



Contemporary Southeastern Europe

An Interdisciplinary Journal on Southeastern Europe

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Research Article

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Contemporary Southeastern Europe, 2017, 4(1), 26-53

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Representations of the ‘Balkans’ in the Foreign Policy Discourses of Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mitjo Vaulasvirta*

The build-up of nationalism in Yugoslavia and its successor states was accompanied by a seismic shift in public discourse, as the national political elites mobilised the rhetoric of Othering in order to distinguish their respective nations from ‘the Balkans’, to construct and reinforce a new national identity, and to endorse European integration. This paper investigates how the discourses of Balkanism and Othering functioned in international relations by examining how the Balkans were represented in the foreign policy articulations of Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina during and after the Yugoslav conflicts. By analysing speeches delivered at the UN General Assembly between 1993 and 2003, this paper investigates how Southeast European states constructed their identities on the international stage and capitalised on “Balkan” identity for foreign policy objectives. It finds that representations of the Balkans were part of foreign policy discourses, but that their use was conditioned by identity considerations and the foreign policy objectives of each country. The paper concludes that both Croatia and Macedonia employed distinct forms of Balkanist rhetoric in order to construct identity and legitimise European integration, while Bosnia and Herzegovina, during the 1992-1995 conflict, adopted a counter-discourse refuting various stereotypical representations of the Balkans to which the country had been initially subjected by Western policy-makers and observers.

Keywords: Balkanism, National identity, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia.

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Introduction

A branch of interdisciplinary research that emerged in the mid-1990s has explored how the Balkans have been perceived and represented outside their borders. Scholars have examined how ideas about the region have been constructed, reaffirmed and disseminated through cultural and political practices and how an outside perception of the Balkans has emerged during the past centuries in the works of foreign travel authors, novelists, journalists, diplomats and politicians. By and large, these outside perceptions have been characterised by stereotypes of the Balkans' cultural and political backwardness, violence, warmongering and tribalism. The Balkans have been portrayed as a quasi-European zone that is, and is destined to be, inferior to Europe itself. This discourse about the Balkans has turned the region into a powerful system of knowledge that privileges the West: "A repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the 'European' and 'the west' has been constructed."¹ Maria Todorova coined the term *Balkanism* to underline the historical, cultural and geopolitical background of this discourse and argued that Balkanism is not a mere variation of Orientalism, as defined by Edward Said, but an independent cultural and political practice. The Orient has been Europe's true Other, while the Balkans has been portrayed as Europe's ambiguous Self. Todorova's landmark monograph, *Imagining the Balkans*, has been succeeded by countless studies that have established Balkanism as a distinct area of interdisciplinary scholarship.²

This paper investigates how discourses about the 'Balkans' have been formulated and used in the foreign policy of Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina following the fall of Yugoslavia. While Balkanism is often conceived as a Western discourse, Southeast European nations have not been its passive recipients.³ Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert Hayden discovered an Orientalist-type rhetoric embedded in the political discourses in Yugoslavia in the late 1980s.⁴ They associated this discourse with rising nationalism in Yugoslavia, the republics' pursuit of independence and, later, their ambition to join the European Union. Balkanist discourse served these overlapping political objectives especially in Slovenia and Croatia, where the advocates of independence proclaimed European identity by juxtaposing themselves with

¹ Todorova, Maria. 1997. *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 188.

² Goldsworthy, Vesna. 1998. *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*. Yale University Press; Fleming, K. E. 2000. Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography. *The American Historical Review* 105(49), 1218-233; Hammond, Andrew. 2006. Balkanism in Political Context: From the Ottoman Empire to the EU. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 3(3), 6-26.

³ Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*.

⁴ Bakić-Hayden, Milica and Robert M. Hayden. 1992. Orientalist Variations on the Theme 'Balkans': Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics. *Slavic Review* 51(1), 1-15.

the rest of Yugoslavia, which was depicted as 'Balkan' and non-European.⁵ The contempt with which many among the Croatian and Slovenian independence-oriented political and cultural elites viewed the 'Balkans' from the late 1980s onwards emerged in a particular historical context, since, both as a name and designation, the 'Balkans' have been tainted long before the seed of disunity and nationalism was sown in Yugoslavia. In the early 20th century, the 'Balkans' had already come to be known in Western and Central Europe not only as a geographical name but a signifier, is "saturated with a social and cultural meaning that expanded its signified far beyond its immediate and concrete meaning."⁶ The negative associations of the name 'Balkans' and its derivatives originated in Western Europe, but these were internalised early on by many intellectuals and writers in Southeast Europe.⁷ Coming to the early 21st century, the word for an inhabitant of the Balkans (*Balkanac*) was already associated with vulgarity and primitivism and it often referred to as something inherently 'non-European'.⁸ While the term 'Balkans' did have its uses in post-WW2 Yugoslavia, it was not used as the primary self-designation and its derivatives retained many of their negative connotations.⁹

It is against this historical background that one can begin to consider the discursive formulations of the 'Balkans' that emerged in the region as Yugoslavia began to crumble. In the early 1990s, the political elites in Slovenia and Croatia adopted a discourse which promoted a European identity, while degrading what were seen as their less worthy southern and eastern neighbours as 'Balkan'.¹⁰ Their former Yugoslav compatriots were seen as a 'Balkan burden', "which has slowed if not prevented entirely the non-Balkan parts of the country from being what they 'really are' – European."¹¹ In this discourse, the name 'Balkans' became a signifier that was deployed by politicians to distinguish Croatia and Slovenia from their neighbours and to promote European identity and integration.¹² Maple Razsa and Nicole Lindstrom have showed that pejorative representations of the Balkans were widely mobilised in the early 1990s in order disassociate Croatia from its neighbours, construct a new national identity, legitimise Croatia's

⁵ Bakić-Hayden, Milica. 1995. Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia. *Slavic Review* 54(4), 917-31.

⁶ Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 21.

⁷ Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 39.

⁸ Mitani, Keiko. 2007. *Balkan as a Sign: Usage of the Word Balkan in Language and Discourse of the ex-Yugoslav People*, in *Regions in Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by Hayashi, Tadayuki and Fukuda Hiroshi. Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University.

⁹ Sarić, Ljiljana. 2004. Balkan Identity: Changing Self-Images of the South Slavs. *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development* 25(5), 389-407; Mitani, *Balkan as a Sign*.

¹⁰ Bakić-Hayden, *Nesting Orientalisms*; Lindstrom, *Between Europe*.

¹¹ Bakić-Hayden and Hayden, *Orientalist Variations*, 924.

