The repetitive and empty discourse the helper role is embedded into makes the helper mission appear like a 'mission impossible', which is directly referred to in the media discourse ("even the best wishes of our great friends cannot help us as long as we do not help ourselves" – "Utrinski vesnik", 17 Jan. 2008).

Macedonian newspapers also frequently reported on Slovenia's relation to other former Yugoslav countries: the Croatian–Slovenian border dispute, Kosovo's

<sup>58</sup> T. Petrovic, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> "Utrinski vesnik" also published another framing text, a translation of a BBC text, on 1 Jan. 2008. "Dnevnik" and "Vecer" published no framing texts.

<sup>60</sup> A.V. Smirnova, *Reported Speech*...

independence, and Serbia's EU prospects. Slovenia's role in relation to other South Slavic countries is far less clearly outlined than Slovenia's role in relation to Macedonia. This particularly applies to the relation of Slovenia to Croatia. Regarding to Serbia, Slovenia's helper role is outlined in a few texts<sup>61</sup> through direct and indirect quotes from Slovenian politicians.

In this sub-corpus, 'West Balkans' and 'Balkans' are used as neutral geographical terms in reflections on the geographical region Macedonia is part of. There seemed to be no negative evaluative stance in the use of this term, although the awareness of possibly negative connotations is observable in a few articles. For instance, the use of the phrases 'Balkan knot' ("Dnevnik", 23 Dec. 2007) and 'Balkan fire' ("Dnevnik", 13 Jan. 2008) indicate that awareness: in their context, these phrases refer to the present complex situation and potential difficulties in solving political issues, and to recent warfare in the Balkans, respectively.

In all three media material samples analyzed in the preceding sections, positioning is most frequently realized in reported speech, which is characterized by the structure content + source + reported verb, and in a combination of direct quotations and reported speech. All three samples mostly use what Smirnova<sup>62</sup> terms 'liberal structures' – (quotations without quotation marks<sup>63</sup>). In Macedonian and Serbian media, journalists mainly used predicates of speaking (communication verbs) that presented the reported utterances as a fact of reality and implied abstraction from them (e.g., 'stated'), whereas Croatian media occasionally used predicates with the potential of enforcement on readers of a negative evaluation of an utterance (e.g., *podmetati* 'frame'; see Section 4.2). Such evaluative verbs draw attention to the speech act itself (i.e., interpret what a speaker allegedly does by uttering something) rather than to the content of the quoted words.

The most frequently quoted discourse participant is Slovenian Foreign Minister Rupel. Less frequently quoted are other Slovenian officials (e.g., the Slovenian ambassador to Macedonia in the Macedonia sub-corpus). These persons are assumed to possess sufficient competence to give judgments as authorities. Providing professional characteristics of the source (e.g., their function) and information about the context of the quoted utterance (e.g., its time and place) emphasizes the relevance of the issue discussed and creates the effect of accuracy of the words quoted.

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<sup>61</sup> A direct quotation of Rupel: "Slovenia will be a strong advocate for Serbia" (?????????? ?? ????? ????? ??????? ?? ??????, "Ve er", 29 Dec. 2007. The same quotation appeared in a text in "Dnevnik", 28 Dec. 2007, but with no quotation marks.

<sup>62</sup> A.V. Smirnova, *Reported Speech* . . .

<sup>63</sup> Quotation marks appear in 'literal structures' that aim at verbatim reproduction of initial messages.

## 5. Conclusions

A look at the self-positioning of Slovenia in the program of its EU Council presidency, and at other-positioning of Slovenia in Croatian, Serbian, and Macedonian media on the occasion of Slovenia's presidency, revealed some interesting findings. First of all, the program is a symbolic final step of discursive distancing of Slovenia from the Balkans. However, Western Balkan countries are an important priority in the program, and so the program established a discursive link between Slovenia and the Balkans. In addition, the program introduced a new storyline in the Slovenian discourse, a new position and identity parameter: a helper position.

The Slovenian self-defined helper position in relation to the priority 'Western Balkans' appears to be an active and superior helper position. Regarding how this position is construed, one should recall two phases in positioning in position theory. Phase-one positioning, or 'prepositioning', involves assigning "qualities of character, intellect, or temperament, sometimes supported by biographical reports on the past behavior"<sup>64</sup>. In the domain of positioning of states, self-prepositioning should involve assigning some qualities to the entity that is the object of positioning, including some references to the entities' past.

As Langenhove and Harré argue<sup>65</sup>, positions emerge 'naturally' out of the social context. Initial positioning can be accepted or challenged. In the presidency program, an important discursive step in self-positioning is missing. Regarding the priority related to Western Balkan countries, the chief document of the presidency does not contain any prepositioning elements. That is, some indications of attributes that would make Slovenia persuasive in this position are missing. There is no mention of any particular features of Slovenia's past that could make its helper role convincing and authentic. Any mention of Slovenia's relation and closeness (at any level) to any part of the Western Balkans is absent. Slovenia's position is based on implicit and unspoken features. For this reason, the self-assigned position seems to lack discursive stability. The program ignored prepositioning and concentrated solely on assigning roles. This may have contributed to a contested nature of Slovenia's position, as well as to the nature of modifications and reformulations of that position in foreign discourses.

