European Citizenship and Youth in Bulgaria: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis between Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks
Research Article

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European Citizenship and Youth in Bulgaria: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis between Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks

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European citizenship is a new concept, which has evolved with the process of European integration. Starting from the younger generations, the EU seeks to establish a modern and innovative view of citizenship through three fundamental elements - rights, identity and participation - that could lead to new ways of conceiving the relationship of institutions-citizens and citizens-citizens. The idea of European citizenship tends to overcome the historical idea of national states and national identity. It does this by reinforcing its supranational nature and developing an attitude of tolerance towards diversity and human/minority rights. Thus, to verify the impact European citizenship has on the younger generation in Bulgaria, this research is based on an inter-ethnic sample of 30 interviews (16 Bulgarians, 14 Bulgarian Turks) and applies a qualitative comparative analysis method. This research seeks to answer these two main questions: 1) How do young Bulgarians perceive the concept of EU citizenship? 2) How do young Bulgarians perceive the new European citizenship in regard to the inter-ethnic relations in their own country? The study suggests that the EU’s attempt to promote European citizenship is underachieving. On the one hand, young Bulgarian people tend to be well exposed to European citizenship, irrespective of their ethnic belonging. On the other hand, the majority of them are sceptical of the tangible value of European citizenship for the reinforcement of a more encompassing and shared notion of diversity and minority rights.

Keywords: citizenship, Bulgaria, youth, minority rights, ethnicity

Introduction
The debate on the concept of citizenship is often focused on daily political experiences and the perceptions of the relationship between states and people. Therefore, redesigning the concept of citizenship could lead to a new perception of both the state-society and institutions-citizens relations. In all European countries, the end of the Cold War saw trends of new liberalism processes, in which market borders moved from the national to the global level. The development of new technologies and transport, as well as increasing global

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issues (such as migratory flows from south to north, the greenhouse effect, the recent economic crises), have brought about the need to reinvent the concept of citizenship, which is pursued by the EU through a modern and innovative approach in a new democratic experiment. The concept of European citizenship represents a new goal, which is still evolving within the European integration process. The idea of European citizenship was introduced by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 as complementary citizenship. Today, it represents a real democratic test, leading to the definition of a new concept of citizenship on the basis of a different organizational model. This model includes new institutions and a new system of governance that is completely different from the classic nation state.

The EU strategy regarding European citizenship begins with young citizens. It could lead to a better understanding of the concept of European citizenship and increased tolerance regarding human and minority rights, but it is still underachieving. In fact, many people still do not know exactly what the concept of European citizenship means and, above all, how they could integrate it into their own daily lives. The development of a homogeneous approach to raising awareness and encouraging daily practices as part of a single policy could support the EU in promoting greater social cohesion among its citizens.

This article contends that this new citizenship plays an innovative role, as observed by different scholars. Yet, it also seeks to analyse how effective this new concept is and to outline the perceptions and behaviours of young Bulgarians vis a vis this new institutional framework, which designs new rights and responsibilities for them.

The first part of the article explains the new features involved in the concept of EU citizenship and the challenges it may face in the future. The concept of European citizenship is compared to the classic concept of citizenship, and the new features of this European experiment are presented. The meaning of citizenship is compared by its three key historical and conceptual elements: rights, identity and participation. The second part of the article analyses, based on an empirical framework and a sample of 30 semi-structured interviews conducted in Sofia, how young people in Bulgaria see this new approach, and,

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2 See the Citizenship Programme 2007-2013, General objects and Priority themes of the Europe for citizens Programme; See also the Euro-Mediterranean co-operation - this Partnership promotes various training courses focusing on a broad notion of citizenship, beyond its European dimension: Participation and Intercultural Exchange, Human Rights Education and Citizenship and Citizenship matters – Participation of Women and Minorities.

in particular, their potential attitudes regarding the development of the EU project. The analysis rests on three main independent variables: awareness, daily practices and ethnic self-identification. Further, the research seeks to understand the correlation between these variables, as well as the role that the concept of EU citizenship plays in majority-minority relations and the intercultural perception in the country. This is because the features of diversity and inclusion are intrinsic to the very concept of European citizenship and could be conducive to the fostering of a new perspective on ethnic and social relations of people in Bulgaria, as well as in the Balkan area where EU enlargement is expected. Therefore, in order to understand the relevance and the combination of the variables, the article starts with a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to analyse the data collected in interviews with 30 young people - 16 Bulgarians, 14 Bulgarian Turks – who are professionals in different fields and students who are well educated and reside in the capital city of Sofia. The city of Sofia has been chosen because it has the highest percentage of tertiary education, 36.84%, and the highest percentage of resident students, 42.88%. In addition, the choice to select and compare a sample of young people of Bulgarian and Turkish ethnicity was determined by the fact that Bulgarian Turks form the largest minority group of the country and that they represent the historical antagonists who had dominated Bulgarian territory for five centuries. Today, there seems to be a peaceful dialogue between the two groups, but there are still some social tensions that re-erect at times, such as during the protest of the Bulgarian nationalistic party Ataka in front of the mosque of Sofia in May 2011.

How could European citizenship be perceived by the new generations in this context? It could be perceived positively in terms of new opportunities, new horizons of cultural, social, financial and political nature, but also negatively, with scepticism towards the European system as being alien and not adaptable to their own situation. Thus, the potential results of the sense of European citizenship in this sample of young Bulgarians in Sofia could be a good example for the whole country and the Balkan region. The link between young people and European citizenship could foster a crucial policy for a long-term European integration policy throughout the whole region.