¹² Razsa, Maple and Nicole Lindstrom. 2004. Balkan is Beautiful: Balkanism in the Political Discourse of Tudjman's Croatia. *East European Politics and Societies* 18(4), 628-50.

independence and to promote membership in the EU.¹³ Ljiljana Sarić's study of the media found that Croatian and Slovenian newspapers have also avoided the term 'Balkans' as a self-designator and rather choose to define their respective countries in opposition to the Balkans.¹⁴ Patrick Hyden Patterson has argued that the way in which public commentators disassociated Slovenia from the Balkans and, in turn, associated it with Central Europe contributed to a new Slovenian national identity and facilitated the rejection of Yugoslavia.¹⁵ Nicole Lindstrom has argued that a negative representations of the Balkans did not only have a role in forging a new national identity, but that they were also used to legitimise a shift in Slovenia's political orientation away from the Balkans and towards Brussels.¹⁶

Other former Yugoslav states have shared a more ambiguous relationship with a Balkan identity, but they have not been immune to Balkanist discourse.¹⁷ In Serbia, the claim for European identity has been legitimised to a significant degree by a perception of the Serbs as defenders of Christianity against the invasions of Islam. In such constructs of identity, Southeast Europe's Muslim peoples are often regarded as the Balkan 'Other,' against whom a contrasting Serb identity is constructed.¹⁸ Yet this form of identity politics has hardly involved a full dismissal of all that is 'Balkan'. Among others, Ljiljana Sarić has shown that Serbian, Macedonian and Montenegrin media comfortably evoke a Balkan identity, suggesting that the dichotomy between what is perceived to be 'European' and 'Balkan' is not as straightforward as in Slovenia and Croatia.¹⁹ Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia are arguably the most ambiguous cases regarding their Balkan identity. The former's identity is affected by the country's multi-ethnicity and large Muslim population (hereafter Bosniaks). On the basis of religion, both the Bosnian Serbs and Croats have constructed the Bosniaks as the Other. The Bosniaks are represented as "the lowest rungs of nesting orientalist hierarchies [...] and are often placed outside the symbolic borders of Europe."²⁰ Yet many Bosniak commentators, who support a multiethnic state, have evoked an identity of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a country, or bridge, between East and West.²¹ Macedonia, on the other hand,

¹³ Razsa and Lindstrom, *Balkan Is Beautiful*.

¹⁴ Ljiljana Sarić, *Balkan Identity*.

¹⁵ Patterson, Hyder Patrick. 2003. On the Edge of Reason: The Boundaries of Balkanism in Slovenian, Austrian, and Italian Discourse. *Slavic Review* 62(1), 110-41, 121.

¹⁶ Lindstrom, Nicole. 2003. Between Europe and the Balkans: Mapping Slovenia and Croatia's "Return to Europe" in the 1990s. *Dialectical Anthropology* 27(3/4), 313-29, 313.

¹⁷ Bakić-Hayden, *Nesting Orientalisms*, 925.

¹⁸ MacDonalds, Bruce David. 2002. *Balkan Holocaust? Serbian and Croatian Victim-Centred Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Bakić-Hayden, *Nesting Orientalisms*.

¹⁹ Sarić, *Balkan Identity*.

²⁰ Helms, Elissa 2008. East and West Kiss: Gender, Orientalism, and Balkanism in Muslim-Majority Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Slavic Review* 67(1), 88-119, 91.

²¹ Helms, *East and West Kiss*.

has been characterised as the “Balkans’ Other within”, a term Vasiliki Neofotistos used to describe Macedonia’s liminal position in this symbolic geography.²² According to Neofotistos, Macedonia is seen internally as a country that escaped violence in the Yugoslav conflict and therefore is no longer part of the Balkans, but which, as a non-member of NATO and EU, is not yet part of the West either.²³

Although Balkanist discourse has often been associated with the pursuit of foreign policy objectives, particularly EU and NATO membership, and is consequently viewed as oriented outwards, research has not yet examined whether Balkanist discourse has contributed to how Southeast European states have conducted their foreign affairs. In order to understand whether this discourse was confined to domestic politics, where its primary function was to mobilise public support for pro-independence movements and European integration, or if it had a broader political function in constructing identity and claiming legitimacy for European integration internationally, this paper will investigate Balkanism in the foreign policies of the former Yugoslav countries. The paper asks, first, how the different states of Southeast Europe, as represented by their political leaders, have articulated discourse about the Balkans in the sphere of international politics and, second, which political motives and objectives can explain how the Balkans have been represented. In particular, the paper is concerned with whether Balkanist discourses have played a role in how states have constructed their identities internationally and in the formulation of European integration discourse. Simultaneously, this paper will explore how Southeast European countries have coped with and responded to the evidently Balkanist articulations of the Yugoslav conflict that dominated international political discourse and had a wide impact on Western policies towards the region in the 1990s.²⁴

This paper seeks to answer the above questions by reviewing the speeches delivered by politicians and diplomats of Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) between 1993-2003. This ten-year period is a fertile era for comparative research on Balkanism. Following the declarations of independence in Croatia and Macedonia in 1991 and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, the states in question were actively engaged in the construction of national identity and establishing themselves as sovereign states in international organisations for the first time.

²² Neofotistos, Vasiliki. 2008. “The Balkans’ Other Within”: Imaginings of the West in the Republic of Macedonia. *History and Anthropology* 19(1), 17-36.

²³ Neofotistos, “*The Balkans’ Other Within*”, 22.

²⁴ Hansen, Lene. 2006. *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. London: Routledge.

As an international body, which was involved in the Yugoslav conflict from the beginning in the form of peacekeeping and where several former Yugoslav states were represented throughout the 1991-1995 conflicts and the 1999 war in Kosovo, the United Nations was a forum where Southeast European issues were addressed and debated and where political discourse about the region was articulated and manifested. These three countries were chosen in order to study cases which represent diverging attitudes to Balkanism: Croatia, which has denounced its Balkan identity, Macedonia, where the discourse has reflected an ambiguous position between the 'Balkans' and 'Europe', and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which remains ambivalent due to its ethno-political divisions. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), which in 2003 changed its name to Serbia and Montenegro and in 2006 dissolved into the republics of Serbia and Montenegro, was excluded from the study because FRY was not a member of the UN between 1992 and 2000.

The following analysis of foreign policy discourses is based on verbatim records of speeches delivered by the representatives (including heads of state, politicians, diplomats and permanent UN representatives) of Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the General Assembly and its subsidiary organs. Considering the large variety of topics addressed in the UNGA, from nuclear disarmament to international terrorism, the selected quotations and references presented in the analysis primarily reflect discussions addressing Southeast European politics and affairs. The following analysis is inspired by Norman Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis. In order to deconstruct and analyse Balkanist rhetoric and to put foreign policy discourse into a historical context, the paper moves organically between prior research on Balkanist discourse and the primary sources, focusing on 1) word choice and 'key words' that are of general or specific cultural or historical significance with regard to how the Balkans have been portrayed in the past; 2) relevant themes, thematic structures and their functions in the text; 3) Balkanist metaphors and the cultural, ideological and political factors that affect which metaphors are used.²⁵ Overall, this paper is concerned with how countries identify or do not identify with the 'Balkans', which alternative regional identities are evoked and in which way, which meanings countries assign to the 'Balkans', which language is used to describe the 'Balkans', and which political and cultural considerations can explain the discourse about the region.

Croatia: Path to Europe paved by rejection of the 'Balkans'

²⁵ Fairclough, Norman. 1992. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 236-237.