In Serbian and Croatian media, two positions (i.e., identity constructions) are present: a helper and its opposite, an obstructor. The Slovenian self-defined helper position was by and large acknowledged in Serbian and Macedonian media, but it was also often questioned in the former. An attempt to 'preposition' Slovenia is observable in references to the common Yugoslav past in Serbian media. The

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<sup>64</sup> See F. Moghaddam and R. Harré (eds.), *Words of Conflict ...*, op.cit. Prepositioning is important because it sets the stage for assigning or refusing rights and duties (phase-two positioning).

<sup>65</sup> L. van Langenhove and R. Harré, *Cultural Stereotypes...*, p. 963.

symbolic geographical position of Slovenia in Serbian media material is best illustrated by the attested metaphor of a European train: it suggests that Slovenia is part of the same train as other countries in the region, although it is a driving force. The Croatian newspapers examined generally construct an opposite position and assign an opposite identity to Slovenia: that of an obstructor, or even its radical instantiation: a villain<sup>66</sup>. In this material, all prepositioning is absent. There are no references to concrete attributes that would explain and support the logics of the obstructor position. References to the common (Yugoslav or other) past are missing. Silencing of the Yugoslav past seems to be common in Slovenian and Croatian discourse. In contrast, no such silencing is present in Macedonian and Serbian discourse. A general view of the Croatian material suggests very little journalism aiming at objective reporting: presentations looking at a certain conflict situation from various angles are rare. Instead, shallow representations of events and a presentation of discourse participants that reduces them to only one dimension dominate. These representations are characterized by assigning very clear and thus stereotypical roles to discourse participants (e.g., of a hero or villain)<sup>67</sup>. Concrete storylines (a vehicle for stereotypes)<sup>68</sup> incorporate a conventional flow of events (e.g., 'hero is tricked by villain') and stereotypical characters. The directly quoted or rephrased statements by Slovenian politicians are often isolated from their context, and thus appear hostile and irrational. Positioning of Slovenia was realized through missing elements. Croatian media seem to 'chase' an external enemy in the discourse examined: Serbia as the ultimate enemy of the 1990s has been backgrounded to a certain extent in this discourse, and a strong emphasis is placed on Slovenia as a new 'enemy'.

The construction of two opposite positions relates to different political contexts in Croatia and Serbia (see Section 4). Both positions are pragmatic in that they serve concrete goals: for instance, construing someone as a systematic obstructor serves to delegitimize his actions as wrong and diverts attention from some other problems in society.

In Macedonian discourse, Slovenia is predominantly positioned as a friend and helper to Macedonia; however, the possible effect of this role is diminished by the highly performative discourse in which the role is embedded. In the Macedonian discourse sample, Slovenia's position towards other South Slavic countries is less clearly articulated.

In the material examined, self-positioning—that is, identity construction—to some extent simultaneously happens with other-positioning: ascribing certain identity traits to Slovenia (e.g., a superior position of an obstructor in the Croatian media) happens simultaneously with ascribing certain traits and positions to Croatia (e.g., an inferior position of a victim).

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<sup>66</sup> V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folk Tale* ....

<sup>67</sup> Op.cit.

<sup>68</sup> L. van Langenhove and R. Harré, *Cultural Stereotypes* ..., p. 368–369.

The geographical terms 'Balkans' and 'Western Balkans' are occasionally employed in discursive positioning to delegitimize 'the other'; that is, in negatively evaluative contexts. This is first and foremost true of the Croatian media. Serbian media only occasionally utilize the dichotomy 'the Balkans' vs. 'Europe' in self- and other-positioning, and Macedonian media do not do so at all.

Discursive presentations of Slovenia's EU Council presidency in Serbian,  
Croatian, and Macedonian media  
Summary

This article examines the discursive presentations of Slovenia in Serbian, Croatian, and Macedonian media (mainly online editions of newspapers) from November 2007 to April 2008. The focus is placed on identity construction through self-positioning and other-positioning, and on applications of symbolic geography in media discussions of Slovenia's rotating EU presidency. The article concentrates on how different national discourses respond to and interpret Slovenia's self-positioning in the presidency's program, and on the differences in how Slovenia's former 'Yugoslav brothers' position Slovenia. In examining Slovenia's position in relation to the dichotomy of the Balkans versus Europe, emphasis is placed on changes in public discourse and the new identity parameters that emerge. The analysis explains the relation of the role(s) defined in Slovenia's self-positioning in its presidency program and the role(s) ascribed to Slovenia in foreign discourses. Particular attention is paid to positioning as an identity-ascribing process as expressed in the headlines, kickers, and leads of the texts analyzed.

Key words: Slovenian EU presidency, Serbian, Croatian and Macedonian media, identity construction, self-positioning, other-positioning, symbolic geography