1. The Innovative Nature of European Citizenship
1.1 A New Outlook
European citizenship was introduced by the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and supplemented by the Amsterdam Treaty (1997). It is defined as complementary to the citizenship of any national member state. Its aim is to strengthen European identity by getting people to be more involved in the integration process. Thanks to the single market, citizens enjoy a number of rights in different areas like the free movement of goods and services, consumer protection and public health, equal opportunities and treatment, and access to jobs and social protection.

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Despite being innovative, the concept of European citizenship is criticized by some scholars because it was established with a top-down design and, in particular, for the so-called European democratic deficit and the lack of common European heritage. The European democratic deficit is expressed in several main points. There is not one demos that can legitimize the European institutions, there is no government voted for directly by the citizens, and the parliament is not the only legislative body, even if it has been voted for by the citizens since 1979. There are also some highly influential political actors who are not democratically legitimated, such as functionaries of the European institutions, private lobbies or experts. Furthermore, there is a reservation principle in European Council procedures, which does not allow people to check all the official documents issued. All these issues cast some doubts as to the real meaning of this new citizenship concept and they demonstrate how this democratic deficit is kept hidden from citizens and the public European debate. In 2006, Castiglione stated that the European Convention for a Constitution sought to overcome these problems by creating a European demos, but the paradox was that this project failed due to the demos itself, with the two referendums held in France and Holland in 2005.

The concept of citizenship should be defined as “a principle of an individual belonging to a community based on his power to participate in the definition of the political regime and which is translated into a set of rights and responsibilities governing his relationship with the state and the community.” This concept, following the view of other scholars, involves three main theoretical elements: rights, identity and participation (legal, identity and political dimensions). All three elements and their evolution should be studied in order to explore the innovative nature of European citizenship.

1.2 Rights
Rights are given to all citizens of a society who, generally, obtain their citizenship through two main, socio-cultural norms and historical experiences: by birth (ius soli) or by blood (ius sanguinis). In an ius soli system, citizenship is based on the place of birth, while in an ius sanguinis system, descent and heritage play a pivotal role in defining who is and who can become a citizen. In terms of European citizenship, some of the rights are given by residency (ius domicilii), such as the political right to vote for and stand as a candidate in European and municipal elections. The concept of ius domicilii could mark a new approach to citizenship even for migrants or people from non-EU countries who live in any of the member states. This approach, therefore, could lead to an innovative relationship between the state and the people of a society that is based on their residency and not on their nationality.

Moreover, even if there is no classic democratic legitimacy between the citizens and a representative government in the EU and there is no effective constitution, a European citizen benefits from all of the following rights: to

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6 More, Cittadini in Europa, 57.
move and reside freely within the EU, to be protected by the diplomatic and consular authorities of any EU country when there are no diplomatic or consular authorities from the citizen's own country in a non-EU country, to sign a petition to the European Parliament and to complain to the European Ombudsman. The fact that these rights are established by a supranational citizenship, different from a national state, is already an essential innovation. The EU is the only international organism with this specific, trans-border status. It is not important whether the EU recognizes the member states as constitutive actors or not, as the innovative perspective is that it is the source of the European citizens' rights.

Another innovative tool related to the evolution of rights is certainly the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), which was included in the draft EU Constitution (2003) and later in the revised Treaty on European Union (Lisbon Treaty, 2007). Since April 2012, European citizens have been able to use this instrument. It gives citizens the right to directly engage in setting the legislative agenda for the EU. Once signatures supporting a policy proposal have been collected and verified from at least one million citizens of at least seven EU member states, the European Commission is obliged to consider that proposal. It can, but is not required to, respond by proposing new legislation. The ECI is the first transnational instrument of participatory democracy in world history.

Finally, it is important to mention the “push and pull” legal role of the European Court of Justice (ECJ). In contrast to a common national justice system where judges rule on the basis of a constituted system of laws, the decisions of the ECJ may expand the legal framework of the EU, thus affecting the rights of citizens and the relationship between nation states and the EU. In the majority of cases, such rulings favour the EU, therefore empowering it. An example is the European Court of Justice’s expansion of the scope of non-discrimination and free movement principles, which cover new and not financially productive categories, after 1998 in the case of Martinez Sala. Thus, the innovative aspect in the legal dimension of the European citizenship is the possibility for the judgments of the ECJ to alter the conceptual framework of citizenship, as it typically happens in an international judicial system and not in a national one.

1.3 Identity
The second element, identity, is often criticized due to the lack of a common European demos with a common consciousness of the citizens, which makes the legitimacy of the institutions and their future much weaker. As argued by

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9 Bellamy, Castiglione and Shaw, Making European Citizenship; O'Neill and Sandler. The EU citizenship.
Schmidt in 2006, the European Union does not have only one *demos*, but multiple *demoi*\(^\text{11}\) that are the base of a “democracy.”

The identity of European citizenship is based on the concept of *diversity*, while the national one is based on the concept of *equality*. The concept of European citizenship overcomes the dichotomy of inclusion and exclusion to embrace the idea of a cosmopolitan community that encompasses recognition and affirmation of the diversity of our society. In the EU, in fact, there is not one single language, one tradition, one history or one religion, but an awareness of living in a multicultural environment with different people of different backgrounds. Hence, Europeans are living in a society that supports the motto “United in Diversity.” This diversity represents the new perspective of European citizenship, in contrast to the dominant idea of an ethnic nation, which is even, to some scholars, characterized in historically multi-ethnic societies, such as the United States. Smith expresses the idea that modern nations tend to form based on a pre-modern, ethnic core that provides myths, symbols and memories; the WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants) were, indeed, the core in the USA.\(^\text{12}\)