A rejection of the 'Balkans' and the promotion of an alternative European identity were unmistakable features in Croatia's statements to the General Assembly in the period under question. Between 1993 and 2003, Croatia referred to itself repeatedly as *Western European, Central European, European, Southeast European, Mediterranean* and *Danubian*, but not once as Balkan. This insistence on a European identity was often repetitive and undisguised: "By its geographical position, history, socio-cultural features, and political and economic orientation, the Republic of Croatia is a part of both Central Europe and the Mediterranean."²⁶ The term 'Balkans', on the other hand, was used to denote an area outside Croatia's borders. Croatia evoked its European identity in different contexts and often without any explicit reason, but most frequently it was associated with Croatia's aspiration for European integration, leaving little doubt that the references were deliberate: "As a country of European civilisation and tradition, Croatia's strategic, political, economic and social orientation is clearly focused on active participation in the process of European integration."²⁷ As such, the strategy Croatian elites adopted nationally, in which Croatian national identity and culture were portrayed as European in order to further the agenda of joining the EU,²⁸ was also intended for foreign consumption. There was a particular insistence on the idea that the country's history provides a strong legitimacy for Croatia to join Euro-Atlantic institutions. Consider, for example, the following extract from foreign minister Mate Granić's 1995 address on post-war reconstruction in Croatia:

"Croatia [...] stands firmly rooted in the maturing Central European polity [and] looks [...] towards reclaiming its place in the old Europe and contributing to the new Europe [...] Since ancient times Croatia has been a European country. Integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions remains our strategic goal. Therefore, Croatia will continue to march towards it [...]. As a Central European and Mediterranean country, Croatia will further endeavour to remain a key agent of stability and peace in this part of the world."²⁹

Central to this and several other statements made by Croatian representatives in the UN was the notion that Croatia is by its history and culture an inseparable part of Central Europe. This discourse broadly echoed the rhetoric adopted by statesmen and public commentators in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic in the 1980s. Larry Wolf has explored how *Mitteleuropa* was then rediscovered and reconceptualised as "an ideological antidote to the iron

²⁶ United Nations, General Assembly, 13th plenary meeting, A/50/PV.13, 29. September 1995 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

²⁷ United Nations, 13th plenary meeting.

²⁸ Lindstrom, *Between Europe*, 317.

²⁹ United Nations, General Assembly, 18th plenary meeting, A/53/PV.18, 28. September 1998 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

curtain” and how the advocates of ‘Central Europe’ attempted to shatter the oppressive idea of ‘Eastern Europe’ by promoting *Mittleuropa* as a new regional identity.³⁰ Overall, the identity discourse evoked by politicians and diplomats in the General Assembly corresponded largely with what scholars have previously written about the construction of Croatian national identity among the country’s political elites in the 1990s. Among others, Milica Bakić-Hayden has observed that the political discourse in Croatia stressed participation in *Mittleuropa* as an alternative to the Balkans.³¹ Dimitar Bechev, on the other hand, has noted how Central European identity and participation in the region’s political initiatives was regarded by Croatia’s political elites as a ‘springboard’ for joining the European Union.³²

Besides the insistence on a Central European identity, another feature of the UN statements that corresponded closely with the discourse evoked by Croatia’s nationally-minded political elites domestically in the 1990s was the notion that Croatia will justly reclaim, or return to, its place in ‘old Europe’. As Nicole Lindstrom has noted, the trope of ‘return’ formed a central element of the public discourse in Croatia, as the elites hoped to restore their country to what they considered as their ‘rightful place in Europe’.³³ This was coupled with the idea that Croatia will make its ‘final exit’ from the Balkans by disassociating itself from what were regarded as the region’s troubled countries.³⁴ The notion of ‘old Europe’ in Minister Granić’s speech represents this view – the idea that Croatia has been inherently European since ‘ancient times’, and that its links with the Balkans were only a temporary phase that will come to an end when Croatia reclaims its position as part of the ‘West’. In this discourse, Croatia’s participation in the Yugoslavian federation is presented as nothing more than a deviation from what is perceived as Croatia’s natural course of history in Europe.

A term that was conspicuously absent from all UN statements by Croatian politicians and diplomats was the ‘Western Balkans.’ The Western Balkans is an administrative term coined by the European Union in 1996 to designate the area of the former Yugoslavia and Albania, and to distinguish it from Southeast Europe as a broader region extending from the Gulf of Trieste to the

³⁰ Wolf, Larry. 1994. *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 15.

³¹ Bakić-Hayden, *Nesting Orientalisms*.

³² Bechev, Dimitar. 2004. Contested Borders, Contested Identity: The Case of Regionalism in South East Europe. *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 4(1), 77-95.

³³ Lindstrom, *Between Europe and the Balkans*, 326.

³⁴ Lindstrom, *Between Europe and the Balkans*.

Black Sea.³⁵ While Slovenia was excluded from the Western Balkans, Croatia was considered to be in it. Although the designation 'Western' was initially added in order to destigmatise the Balkans – a strategy that appears to have worked among the Croatian media, which has quite frequently referenced the 'Western Balkans'³⁶ – the Croatian political leadership has remained averse to the term as it lumped Croatia in together with other former Yugoslav states.³⁷ Franjo Tuđman, who remained President until the end of 1999, became increasingly sceptical of various EU-led regional initiatives and approaches towards the end of the 1990s, seeing them as an attempt to create a neo-Yugoslavia of some kind.³⁸ Simultaneously, the 'Western Balkans' was a public image challenge for Croatia. Consider, for example, the following thoughts of Stjepo Martinović on branding Croatia abroad: "[...] the West Balkans remains for Hrvatska a completely unacceptable 'brand' as it has neither historic nor other viable connections; also as the Stability Pact was launched from Sarajevo, bringing Hrvatska under its image umbrella might again [...] associate Hrvatska with Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is [...] the least desirable 'twin sister'."³⁹ Martinović, who in 2002 led the information department of the Croatian Ministry of European Integration, stated explicitly that the danger of accepting the Western Balkans label is that Croatia would be associated with its southern and eastern neighbours.

Although the 'Western Balkans' did not appear in the statement, Croatian politicians and diplomats hesitantly evoked a 'Southeast European' identity in the General Assembly when discussing Croatia's neighbourhood.⁴⁰ Although the term 'Southeast Europe' also represented a turn in European and international political discourse in the 1990s, whereby the negative associations of 'the Balkans' would be replaced with a more neutral and Europe-oriented terminology,⁴¹ 'Southeast Europe' appeared in the UN as Croatia's self-designation only infrequently and found its uses primarily when emphasising Croatia's foreign policy towards the region. Consider, for example, the following extract from foreign minister Tonino Picula's 2000 address: "Croatia's leading role as a contributor to peace and security in the region of

³⁵ Vesnic-Alujevic, Lucia. 2012. *European Integration of Western Balkans: From Reconciliation to European Future*. Brussels: Center for European Studies.

³⁶ Šarić, Ljiljana. 2010. *Domestic and Foreign Media Images of the Balkans*, in *Contesting Europe's Eastern Rim: Cultural Identities in Public Discourse*, edited by Šarić, Ljiljana / Musolff, Andreas / Manz, Stegan and Ingrid Hudabiunigg. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

³⁷ Maldini, Pero and Davor Paukovic. (ed.). 2016. *Croatia and the European Union: Changes and Developments*. Oxon: Routledge.

³⁸ Jović, Dejan. 2006. Croatia and the European Union: a Long Delayed Journey. *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans Online* 8(1), 85-103.

³⁹ Martinović, Stjepo. 2002. Branding Hrvatska – a Mixed Blessing That Might Succeed: the Advantage of Being Unrecognisable. *Journal of Brand Management* 9(4-5), 315-22, 316.

⁴⁰ United Nations, General Assembly, 13th plenary meeting, A/55/PV.13, 13. September 2000 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

⁴¹ Bechev, *Contested Borders, Contested Identity*.

South-East Europe will considerably contribute to turning this part of Europe into an area of peace.”⁴² The selective use of the term was reflected also in a tendency to use ‘Southeast Europe’ as a supplementary category, or an additional self-designation, which was often evoked in the speeches alongside the ‘Central European’ and ‘Mediterranean’ labels in order to avoid categorising Croatia exclusively in terms of one geo-political area. Further evidence of the discomfort of using ‘Southeast Europe’ as a self-designation was reflected in attempts to redefine and reconstruct ‘Southeast Europe’ in order to distinguish it from the Balkans. This is demonstrated in the following extract from President Tuđman’s 1994 address:

*“[...] since it gained independence, Croatia has become a mature and responsible member of the international community. It is already a pillar of future stability and cooperation in that part of southeastern Europe which is linked to the traditionally agitated Balkans.”*⁴³

Tuđman’s speech effectively unveils the inclusion/exclusion logic of Croatia’s foreign policy discourse towards the region. Although ‘Southeast Europe’ and the ‘Balkans’ are synonyms, the former being a more neutral and the latter a more contested term for the same geographical entity,⁴⁴ Tuđman repeatedly referred to them as distinctively different territories. In this redefinition, Croatia is a member of Southeast Europe that exists alongside, but separately from, what is described as the ‘traditionally agitated Balkans.’ While Tuđman failed to elaborate which countries the newly defined ‘South-East Europe’ incorporates, one can safely assume that it consists solely of Croatia and Slovenia, as Tuđman would not have hesitated to characterise Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia as ‘Balkan’. By generating this dichotomy, Tuđman tried to redeem Croatia as a member of Southeast Europe from the negative connotations of the Balkan identity. Considering that the speech was made when the Croatian War of Independence was still ongoing, it can also be seen as an attempt to disassociate the war in Croatia from the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the two conflicts were often grouped under the collective banner of ‘Balkan Wars.’ This association was a pressing concern for Tuđman, because the ongoing conflict in Croatia was a vivid reminder that Croatia was regarded as ‘Balkan.’ To present a country that is in the middle of an armed conflict as a ‘pillar of future stability’ is beyond questionable, but it shows the extents to which the Croatian

⁴² United Nations, *13th plenary meeting*.

⁴³ United Nations, General Assembly, *9th meeting*, A/49/PV.9, 28. September 1994 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

⁴⁴ Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 141.

government was willing to go to relieve Croatia from the burden of the 'Balkans'.

Furthermore, in this occasion Croatian rhetoric towards the Balkans resembled a discourse established by politicians and public commentators from the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. The wording "traditionally agitated Balkans" used by Tuđman is likely to have been borrowed from the Czech President Vaclav Havel, who used the same phrase in an op-ed published in the *New York Times* in October 1993.⁴⁵ Havel argued that the Central European countries should seek membership in and be admitted to NATO because their region was already an integral part of Western European civilisation. Havel used the phrase 'traditionally agitated Balkans' to underline the idea that Central Europe is a distinct and relevant region because it borders Southeast Europe, which he saw as a key area for European security.⁴⁶ Tuđman's prerogative remained effectively the same as Havel's, except that the region Tuđman wished to legitimise as a separate territory from the Balkans was Southeast Europe. Overall, by labelling the Balkans as "traditionally agitated," and therefore expressing the traditionally held view of the region as a site of perpetual conflict, and by defining Croatia as non-Balkan, Croatia took part in the process of inclusion and exclusion that is at the heart of this discourse.

Macedonia: The Balkans as Europe's Heartland and its Powder Keg

Macedonia evoked both 'Balkan' and 'Southeast European' identities in the General Assembly. Until 1996 the 'Balkans' was the only explicitly asserted self-designation, but after that it frequently appeared alongside the neutral form 'Southeast Europe'.⁴⁷ Despite the derogatory associations of the word, the 'Balkan' identify was often evoked without any explicit purpose. This is noteworthy, since while the Macedonian media has used the 'Balkan' self-designation,⁴⁸ some studies have found that educated Macedonians are averse to the Balkan identity, often defined in opposition to what is regarded as 'European'.⁴⁹ Regarding political discourses in Macedonia, Vasiliki Neofotistos found that in official state representations the 'Balkans' and the 'West' have

⁴⁵ Havel, Václav. 1993. *New Democracies for Old Europe*. *New York Times*, 17. October 1993.

⁴⁶ Havel, *New Democracies for Old Europe*.

⁴⁷ See for example: United Nations, General Assembly, 6th meeting, A/C.1/49/PV.6, 19. October 1994 (accessed: 10. March 2017); United Nations, General Assembly, 30th plenary meeting, A/55/PV.30, 27. September 2000 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

⁴⁸ Šarić, *Balkan Identity*.

⁴⁹ Thiessen, Ilka. 2007. *Waiting for Macedonia: Identity in a Changing World*. Peterborough: Broadview Press.

often been portrayed as two opposite ideological systems. In fact, Neofotisto's notion of Macedonia as the "Balkans' Other within" insists on the notion that Macedonians see themselves as no longer being part of the 'Balkans.'⁵⁰ In the UN statements analysed for this paper, in contrast, Macedonian politicians and diplomats embraced a Macedonian national identity as a country at the *heart of the Balkans*.⁵¹

The discrepancy between how Macedonian political elites have, at times, represented the Balkans internally and how they have referred to the region in the General Assembly can in part be explained by the underlying political objectives of this foreign policy discourse. In contrast to Croatia, Macedonia's foreign policy in the UN has very clearly underlined the importance of bringing all Southeast European states into the European political sphere. Promotion of the Euro-Atlantic integration of the entire region was given considerable emphasis in the statements, and in 1993 President Gligorov described it as a high priority for Macedonian foreign policy.⁵² In this discourse, EU-membership was generally represented as a condition for overall long-term stability and peace in the region: "The only way to achieve long-term peace and stability in the whole Balkan region is through the full integration of all the Balkan countries into Europe."⁵³ Besides the security-oriented argument for the Balkans' European integration, Macedonia's politicians and diplomats phrased an identity-oriented argument, which underlined the European identity of the entire Balkans. In the speeches, the Balkans were described as *the centre of European civilisation* and *the cradle of European civilisation*,⁵⁴ and there were evident attempts to use such historical narratives to justify EU-integration: "There should be no more hesitation in the effort to quickly Europeanise the Balkans, which, as we all know, once were the centre of European civilisation."⁵⁵

While portraying the Balkans as the birthplace of European civilisation, Macedonia was not immune to the discourse of 'Othering' or nesting Orientalism in the General Assembly. As Neofotistos has argued, Macedonia's particular identity as a "Balkans' Other within" entails the idea that

⁵⁰ Neofotistos, "*The Balkans' Other Within*", 21.

⁵¹ United Nations, General Assembly, First Committee, 11th meeting, A/C.1/51/PV.11, 22. October 1996 (accessed: 10. March 2017); United Nations, General Assembly, 13th plenary meeting, A/57/PV.13, 17. September 2002 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

⁵² United Nations, General Assembly, 10th plenary meeting, A/48/PV.10, 30. September 1993 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

⁵³ United Nations, *General Assembly, 19th plenary meeting, A/50/PV.19, 14. October 1995* (accessed: 10. March 2017).

⁵⁴ *United Nations, 9th plenary meeting*.

⁵⁵ *United Nations, 9th plenary meeting*.