Others scholars have underlined that the common sense of cosmopolitanism of Europeans derives itself from the historic, painful and cruel heritage of the two World Wars and from the “never again” promise.\(^\text{13}\) Furthermore, according to Bruter (2005) and Magnette (2007), considering the evolution of technologies and current lifestyles, the conception of identity by each European citizen is no longer seen as traditional membership, but involves a process of continuous political and cultural transformation. This cultural transformation includes three different spheres: transformation of national identity, transformation of horizontal relations (living with people from different nationalities) and transformation of vertical relations (the relationship between people and the EU).\(^\text{14}\)

One of the most significant contributions trying to explain the idea of a common European identity is certainly that of Habermas, who defines the concept as “constititutional patriotism” - the idea that political attachment ought to centre on the norms, values and, more indirectly, procedures of a liberal democratic constitution.\(^\text{15}\) He contrasts the previous national culture with the present, constitutional and normative conception of society linked to the European Union project. Bearing in mind this framework, European citizenship differs from the conception of national sentiment by evolving into a

\(^{11}\) A nation-state model of democracy presumes a single “demos” (citizenry) constituted by a resilient collective identity, a common public sphere and a developed political infrastructure of associations and parties that serve as the social underpinnings of a legitimate and well-functioning democracy. Such a demos is strong at the national level, but weak in the EU. The EU has a new aptitude; it is characterized by more demoi.


common constitutional sense. Thus, a strong awareness among the people of this meaning of European citizenship could spread a stronger democratic sense of tolerance, solidarity and social cohesion. In any case, despite Habermas successfully articulating the concept of “constitutional patriotism,” in trying to introduce the word patriotism into a series of principles, his argumentation is still too weak and abstract to support and justify a real sense of solidarity and belonging among citizens. His optimistic view of the landscaping of modern, pluralist societies by building an authentically shared, political culture is misplaced.\textsuperscript{16} The challenges that cultural diversity and pluralism face in contemporary states cannot be resolved through a normative approach that focuses solely on political legitimacy. Yet, the difficulties that surround the concept of “constitutional patriotism” advise that modern states will resist the building of a collective, political identity that could generate a genuine sense of solidarity. Thus, it seems that the modern concept of European citizenship relating to pluralist states faces more profound challenges, which cannot be simplified as part of an inevitable march of modernization or rationalization, as Habermas assumes.\textsuperscript{17} One of the challenges in building a basis for a collective identity will be the major participation of citizens at all levels of governance of the EU. A stronger relationship between civic engagement and empowerment, and therefore the development of a civic involvement and social solidarity,\textsuperscript{18} could be key to pursuing a trustful sense of democratic common will and constitutional patriotism.

1.4 Participation
The third element, participation, refers to the link between who is representing and who is represented, the engine of the policy making process in any democratic body. Nowadays, the political crisis is related to the crisis of citizenship, in which our societies have difficulty legitimating politicians and the political arena, and the concept of citizenship itself becomes more and more “empty.”\textsuperscript{19} European citizenship, because of its new nature, could invigorate political legitimacy, allowing modern society to face the global problems that seem too vast to overcome. The gap between civic society and the democratic representative institutions has grown, and the historical process leading to the creation of a unique, common civic identity - the modern citizenship - has stopped.\textsuperscript{20} In this sense, participation, in particular, could play an essential role for the future of political legitimacy of societies. Thus, the key point of this part of the analysis addresses the innovative approach of European citizenship, in respect to the European policy making process, and will check if it is capable of facing the current lack of legitimacy.

\textsuperscript{17} Viroli, \textit{È possibile un patriottismo costituzionale europeo?}; Baumeister, Diversity.
\textsuperscript{20} Rossi, \textit{La cittadinanza democratica}, 37-38.
Further, regarding electoral participation in the European Parliament and the European Citizens’ Initiative, there is another notion worth considering, “participatory democracy.” This consists of all the instruments and procedures that aim to involve citizens in defying public decisions and politics, trying to increase their influence in these public procedures.\(^{21}\) Concretely, this definition refers to legislative initiatives, procedures of deliberative democracy (like a forum or jury of citizens), consultations, participatory budgeting, etc. This participatory democracy is the new approach of the European Union, formally included in the Treaty of Lisbon, to face the crisis of representative democracy and its democratic deficit. Thus, the intent is prominent and innovative, but it still seems weak and not completely efficient. In fact, to implement this method of participation, the European institutions work with two main actors: individuals (for example, through online campaigns) and the civic society (lobbies, organizations, companies, etc.). However, they do not have specific criteria, particularly regarding the latter, for choosing their interlocutors and for measuring their respective political representatives’ roles (one organization could have 100 or 10000 members). In addition, 60% of the organizations involved in European round tables are private companies, while the majority of the other 40% are financed by EU funds and represent the civic sphere and workers in Brussels. This particular framework leads to pertinent criticism of “professionalising” civic activism, where the work of the European Union appears to be more oriented towards its own legitimacy and not towards measurable civic-political participation.\(^{22}\) Regardless of these critical aspects, participatory democracy was successful in some cases, as demonstrated by the 1992–1993 civic initiative of the Active Citizenship Network, which reached an important civil milestone by promoting the European Charter for Patients’ Rights.

This experience can be considered in a positive light for the following reasons: 1) the relevance and sensibility of the problem 2) the specific know-how of the association and the use of the European Court jurisdiction (free movement and non-discrimination principles) 3) the confirmation of the communitarian legal supremacy, which gave a European dimension to the management of patients’ rights 4) the fact that the initiative was independent and based in locations different from the capital of Brussels 5) the role of citizens, who were not the target, but rather the first actors of a European civic initiative and, therefore, actors in the creation of European citizenship.\(^{23}\) Therefore, in this case, the civic bottom-up initiative from the Active Citizenship Network met a judicial top-down initiative from the European Court judgments in order to finally reach the European institutions.

Hence, as Moro observed, yet another innovative feature of European citizenship is its incremental approach, where citizens can play a fundamental role. This is the case with the Active Citizenship Network initiative proven by its successful results.