Macedonia is different from the rest of the Yugoslav states because it was not involved in the 1990s conflicts. This notion of particularity enabled the Macedonian political elites to assert that Macedonia is more 'Western' than its fellow Yugoslav republics in the north.⁵⁶ This message was communicated both to the Macedonian people and to the international community to showcase what was perceived as Macedonia's particularity vis-à-vis the rest of the former Yugoslavia.⁵⁷ Macedonian political elites actively, and somewhat successfully, promoted an image of their country as the Balkans' only stable and functional multi-ethnic democracy, contributing to peace and security in the region.⁵⁸ Traces of the same discourse could also be located in the statements of Macedonian political leaders and diplomats in the General Assembly. The following quotation from President Kiro Gligorov's 1993 address exemplifies this:

*"By attaining its independence in a peaceful and legitimate manner [...] Macedonia has kept the peace and forestalled a spill-over of the war into the southern Balkans. The comprehensive efforts [...] have changed our historic position from a bone of contention to a factor for peace and stability in the Balkans."*⁵⁹

Macedonia repeatedly asserted in the UN that it had attained its independence *peacefully* and *legitimately*, juxtaposing itself with those Yugoslav states that partook in conflicts.⁶⁰ The notion that Macedonia has ceased to be a *bone of contention* in the region is not coincidental, as 'bone of contention' may refer to historical tensions between the Slavic states and Greece in the area where the Republic of Macedonia is now located.⁶¹ In particular, the term has referred to the 'Macedonian question' – a series of disputes between Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia over the possession of Macedonia in the second half of the 19th

⁵⁶ Neofotistos, "The Balkans' Other Within."

⁵⁷ Neofotistos, "The Balkans' Other Within", 21; Panev, Aleksander. 2005. Macedonia, in *Eastern Europe. Introduction to the People, Lands and Cultures*, edited by Frucht, Richard. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO inc.

⁵⁸ Bechev, Dimitar. 2006. Constructing South East Europe: The Politics of Regional Identity in the Balkans. *RAMSES Working Papers* 1/06; Vankovska, Biljana. 1999. *Constitutional Engineering and Institution-Building in the Republic of Macedonia (1999-2011)*, in *Civic and Uncivic Values in Macedonia. Value, Transformation, Education, and Media*, edited by Ramet, Sabrina / Listhaug, Ola and Albert Simkus. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 99; Battersby, Paul / Siracusa, Joseph M. and Sasho Ripiloski. 2011. *Crime Wars: The Global Intersection of Crime, Political Violence, and International Law*. Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio.

⁵⁹ United Nations, *10th plenary meeting*.

⁶⁰ United Nations, General Assembly, 47th session, A/47/PV.98 13 13 April 1993 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

⁶¹ Archibald, Zosia. 2010. *Macedonia and Thrace*, in *A Companion to Ancient Macedonia*, edited by Roisman, Joseph and Ian Worthington. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 334; Wachtel, Andrew. 1998. *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 90.

century.⁶² Considering that the ‘Macedonian question’ perpetuated the image of Southeast Europe as a turbulent region and of Macedonia as the “land of terror, fire, and sword,”⁶³ the assertion that Macedonia has ceased to be the region’s bone of contention appears as an attempt to deconstruct a narrative that long defined the image of Macedonia in the West.⁶⁴ The fact that most Yugoslav republics faced war in the 1990s seems to have given Macedonia an opportunity to do so. By pointing to the warring state in the north, Macedonia was able to seek to renegotiate its own position in this symbolic geography: it was no longer the bone of contention, but a mitigator of conflict. The following quotation from Stojan Andov’s 1995 speech testifies to this discourse:

*“We have opted for a peaceful approach and for political negotiations for dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and have refused to take part in the inter-ethnic war in its regions [...] and, thus, overcome the historic causes of what has been a bone of contention.”*⁶⁵

Statements by Macedonian representatives in the General Assembly also contained particular language manifested by the use of specific expressions and metaphors regarding Southeast Europe that can be attributed to Balkanist discourse. As the following analysis of these accounts reveals, they were often embedded in discourse about Euro-Atlantic integration. It is important to note, however, that this discourse did not follow the logic of inclusion and exclusion, in which the ‘Balkan’ label is cast on other countries as a way to present oneself as more ‘European’. Rather, the use of Balkanist expressions followed a different and often contradictory logic, whereby stereotypical presuppositions about the Balkans’ propensity for war were presented as evidence of the need for international involvement in Southeast Europe. One aspect of this discourse underlined the historical continuity of the Balkan conflicts and regarded the Yugoslav wars as a result of ethnic hatreds. Consider in this regard the following extract from diplomat Denko Maleski’s 1996 address, where he argued for the necessity of the ICTY due to the historical continuity of ethnic hatreds in the Balkans: “The Balkans are a region where violations of international law have a historical continuity [...]. Fuelled by ethnic hatred disguised in different ideologies, the policy of aggressive nationalism has devastated the region over and over again.”⁶⁶

⁶² Rossos, Andrew. 2008. *Macedonia and the Macedonians. A History*. Stanford: Hoover Institute Press Publication.

⁶³ Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 117.

⁶⁴ The term “bone of contention” appeared also in another speech: United Nations, General Assembly, *36th plenary meeting, A/50/PV.36, 22. September 1995 (accessed: 10. March 2017)*.

⁶⁵ *United Nations, 36th plenary meeting*.

⁶⁶ United Nations, General Assembly, *59th plenary meeting, A/51/PV.59, 19. November*

The 1990s conflicts brought forth a theory that the wars in the former Yugoslavia were merely an extension of prior conflicts in Southeast Europe and that cycles of violence were ingrained in the region's social fabric.⁶⁷ This idea of the historical continuity of violence was intrinsically linked to the theory that the Yugoslav wars were first and foremost an ethnic conflict – a manifestation of age-old hatreds between the Balkan peoples.⁶⁸ Claiming that the Yugoslav wars resulted from 'ancient ethnic hatreds' was a contested theory, which neglected the ideological and political foundations of the conflict.⁶⁹ By underlining the *continuity* rather than the particularity of the 1990s conflicts, Macedonia's speakers, too, invoked a discourse that portrayed the Yugoslav wars in terms of specific 'Balkan' patterns of violence.⁷⁰ In the UN, Macedonia cited 'ethnic hatred' as the cause of the war in Yugoslavia: a term that was politicised and seen by many scholars as misguided.⁷¹ Macedonia also asserted that "ethnic hatred" was the driving force, or *fuel*, behind the policy of nationalism, therefore portraying the aggressive nationalist policies in the former Yugoslavia as a result of ethnic feuds and not the ethnic conflict as a result of nationalist policies.⁷² The difference is more than semantic, as the defining element in the most problematic accounts of the conflicts was that they emphasised ethnicity and religion over nationalism, making the wars appear as a result of unresolvable ancient feuds.⁷³

Macedonia's diplomats and statesmen also referenced the ideas and notions that many in Western policy-making circles had taken as evidence of the primordial nature of the Yugoslav wars that made international intervention futile.⁷⁴ Yet the conclusions drawn in presentations where this discourse was manifested in the General Assembly underlined the need for foreign

1996 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

⁶⁷ Brown, Keith. 2003. *The Past In Question*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 23.

⁶⁸ Ramet, Sabrina. 2004. Explaining the Yugoslav Meltdown, "For a Charm of Powerful Trouble, Like a Hell-Broth Boil and Bubble": Theories About the Roots of the Yugoslav Troubles. *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 32(4), 731-63; Sells, Michael. 1996. *Religion, History, and Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, in *Religion and Justice in the War Over Bosnia*, edited by Davis G. Scott. New York: Routledge; Kuusisto, Riikka 1998. Framing the Wars in the Gulf and in Bosnia: The Rhetorical Definitions of the Western Power Leaders in Action. *Journal of Peace Research* 35(5), 603-20.