\(^{23}\) Moro, Cittadini in Europa, 137-141.
2. European Citizenship and Young People in Bulgaria
2.1 The EU Youth Strategy

The topic of European citizenship has gained considerable importance for both the Council of Europe and the European Commission over the past years. In their policies, the two institutions emphasize priority actions, particularly in the fields of education, training and youth: 1) Sustaining the role of youth organizations in the development of democratic participation; 2) Citizenship education and the participation of young people; 3) Access of young people to decision making.\textsuperscript{24}

The Commission’s communication on youth participation, which was issued to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions in 2009, declares that, “Europe’s future depends on its youth.”\textsuperscript{25} It formulates a new strategy for engaging young people in contributing to the EU project; the strategy is based on two key approaches: 1) Investing in Youth - putting in place greater resources to develop policy areas that affect young people in their daily lives and improve their well-being; 2) Empowering Youth - promoting the potential of young people for the renewal of society and for contributing to the EU values and goals. The Commission incentivizes greater collaboration in formulating the policies focused on youth and other policies such as those on education, employment, inclusion and health. This would be developed through initiatives promoting youth activities and youth work.\textsuperscript{26} The implementation of this cross-sectoral vision is especially supported by the Commission through different actions: The Youth-in-Action programme, Culture, Lifelong Learning, Progress, Media, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, Competitiveness & Innovation Programme and Structural Funds.\textsuperscript{27} In general, the EU vision considers young people as essential players with an active role in constructing and creating Europe and its new concept of citizenship; they are committed to the European ideal of an open, inclusive and socially cohesive society.

Notwithstanding all of these actions and political perspectives, many people (not only the youth) still do not know what the concept of European citizenship entails exactly, and, most importantly, they do not know how they can integrate this new concept into their daily lives. In 2010, although the majority (78%) of EU citizens claimed familiarity with the term “citizen,” the Eurobarometer calculated that still 22% had never heard of the term “citizen of the European Union.”\textsuperscript{28} Yet, 48% had declared that they are “not well

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Dolejšiová, Ditta and Miguel García López. (eds.). 2009. European citizenship - In the process of construction: challenges for citizenship, citizenship education and democratic practice in Europe, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{26} European Commission. 2009. The European Parliament.
\item \textsuperscript{27} European Commission. 2009. The European Parliament.
\end{itemize}
informed” of the rights that stem from this new concept.\textsuperscript{29} It is interesting to point out that citizens of the new member states were less likely to claim they had never heard the term (13%), compared to respondents from the EU15 (EU members prior to 1 May 2004) countries (24%). Citizens of the new member states were also more likely to indicate that they knew what the term meant (46%), compared to the older EU15 respondents (42%). Slovakia, Hungary and Finland, with 96%, 94% and 93% respectively, had the highest percentages of respondents declaring to be familiar with the term “citizen of the European Union.” On the contrary, Belgium (70%), Denmark (66%) and Germany (59%) had the lowest percentages of people claiming to be familiar with the term. In Bulgaria, the same statistics showed that 41% were familiar with the concept of European citizenship, 44% were familiar, but not sure about its meaning, and 11% had never heard of it.

All these data are even more significant if we take into account that the electoral participation in the European Parliament is constantly decreasing with time, from 84% to 31% between 1979 and 2009.\textsuperscript{30} The EU needs to mobilize its citizens to achieve major democratic legitimacy, and it intends to start with young people.

This paper shares Moro’s observation that one of the most innovative features of European citizenship is its incremental approach, through which citizens can play a fundamental role in the shaping of this new concept. It is also shared that the EU has the vital role of raising awareness and forming new attitudes among the young citizens, which leads to stronger participation on the EU level. Yet, this paper is going to verify the evolution of this new concept of citizenship and to try to understand young people’s perception of, and their behaviour with respect to, the new institutional framework, which designs new rights and responsibilities for them.

2.2 Young Bulgarians’ Perception of EU Citizenship: The Research Structure
The aim of this empirical work, which is based on thirty semi-structured, English-language interviews, is to study the perceptions and attitudes of young Bulgarian people in regard to the new concept of European citizenship. The research purpose is also to discover how this new citizenship approach could facilitate inter-ethnic dialogue in the opinions of young people in Bulgaria. Thus, there are two main research questions posed by the article. The first one is: 1) How do young Bulgarians perceive the concept of EU citizenship? Is it perceived positively as an opportunity, a new way to improve their lives and perspectives for society, or rather negatively, as something artificial, imposed, useless, unequal or simply unattainable? The second question is: 2) How do young Bulgarians perceive the new European citizenship with regard to the inter-ethnic relations in their own country? Do they see it as a new framework in which to improve inter-ethnic dialogue and social integration between the different communities? Hence, even if the inter-ethnic dialogue between Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks is a salient topic, which involves different stakeholders and historical issues (i.e. the historical role of the MRF party),

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could a new perception of European citizenship contribute to a new viewpoint on the cultural and social relations of young people living in Bulgaria?

The research method applied in this paper is a comparative research design through the qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), which is a middle way between conventional qualitative and quantitative research approaches. QCA exemplifies some key strengths of the qualitative and quantitative approach. First of all, it considers each case as a complex entity, maintaining the concept of causality, which is typical for the qualitative approach. At the same time, it allows the researcher to produce generalizations by comparing a high number of cases through Boolean algebra, which represents the cases by using specific variables.