⁶⁹ Campbell, David. 1998. *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity, and Justice in Bosnia*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 33-34; Ramet, *Explaining the Yugoslav Meltdown*; Detrez, Raymond and Barbara Segaert. 2008. *Europe and the Historical Legacies in the Balkans*. Brussels: P.I.E Peter Lang, 10.

⁷⁰ United Nations, *59th plenary meeting*.

⁷¹ Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*; Engström, Jenny. 2009. *Democratisation and the Prevention of Violent Conflict: Lessons Learned from Bulgaria and Macedonia*. Surrey: Ashgate publishing.

⁷² United Nations, *59th plenary meeting*.

⁷³ Hansen, *Security as Practice*; Bieber, Florian. 1999. The Conflict in Former Yugoslavia as a «Fault Line War»? *Balkanologie* III(1), 33-48.

⁷⁴ Hansen, *Security as Practice*.

involvement in the Balkans. Most explicitly, the discourse about the Balkans' propensity for war was embedded in statements addressing European integration, where Macedonian representatives portrayed the Balkans as a site of perpetual conflict to establish a basis for further EU engagement in the region. Take the following example from the diplomat Naste Calovski's 1995 address to the General Assembly: "Transformation of the Balkans from a zone of conflict, a barrel-of-gunpowder zone, to a zone of peace and cooperation, as an essential ingredient of European integration."⁷⁵ Metaphors associated with the First World War, such as *barrel-of-gunpowder zone*, *powder keg of Europe* and *keg of dynamite*, were used in the speeches to give Euro-Atlantic integration a sense of urgency. As Naste Calovski phrased on a different occasion: "The history of the Balkans is one of uncertainty, problems, conflict [...]. The region has always been referred to as a keg of dynamite. We have to change that, and the only means of doing so is by Europeanisation of the Balkans."⁷⁶

Phrases such as the *keg of dynamite* and *barrel-of-gunpowder zone* were derived from the infamous 'Balkan powder keg' metaphor, which was used to describe the political tensions in Southeast Europe prior to the First World War. 'Balkan powder keg' has been described as one of the most "mythical and fatalistic concepts" about the Balkans, because it not only denotes particular tensions in a particular time, but also contains a cynical prophecy – the belief that the Balkans are predisposed to violence and that war is bound to break out in the region every fifty years.⁷⁷ When the Yugoslav wars broke out in 1991, many observers took the bloodshed as yet another manifestation of the Balkans' inherent propensity for war.⁷⁸ The idea of the dynamite keg stems from the belief that the Balkans were responsible for starting the First World War. The fact that this claim is to a great extent unwarranted did not prevent Macedonia from suggesting that the breakout of the First World War should be viewed as evidence of the Balkans' predisposition for war: ⁷⁹ "It is interesting to note that it is no coincidence that the First World War started in the Balkans and that the Second World War lasted longest in the Balkans; Europeanisation of the Balkans should not be delayed."⁸⁰

⁷⁵ United Nations, General Assembly, 1st committee, 5th meeting, A/C.1/50/PV.5, 17. October 1995 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

⁷⁶ United Nations, General Assembly, 1st committee, 17th meeting, A/C.1/50/PV.17, 9. November 1995 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

⁷⁷ Daković, Nevena. 2004. *Remembrance of the Past and Present*, in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, edited by Cornis-Pope, Marcel and John Neubauer. Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 474.

⁷⁸ Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*; Promitzer, Christian. 2003. *The South Slavs in the Austrian Imagination*, in *Creating the Other: Ethnic Conflict and Nationalism in Habsburg Central Europe*, edited by Wingfield, Nancy. Berghahn Books Publishing, 209.

⁷⁹ Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 6.

⁸⁰ United Nations, *1st committee, 5th meeting*.

By invoking an image of the Balkans as a region that has a predisposition to war, and where conflicts happen for reasons that are ingrained in the fabric of its societies, Macedonia underlined the need for comprehensive outside intervention. Euro-Atlantic integration was then proposed as a solution that can permanently undo the factors that have previously led the Balkan countries to war. As President Boris Trajkovski argued in 2003: "A thorough and continuous commitment would be needed by all [...] to defuse once and for all this powder keg of Europe."⁸¹ Similarly, there was also a tendency in the rhetoric to invoke fears of further 'Balkanisation' and to compare that with the endless possibilities of 'Europeanisation': "Now and in the future, the most important endeavour of the Balkan States – and, for that matter, of all European States – is the Europeanisation of the Balkans and not its further Balkanisation."⁸² Overall, this discourse regarding the 'Balkans' is revealing because it drew on the same presuppositions as the influential Western discourses in the 1990s, which "constructed 'the Balkans' as radically different and threatening in its capacity to bring chaos and war to the West."⁸³ Yet, unlike many political actors in the United States and Europe, who constructed the Balkans "as incapable of transformation, and to be isolated and deterred rather than supported,"⁸⁴ Macedonia used the discourse to make the case for the full integration of Southeast European countries into the EU.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Counter-Discourse Against 'Ancient Hatreds'

Diplomats and politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), both during and after the 1992-1995 conflict, took no issue with evoking both 'Balkan' and 'European' identities in the UN,⁸⁵ but these accounts did not feature as part of a broader discourse, whereby BiH would proclaim its Europeanness by juxtaposing itself with other states. Looking first at the statements made in the UN during the Bosnian conflict, when BiH was represented both by its Bosniak-led Government and President Alija Izetbegović, revealed that notions of exceptionality in the form of multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism were often the most important elements in accounts where Bosnia and Herzegovina's identity was addressed. Take the following example from President Izetbegović's 1994 address to the General Assembly: "What we call "Bosnia" is

⁸¹ *United Nations, 10th plenary meeting.*

⁸² *United Nations, 1st committee, 17th meeting.*

⁸³ Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 42.

⁸⁴ Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 42.

⁸⁵ United Nations, General Assembly, [42nd plenary meeting](#), A/56/PV.42, 9. November 2001 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

not merely a small piece of land in the Balkans [...] it is an idea; it is a belief that peoples of different religions, different nationalities and different cultural traditions can live together.”⁸⁶ Overall, the wartime leadership of BiH combined anti-fascist rhetoric with the rhetoric of religious tolerance and coexistence in defining the nature of the Bosnian conflict and the Bosnian and Herzegovinian state itself.⁸⁷ Such references to multiculturalism may have reflected genuine understandings of BiH’s identity, but they undoubtedly also played into a broader discursive strategy, whereby notions of multiculturalism were a way to mobilise support from the American and European governments.⁸⁸ The notion of multiculturalism as a defining element of BiH’s identity was also relevant in the UN in the post-war era, but then its uses reflected the post-war political reality and power-sharing arrangements. Politicians, depending on their background, appeared to pay lip service to multiculturalism as a way to justify what effectively were nationalist policies.⁸⁹

References to multiculturalism are important for understanding how Bosnia and Herzegovina, as represented by its political leaders and diplomats, came to terms with Balkanist discourse in the United Nations. From the analysis of UN statements made by BiH’s representatives primarily during the Bosnian conflict, but also in some cases after the 1995 Dayton peace accords were signed, there emerges what may be characterised as a counter-discourse against problematic – which is also to say Balkanist – interpretations of the Bosnian conflict and society more broadly. This counter-discourse formed a criticism against three distinct yet intertwined explanations of the Bosnian conflict: 1) the theory of the Bosnian war as a civil or religious war, 2) the theory of ancient ethnic hatreds and ethnic animosity between Croats, Serbs and Muslims, and 3) the Huntington-style paradigm of the clash of civilisations. Taken together, these narratives formed a critique of western discourses that were evoked by many foreign observers to explain the wars in former Yugoslavia. The first sub-narrative of this counter-discourse featured in statements during the Bosnian conflict, when the country was represented in the UN by a Bosniak-led Government and President Alija Izetbegović. The wartime Bosnian leadership used the General Assembly as a platform to

⁸⁶ United Nations, General Assembly, 7th meeting, A/49/PV.7, 27. September 1994 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

⁸⁷ United Nations, General Assembly, 75th plenary meeting, A/48/PV.75, 10. December 1993 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

⁸⁸ Campbel, David. 2003. *Deterritorialized Loyalty: Multiculturalism and Bosnia*, in *Political Loyalty and the Nation-State*, edited by Waller, Michael and Andrew Linklater. Oxon: Routledge.