The research performs a micro-level comparison of 30 cases of young Bulgarians in an attempt to understand the relationships and relevance of independent variables that influence the outcomes the most. The QCA, thus, links the combination of the variables with the outcome, offering “multiple conjunctural explanations.” This method deals with macro-social phenomena and macro-level units of analysis, but also with micro-level cases. Recently, there were the first micro-level applications of the QCA with individuals as units of analysis. Instead of the classic qualitative approach, the QCA enables a systematic comparison of a smaller number of individual cases, which preserves complexity and is as parsimonious as possible, underlining often-hidden, causal relationships on a micro-level. Moreover, considering the extensive primary information gathered though the qualitative technique, QCA allows for the data to be cut down, while their preserved complexity and diversity allows a systematic comparison of the cases through a small number of variables.

The most appropriate strategy for this study is the multiple cases – most similar system design (MSSD). It is synchronic, so similar cases are compared in real time to highlight the combined variables related to the different outcomes. Cases that are chosen are as similar as possible, so as to observe and control for any external variances. The aim of MSSD presupposes a purposeful, rather than random, selection of the cases. It is, however, impossible to identify all factors relevant to outcome differences. Some findings of this research design may be over-determined and have several possible explanations that cannot be ruled out - a limitation that could be overcome.

34 Rihoux and Lobe, The Case for Qualitative, 474-476.
with further research on a larger sample of young Bulgarians. Bearing this framework in mind, the attempt is to point out any differences across the selected cases that are capable of producing a similar outcome.

The case selection is based on the features of age, education, gender, ethnicity, residence and knowledge of the English language. Among the 30 respondents selected, there were 14 males and 16 females. Out of this, 16 defined themselves as Bulgarians (7 males and 9 females) and 14 as part of the Turkish community (7 males and 7 females). The latter group is the largest minority in Bulgaria, forming 8.8% of the population or 588,318 people according to the latest census in 2011. The participants in the sample are between 21 and 30 years of age; they are students and professionals in different fields, all residing in Sofia (for at least 1 year), holding at least one Bachelor's degree or in their last year of a BA. In order to create a more similar case, similar classifications of residence and education were chosen. Also, to avoid the expected outcome being altered, the typology of the study (technical, human or social sciences) could have a certain influence on the knowledge of those who partook in the study. Although the number of cases is limited, it has been thoroughly selected and covers all the expected possibilities for our qualitative comparative analysis. Furthermore, the research has an important specificity regarding the youth’s perception of EU citizenship in Bulgaria, a country of interest to this study for a number of reasons. Bulgaria, together with Romania and afterwards Croatia, is one of the newest EU member states (acceded in 2007). Therefore, its social, legal and financial background linked to the EU can still be seen as “under construction” or not as consolidated as that of older member states. Furthermore, Bulgaria has not yet entered the Schengen area. Other relevant reasons for choosing Bulgaria as the country of analysis are as follows:

- According to the statistics of Eurofound, in 2010 Bulgaria had the highest percentage of young people who were not in employment, education or training (21.8%);
- In the country, diverse minorities (Bulgarian Turks, Roma, Pomaks, Jewish, others) live peacefully together, even though some episodes of ethnic tension have created a more uncertain context. In May 2011, there was a protest of the Bulgarian Nationalist Party Ataka in front the Mosque of Sofia, and in the autumn, protests against the Roma communities were held in different cities;
- There is a huge gap between young people and politicians in Bulgaria. Politicians do not enjoy the confidence of the people and do not have high standing with the public. One of the main reasons is the highly corrupt system, which keeps people distant from politics (i.e. the recovery of fake election ballots printed by GERB during the parliamentary elections in May 2013).

37 According to the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute – 2011 Population Census – these are the main ethnicities. The Bulgarian ethnic group has 5,664,624 persons and comprises 84.8% of the people who declared their ethnic identity on a voluntary basis. The Turkish ethnic group has the second largest population – 588,318 persons. It represents 8.8% of the population. The Roma ethnicity is traditionally the third one, numbering 325,343 persons, with a relative share of 4.9%.
Moreover, there is a deficit in the civic education of the young in the country, which affects their trust in politics.\footnote{Krasteva, Anna and Tolya Stoitsova. (eds.). 2008. Parva godina evropejska Balgaria: izbori i obrazi. Sofia: New Bulgarian University.}

This background could partly explain the research results and the answers of some interviewees. The economic crisis and the economic situation of Bulgaria (the lowest GDP per capita of all EU member states – Eurostat, 2012), for example, could play an important role in the perception of European citizenship of young people. This new citizenship could be considered to be an opportunity or, on the contrary, inequality compared to citizens living in other countries. At the same time, the inter-ethnic issue could influence the perception of European citizenship and \textit{diversity} as a new and positive challenge, applicable to Bulgaria or, alternatively, as being irrelevant, useless and imposed.

Having defined the \textit{casing} and the selected cases, the following paragraphs present the combined independent variables (i.e. awareness, European daily practices and ethnic self-identification) and how they relate to the final outcomes.

The first variable, \textit{awareness}, aims to identify respondents’ knowledge of the term “European citizenship” and, in particular, the new nature of the concept. The second variable, \textit{daily practices}, seeks to understand how European experiences\footnote{European experiences are defined as familiarity/experience with the EU Programmes (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Youth in Action, etc.), friendship and communication with other European students, participation and involvement in European networks or associations, mobility and willingness to travel, willingness to know other European cultures, etc.} are already part of the respondents’ lifestyle, and how young Bulgarians are changing their vertical and horizontal relationships in terms of belonging, and normative and civil participation. The last variable, \textit{ethnic self-identification}, seeks to evaluate the level of attachment of people to their respective communities. This last variable represents a “litmus paper;” it is relevant in order to identify the possible connection between ethnic identity and European citizenship. In the study, the three variables are considered as binaries (high-low: 1-0). Although they do not permit a pure qualitative analysis of the data, they allow a more systematic analysis to focus on the chosen outcomes covering a larger general framework of our QCA.

Awareness and daily practices are measured through the levels of three indicators - the three main elements of the citizenship concept described above – namely, rights, identity and participation. Ethnic self-identification is evaluated through three other indicators: the level of declared self-identification, the links with one’s own and other communities, and the strict following of cultural traditions and practices of one’s own community. Some examples of the questions are: Do you know what the European Ombudsman is? Do you know anything regarding the diplomatic and consular protection of citizens of the EU abroad (Rights)? Do you feel more Sofianez,\footnote{Sofianez is a term used to indicate an inhabitant of Sofia.} Bulgarian, European..., and why? Do you consider yourself cosmopolitan? Why? What do you think about the EU slogan “United in Diversity” (Identity)? Did you vote in

\begin{thebibliography}{1}
\item European experiences are defined as familiarity/experience with the EU Programmes (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Youth in Action, etc.), friendship and communication with other European students, participation and involvement in European networks or associations, mobility and willingness to travel, willingness to know other European cultures, etc.
\item Sofianez is a term used to indicate an inhabitant of Sofia.
\end{thebibliography}
the last European Parliament elections? Do you know what the ECI (European Citizens’ Initiative) is (Participation)? The second part of the interview is focused on ethnic self-identification (third variable), where the questions are more related to the respondents' own community: Do you have a lot of friends belonging to other Bulgarian ethnicities? How important are cultural and religious traditions to you?

2.3 Young Bulgarians’ Perception of EU Citizenship: Data Analysis and Research Results

The following paragraphs present the separate aspects of the variables and the indicators examined, followed by a presentation of the results obtained for the two research questions. As shown in Table 1, with regard to the first independent variable, awareness of the concept of European citizenship, it appears that young people, despite being well educated, are not very familiar with the meaning of European citizenship. Bulgarian respondents gave eight positive and eight negative answers, whereas Bulgarian Turks gave four positive and ten negative answers. Although awareness differs between Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks, it can be argued that raising awareness of the new democratic concept of citizenship is still a challenge for the EU. The indicators show that the majority of the micro cases have a better knowledge of rights than of identity and participation, even though with some cases it is superficial. An example is that they know and appreciate the role of the Ombudsman and of the ECJ, but they do not know the terms and specific functions of these authorities. There is only one case where the respondent could give more details on them because of being directly involved in litigation against the State of Bulgaria.

Conversely, there is rarely any detailed knowledge of the idea of a common European identity, which, although defined by the majority (almost 80% of the respondents) as real, is perceived as missing. Some say that EU citizens have a common identity due to the “interrelated historical, artistic and cultural experience,” while only two people stated they only have a common “system of law,” similar to Habermas’ assumption of “constitutional patriotism.” The last awareness indicator, knowledge of the mechanism of participation in the EU system, is also not well-known, even if a large number of respondents affirmed that European citizenship is an “evolving process” that can be improved and modified by citizens. Thus, paradoxically, respondents believe that they can influence the democratic evolution of this new concept, but they do not know how exactly. Many of them do not know about the European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) or the European public consultation. This problem is less evident, yet exists, among those young people who are active participants in the civic society and members of cross-border associations or NGOs (30% of all respondents). For instance, one respondent stated: “I know that ECI is an instrument which allows European citizens to express their will, but I do not know it in detail.” In these cases, and in a broader view, the research finds that young people live as active European citizens in their daily lives without actual awareness of their active participation. Awareness and daily practices seem to be two sides of the same coin; however, they are very different, one being vastly more perceptible than the other. Contrary to the focus of the EU strategy on raising awareness and promoting participation through actions, which mainly
support the daily practices of the European citizenship (for example through mobility, exchanges, etc.), young respondents declared that most of the information and knowledge that they have about EU citizenship is “derived from personal interests and studies.”

This finding is confirmed by the results of the second variable, the daily practices, which are positive in twelve cases for the Bulgarians and in six cases for the Bulgarian Turks. Both results are more positive compared to awareness, even if for the Bulgarian Turks there is a lower predisposition to living inside the European framework every day. All interviews demonstrate that the European daily practices of the people mainly relate to identity and participation - second and third indicators - corresponding to what Bruter and Magnette describe as transformation of horizontal and vertical relations, which include living with people from different nationalities, travelling and having contact with other European citizens, and being involved in actions and activities correlated with a European cross-border level or, in some cases, with specific European topics. This sample, for example, includes two people who work as international affairs officers, for a bank and for a political party member, five members of cross-border associations who deal with various matters not related to European issues, and one person volunteering in a Bulgarian blog focused on European policies. It is interesting to point out that only two interviewees declared to be involved in local civic activities connected with Bulgarian issues. This confirms the study of Krasteva and Stoitssova of 2008 on the gap between young Bulgarian people and the country’s political system. In a way, it seems that European citizenship brings a new and optimistic civic will among the youth. The last indicator, rights, is seen as correlated with the other two because travelling, for example, to attend initiatives for transnational associations is clearly an indication of exercising the right of free movement in the EU. With regard to this right of free movement, some respondents expressed critical attitudes, saying “it is not justified that Bulgaria is not part of the Schengen area yet,” but they believe that the situation would change soon. At the same time, they believe in European rights concerning legal protection. Consider the answer: “the positive thing is that there is some sort of control over corruption and over the Bulgarian judicial system.” Even if people do not know the legal procedures for claiming their rights, they believe that they could easily understand them when needed. Eighty respondents, forty Bulgarians and four Bulgarian Turks, stated that “the best advantage of EU citizenship is exactly the opportunity to claim one’s rights on a higher level.” The Bulgarians connect this with a negative judgment of the Bulgarian system; the Turks connect this with greater protection of their human rights as a minority community. In addition, another relevant practice that the research illustrates is that the majority of the respondents, 24 out of 30 people, declared to vote conscientiously for the European Parliament, even if some of them do not know all the European bodies very well or the role of the European Parliament and the Commission. Therefore, with different levels and different modalities, all these assumptions confirm a change of the horizontal and vertical relationships of people and the EU towards a new thinking of their own concept of citizenship.