⁸⁹ Consider, for example, the following extract from Dragan Cović’s 2003 address, where multiculturalism was used to justify the segregation of students by ethnicity in the BiH education system: “It is our firm belief that, by caring for the individual and by ensuring the collective right to get an education in one’s own language and alphabet, we will enhance mutual dialogue and tolerance, in order to preserve the multicultural society of Bosnia and Herzegovina. United Nations, General Assembly, 15th plenary meeting, A/58/PV.15, 29. September 2003 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

criticise interpretations, which portrayed the Bosnian war as a civil or religious war, and instead sought to underline what it saw as the ideological background of the conflict, rooted in fascism. In 1993, the BiH Ambassador to the UN, Muhamed Sacirbey, articulated this criticism in the following way:

*“To the democracies of the West, we say... you avoided your responsibility. Worse, you excused your inaction and added to our despair by categorising us on the basis of ethnicity and religion rather than on that of our actions and political philosophy. You further victimised us [...] through the irresponsible and even malicious labelling of this aggression as a civil or religious war [...] you also attempted to slander and deny the legacy of our nation as a tolerant, multi-ethnic society.”*⁹⁰

The criticism posed by the BiH leadership must be understood against the influential Western discourses, which subjected the Bosnian conflict to conflicting interpretations in the 1990s. These can be classified into two overall categories.⁹¹ According to the first explanation, the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina was a clear-cut case of civil war among three ethno-religious groups – Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats – some of which received military and political support from the neighbouring states.⁹² Another interpretation saw the war as an international conflict, where the Bosnian Serb forces were under Belgrade’s control and which involved violations of BiH’s territorial integrity by Croatia’s armed forces.⁹³ Furthermore, the Bosnian conflict was often attributed to ethnic, religious and historical factors.⁹⁴ These explanations were mobilised as part of both ‘civil war’ and ‘international conflict’ narratives, but accounts that emphasised the former interpretation gave more weight to them than those belonging to the latter.⁹⁵ The association with stereotypical, which is to say also Balkanist, notions regarding ethnicity, religion, and historical animosities made the ‘civil war’ accounts of the Bosnian conflict often problematic and misinformed. Insistence on the incompatibility of Bosnia’s ethno-religious groups depoliticised the Bosnian war and downplayed the crucial role of Milošević’s and Tuđman’s regimes in Belgrade and Zagreb, while

⁹⁰ United Nations, General Assembly, 82nd plenary meeting, A/48/PV.82, 17. December 1993 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

⁹¹ Campbell, David. 1998. *MetaBosnia: Narratives of the Bosnian War*. *Review of International Studies* 24(2), 261-81.

⁹² Shoup, Paul S. and Steven L. Burg. 1999. *Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention*. New York: M.E Sharpe Inc.

⁹³ Shoup and Burg, *Ethnic Conflict*.

⁹⁴ Shoup and Burg, *Ethnic Conflict*.

⁹⁵ Campbell, *MetaBosnia*.

also perpetuating the pre-existing discourse about the region's propensity for ethnic hatred and violence.⁹⁶

The battle against the civil war interpretation waged in the General Assembly by the wartime Government of BiH and President Alija Izetbegović stemmed from the broader context of the Bosnian conflict. As Xavier Bougarel has explained the Bosnian Muslims' overall interpretation of the war: "the most frequent terms used for labelling the war – 'resistance to aggression', 'struggle against fascism' – originated in international law or Titoist rhetoric. As for the Bosnian authorities, they defined the war as external aggression, rejecting any interpretations that would frame it as a civil or religious war."⁹⁷ The reasons for this were simultaneously ideological and political, as perceptions of the war in BiH were likely to impact how Western political actors would respond to the conflict. As one scholar noted: "To interpret the war as a case of external aggression simplified the choices facing western policy makers [...]. If the conflict were viewed as a civil war, the factors that would have to be taken into account by outsider actors intent on bringing peace to the region became far more complex."⁹⁸ Therefore, it was politically savvy for the wartime Bosnian government, which insisted on international intervention from the West, to evoke an image of external aggression and belittle the civil war accounts.

At the same time, statements made in the General Assembly during the 1992-1995 conflict showed that representatives of BiH went a step beyond describing the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina as an external aggression, as they also sought to confront how the international community ethnicised the Bosnian conflict. Consider another extract from Ambassador Sarcibey's 1993 speech "[...]the war is about ideology – ideology not of religion and ethnicity but of politics and tolerance [...] our enemy is not defined by its ethnicity or religion but by the ideology of intolerance, dictatorship and fascism that it promotes."⁹⁹ This quotation shows that the wartime leadership of BiH from an early point criticised influential Western accounts, which had framed the Bosnian war as an ethno-religious conflict and which were later subjected to considerable scholarly scrutiny. There was a tendency among Western policy makers in the

⁹⁶ Aitken, Rob. 2007. Cementing Divisions? An Assessment of the Impact of International Interventions and Peace-Building Policies on Ethnic Identities and Divisions. *Policy Studies* 28(3), 247-67; Campbell, *National Deconstruction*.

⁹⁷ Bougarel, Xavier. 2013. Death and *the Nationalist: Martyrdom, War Memory and Veteran Identity among Bosnian Muslims*, in *The New Bosnian Mosaic: Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-War Society*, edited by Bougarel, Xavier / Helms, Elissa and Ger Duijzings. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 167-92, 175.

⁹⁸ Shoup and Burg, *Ethnic Conflict*, 195.

⁹⁹ United Nations, General Assembly, 6th plenary meeting, A/50/PV.6, 26. September, 1995 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

1990s to unjustly frame the Bosnian conflict as a war driven by irreconcilable ethnic differences.¹⁰⁰ As David Campbell notes, the international community “problematized Bosnia in terms of a nationalist imaginary – as a place where political identity is fixed in terms of ethnic exclusivity.”¹⁰¹ Campbell finds that the diplomatic efforts of the international community sprang from a contestable political anthropology about Bosnia, which was influenced by a poor understanding of local conditions and a pre-existing discourse about the Balkans as a site of perpetual conflict.