42 Bruter, Citizenship of Europe?; Magnette, How can one be European?
The third variable, *ethnic self-identification*, is predominantly positive, with ten Bulgarians and eight Bulgarian Turks responding to have a strong sense of community for cultural and historical reasons. In Bulgaria, but also in Eastern countries in general, this has been reinforced by the collapse of communism as a system based on social differentiation, politicizing ethnic identities, movements and parties.\(^4\) A high number of respondents, 26 out of 30, declared to belong more to their own communities than to other identities, even though four people declared to feel more like citizens of the world, and six people to feel both their ethnic and European belonging. European identification is less prominent with the Turks, but, in general, it is not refused. Ten Bulgarian Turks declared that they would like to see Turkey as a member of the EU, while, on the contrary, only four Bulgarians agreed with such membership. Some Bulgarians explained their position by saying “Turkey is part of another culture,” “the ruling government is Islamist” or “Turkey is too large and would imbalance power on the Balkans and in the EU.” Still, others admitted the existence of historical tensions between the two countries, especially on behalf of the Bulgarian side. Considering the second indicator, the majority of the interviewees stated that they have interactions with people from the respective other ethnicity, although they did not have strong relationships with them. Four Bulgarian Turks also expressed their desire to live in Turkey in the future, and one of them wanted to attend the Erasmus Program in Istanbul next year. Finally, related to the last indicator, the interviewees who follow cultural practices declared that “it depends mostly on our family and our religion.” In this indicator, Islam plays a relevant role in distinguishing Bulgarian Turks.

It is important to study the combination of the variables through the QCA, which will make possible an evaluation of the relevance of the three variables linking them to the results of the outcomes.

Table 1: List of Cases and Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASEID</th>
<th>Awareness (high-low)</th>
<th>Daily Practices (high-low)</th>
<th>Ethnic Self-id (high-low)</th>
<th>Perception of EU Citizenship (Pro-Sceptical)</th>
<th>Perception of Minority-majority Relations and the Intercultural Dialogue (Pro-Sceptical)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bg1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bg2</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bg3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bg4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bg5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bg6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bg7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bg8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bg9</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bg10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bg11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysing the first research question (c), only six situations have a negative outcome; in all of them, the awareness (a) and the daily practice (d) are low.\textsuperscript{44}

\[
a \cdot d \cdot E + a \cdot d \cdot e \rightarrow c
\]

The result occurs independently of the third variable, ethnic self-identification (e). So it could be minimized with the formula below:

\[
a \cdot d \rightarrow c
\]

These assumptions are confirmed both for cases bg7, bg14, tr9, tr12 and for cases tr4 and tr11 (see graphic 1, pink rectangles) for Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks. Thus, if a young person is neither familiar with the distinctive features of European citizenship nor with any European activities in his daily life, he tends to be sceptical or indifferent to the European Union and its new concept of citizenship; it does not matter if he has an ethnic sense of attachment or not. This could be explained with the lack of trust between the young Bulgarian people and their political system. In fact, some declared, “I am not interested in politics,” while others said, “Politicians do not care about people.” This cannot be overcome with new trust in Europe without awareness and daily practices. All of the other cases, which instead have a pro-inclination, have at least one positive variable of awareness or daily practices. In the same way, the third variable does not influence the outcome because it is individually neutralized by the other two. The presence of A or D indicates a positive outcome of C.

\[
A + D \rightarrow C
\]

\textsuperscript{44} Considering the variables and the outcomes, the positive result (1) is represented by capital letters: A, D, E (variables) - C, M (outcomes); on the contrary, the negative result (0) is represented by small letters: a, d, e (variables) - c, m (outcomes). The symbols are represented by “+” which means “or” and “.” which means “and.”
Thus, if a young Bulgarian belonging to the Bulgarian ethnicity or to the Turkish one has awareness of the innovative aspects of the European citizenship concept – for example, he knows the European rights, he is conscious of the multicultural sense of the EU or is already living with a European vision in mind, being part of European networks, travelling and participating in European Programmes – he tends to have a positive perception of European citizenship. During one interview, a Bulgarian student declared, “I really like to travel and to discover other European customs and traditions; they represent our long and fruitful history. In Europe, we do not have common national traditions, but each region has its particular ones. The EU should preserve and promote them.”

The graphic below shows how variable awareness and daily practices can even individually bring a positive outcome.45

![Graphic 1: Perception on EU Citizenship](source)

Analysing this first research question, it can also be observed that a positive perception incentivizes the participation of young people, fostering a major personal motivation and strong belief in the future of the European integration process. On the contrary, a negative perception brings about a sceptical attitude and lower involvement of the person, physically and ideally, in the EU project (in terms of civic participation, propensity to know other European cultures, willingness to participate in EU Programmes, etc.). Finally, high

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45 The graphic is made by the Tosmana program. The green colour represents a positive result (1), the pink colour represents a negative result (0), the white colour represents a case combination not covered by the research, and the double colour/green-pink represents a contradiction. These two last cases are not present in our research.
ethnic self-identification, combined with both high awareness and high level of daily practices, represents the best combination with the highest propensity and motivation for involvement in the EU integration process. So, using the formula, it could be represented as:

$$A \cdot D \cdot E \rightarrow C$$

In fact the four cases, bg4, bg9, bg12 and bg15, could be seen as special cases because their combinations correspond to the highest pro-Europe civic activism and a higher spirit and sense of belonging to the EU, as one respondent said, “Europe is one great idea that will have a long future.” They also claimed to believe in a future federal system of the EU.