An influential and well-known element in Western discourse regarding the Bosnian conflict was the so-called ‘ancient hatreds’ thesis – a widely cited claim according to which the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina sprang from historical animosities between ethnic groups that cannot be resolved via foreign military intervention.¹⁰² This discourse, epitomised by the infamous catch phrase ‘ancient hatreds’, was inspired by prior patterns of cultural representation in which the Balkans was defined and described in opposition to the West as primitive, uncivilised and, by their very nature, violent. It viewed the 1990s conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina as evidence of the region’s propensity for war and the Balkan identity as impervious to change.¹⁰³ The ancient hatreds thesis not only constructed a difference between ‘Europe’ and ‘the Balkans’, but it also had political implications, as the idea of unresolvable ethnic disputes was used to legitimise Western inaction in Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁰⁴ Statements made by BiH representatives in the General Assembly during the Bosnian conflict showed that that the wartime leadership took a stance against these interpretations put forward and circulated by Western observers and policy makers. For example, Ambassador Sarcibey raised the following concerns in 1993:

“Some have called this a tragedy when we know it is a criminally inflicted disaster. Others call it the product of age-old ethnic hatreds. May I remind everyone that Bosnia and Herzegovina has stood for more than half a millennium as a place of tolerance, pluralism and respect [and] may I note that any generalisation that condemns ethnic groups as historically bent on murdering one another is inherently bigoted.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Aitken, *Cementing Divisions?*; Hansen, *Security as Practice*.

¹⁰¹ Campbell, David. 1999. Apartheid Cartography: The Political Anthropology and Spatial Effects of International Diplomacy in Bosnia. *Political Geography* 18(4), 395-435, 417.

¹⁰² Hansen, *Security as Practice*.

¹⁰³ Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 94.

¹⁰⁴ Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 94.

¹⁰⁵ United Nations, General Assembly, 75th plenary meeting, 10. December 1993 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

As they critiqued accounts of ethnic animosity and irreversible ethnic hatreds, representatives of the wartime BiH government took the opportunity in the General Assembly to underline an opposing historical narrative, which presented tolerance and peaceful coexistence as fundamental characteristics of Bosnian and Herzegovinian society. The representatives of BiH generated and contributed to a particular discourse that was emerging around the same time in the American and European media. As Lene Hansen has observed, the construction of ‘Western responsibility’ in the media relied in part on a discourse which depicted BiH “as an exemplar of a multicultural, tolerant, and cosmopolitan ‘West’.”¹⁰⁶ In the General Assembly, this discourse was manifested, for example, in references to the Sephardic Jews who came to Sarajevo following the Spanish Inquisition: “The argument that the current rampant racism in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the product of age-old ethnic hatreds was completely false [...]. Bosnia and Herzegovina had a long tradition of providing sanctuary to people fleeing persecution.”¹⁰⁷ Moreover, there was a tendency to emphasise the history of Sarajevo as a meeting place of cultures and symbol of tolerance. This rhetoric was first and foremost associated with the wartime circumstances, but it did also carry on into the post-war era, when it was related to attempts to rebrand Bosnia and Herzegovina and overcome the image of BiH as a country of permanent conflict. One of these post-war statements even referenced Robert D. Kaplan’s book *Balkan Ghosts*, which was the flag bearer of the ancient hatreds thesis: “The time has come to salute the new image of my country and to start re-branding the perception of the region as a whole, which no longer fits anymore the ‘Balkan ghosts’ stereotype.”¹⁰⁸

In the late 1990s, diplomats and politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina began to criticise Samuel Huntington’s thesis about the clash of civilisations: “A multi-ethnic, multicultural Bosnia and Herzegovina [...] in which mutual respect, equality and cooperation [...] are shared assets, will be the best answer to superficial theories on the inevitable clashes between different cultures and civilisations.” The clash of civilisations was an influential but widely criticised theory first developed by Huntington in 1993, which framed much of the international debate about the Bosnian conflict in the 1990s. As Lene Hansen has observed, “[t]he simultaneity of the Bosnian war and Huntington’s writings, and the implication of the ‘Islamic civilisation’ in the ‘Bosnian Muslims’ turned the Bosnian war into a prominent and much discussed example of Huntington’s thesis on civilisational alignment and Western

¹⁰⁶ Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 99.

¹⁰⁷ United Nations, General Assembly, [3rd committee](#), 10th meeting, 18. October 1993 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

¹⁰⁸ United Nations, General Assembly, [7th plenary meeting](#), 14. September 2000 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

interventionism.”¹⁰⁹ While the Huntington paradigm was not essentially Balkanist, Hansen notes that it nonetheless fed into the traditional Western perception and fears about the region: “the fear of the ‘Balkan Oriental,’ in this case as transferred onto the Bosnian Muslims.”¹¹⁰ Considering how the clash of civilisations theory contradicted the very foundation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a united state, it was understandable why some in the post-war Bosnian political leadership wished to contest this paradigm and instead promote an image of a unified state and cross-ethnic collaboration:

*“The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina - Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs, Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox - are all united, having chosen together to be on the side of civilisation and an open society... Bosnia and Herzegovina has proved to be the place that rendered the notion of a clash of civilisations null and void.”*¹¹¹

Concluding Remarks

This paper was inspired by the observation that, although research on domestic politics in the countries of former Yugoslavia as well as that on Western political actors has underlined the prominent role of pejorative representations of the Balkans in the 1990s, the role of Balkanist discourse in the foreign policy of the former Yugoslav states has largely been left unexplored. Focusing on statements made in the United Nations by Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1993 and 2003, this paper has briefly considered the foreign policy dimension of Balkanist rhetoric. It found that discourse about the Balkans was part of foreign policy articulations, but that representations of the Balkans were versatile and fluid, both between and within countries, and that they stemmed from the identity considerations and foreign policy objectives of each state. These identity considerations were most consistent and reflective of prior research in Croatia’s statements, which were characterised by attempts to disassociate Croatia from the Balkans. The ‘Balkans’ featured in the speeches as an Other, against which Croatia’s congratulatory European, Central European or Southeast European identity was framed. Importantly, this discourse was often inseparable from the advocacy of Croatia’s Euro-Atlantic integration, leaving little doubt that it was a conscious choice, where the construction of a European identity was seen to pave way to the European polity.

¹⁰⁹ Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 133.

¹¹⁰ Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 149.

¹¹¹ United Nations, General Assembly, [42nd plenary meeting](#), 9. November 2001 (accessed: 10. March 2017).

While Croatia's foreign policy discourse at times adhered to the core logic of Balkanism, Macedonia's speeches exposed a more multifaceted discourse. Macedonian representatives evoked a Balkan identity and portrayed the Balkans as Europe's heartland, while also invoking pejorative representations and stereotypes that constructed the Balkans in opposition to Europe. While the discourse was seemingly inconsistent, its foremost function was to legitimise the Euro-Atlantic integration of the region's countries. This speaks first and foremost to the fluidity of Balkanist discourse and shows that Macedonia sought to amend this discourse according to its own policy objectives and use it rather strategically to pursue EU integration. While the language used to describe the Balkans was similar to that evoked by many political actors in the 'West', Macedonia used Balkanisms to draw different, even opposite, conclusions, which pleaded for greater European engagement in Southeast Europe. The counter-discourse adopted by Bosnia and Herzegovina indicated that the Bosnian government was not only keenly aware of Balkanist articulations, but that it also sought to confront them as a way to mobilise support from the US and EU. During the 1992-1995 conflict, the BiH government took an active stance in refuting influential arguments regarding irreconcilable ancient hatreds and the clash of civilisations, as initially put forward by 'Western' media, academics, policy makers and analysts, and articulated a counter-discourse in which Bosnia and Herzegovina was portrayed as tolerant and pluralistic with regard to its history.

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