Considering the second question (m), the possible outcomes are more articulate (see graphic 2). In this case, ethnic self-identification is the most relevant variable; as a matter of fact, the other two variables, “awareness” and “daily practices,” taken individually do not impact the final outcome. Actually, when the ethnic self-identification variable is positive, the outcome is positive only when both of the other two variables are positive. Thus, there is a positive perception of the role of the European citizenship in terms of a greater intercultural and ethnic dialogue only in these combinations: awareness 1, ethnic self-id 0 (bg2, bg3, tr2, tr5); daily practices 1 and ethnic self-id 0 (bg1, bg6, bg10, bg11, tr3, tr10 and bg2, bg3); awareness 1, daily practices 1 (bg2, bg3, bg4, bg9, bg12, bg15). So, synthesized, the result will be:

$$A \cdot e + D \cdot e + A \cdot D \rightarrow M$$

$$a \cdot E + d \cdot E + a \cdot d \rightarrow m$$

Thus, when there is high ethnic self-identification, it corresponds to a negative perception, except in cases bg4, bg9, bg12 and bg15 with high awareness and high level of daily practices, which together are able to neutralize the ethnic sense of community of the people. These four cases can be explained with their proactive civil proneness, which gives them particular motivation and a marked positive attitude to the future and the role of the EU.

In any case, many Bulgarian respondents (around 60%) separated European citizenship from the minority/inter-ethnic issue, explaining it as an internal and history-related problem. Some said, “the minorities should first be integrated into the Bulgarian community and then in the European one.” Others criticized the European motto “United in Diversity,” claiming, “it is too easy to say.” Still, others stated, “some situations are not understood by the western countries which do not experience strong intercultural problems.” A Bulgarian Turk respondent, instead discussed that “there is a paradox in the EU: it proclaims equality among people, but in a way this equality is only controlled by Germany and France.” Another Bulgarian Turk stated, “nowadays there are still violations against Muslims in some European countries” and harshly criticised the negotiations for the accession of Turkey to the EU. Concerning this topic, ten Bulgarians stated they were against the accession of Turkey to the EU. Whereas, on the contrary, all Bulgarian Turks declared to be in favour, even if they appeared more interested in the advantages of this accession (for example, the possibility to study and live in
Turkey) than in the actual idea of the European citizenship. An analysis of this question suggests that the sense of community and belonging outlines the opinion of young people, that European citizenship can be achieved only if they are fully involved as European citizens in terms of awareness and day-to-day life. The different cases can also be summarized in the diagram below.

Graphic 2: Perception of the Minority Issue

Source: Author’s own illustration, Tosmana 1.2.

Conclusion

The European Union is trying to keep up with the times and face today’s global challenges. Its new approach to European citizenship is innovative, regardless of the existing gaps and unresolved doubts, which are slowing down the evolution of European society and its political organization. Despite the complex panorama, this paper has tried to show that the concept of European citizenship with an elastic approach can be considered as evolution of national citizenship. In this regard, the EU is pursuing a modern and innovative approach with the three still developing key elements of the citizenship concept: rights, identity and participation.

The most fragile aspect of this new citizenship appears to be the efficient promotion of the comprehensive and evolutionary meaning of its three fundamental elements in a modern day interpretation and the effective implementation of the existing instruments. The analysed sample suggests that the EU strategy geared to young people seems to have some success. Based on the data outlined in this article, it is working well in regard to the Bulgarian youth. Especially in terms of overall perception of the innovative
nature of the concept, with 24 positive results out of 30, but insufficiently in regard to the new conceptions of ethnic and intercultural diversity and tolerance, where the positive cases are only 14. For the two dependent variables of the research, the Bulgarian ethnic majority has a better result with 14 and 10 positive cases (out of 16), compared to the 10 and 4 positive cases (out of 14) of the Turkish minority.

Although it works with a limited number of cases, the research covers all possible combinations envisaged by the QCA analysis and leads to a double result, which involves both Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks. On the one hand, they tend to be generally well disposed to European citizenship regardless of their ethnic belonging. This is favoured by their awareness of the new concept and by their behaviour, which already involves a European lifestyle, being part of European networks, travelling and participating in EU Programmes. Contrary to the first result, however, the majority of the respondents (16 people) are sceptical as to the particular value of European citizenship in terms of a larger and shared notion of diversity and minority rights. In other words, within this sample, the variable of ethnic self-identification is non-influential in studying the first outcome on the general perception of European citizenship, whereas it is relevant to the second one concerning the perception of European citizenship with regard to the minority issue. In this situation, only high “awareness” together with many “daily practices” could neutralize a high ethnic self-identification. This is due to one main factor; the awareness and the daily practices should be considered together as part of the same matter and the same strategy from the EU. The findings of the research could foster broader future research involving other Bulgarian cities or even other countries with similar conditions, such as new Eastern-European member states or other western Balkan countries, in order to measure their European inclination before their official EU accession. A more in-depth analysis of this study could stimulate the EU to design a new strategy that promotes awareness of the three elements - rights, identity and participation - of the new concept of European citizenship and that also assesses and improves the current situation in the Balkans, which are still very sensitive when it comes to ethnic issues.

Bibliography
European Citizenship and Youth in Bulgaria: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis between Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks


Civil Society Going Political:
The Crisis of Democracy and the Rise of Participatory Political Parties in Croatia

Research Article

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Civil Society Going Political: The Crisis of Democracy and the Rise of Participatory Political Parties in Croatia

Dražen Cepić and Marko Kovačić

This paper debates the crisis of democracy and the importance of civil society in bringing forth new, participatory models of democracy. This is demonstrated in the case of Croatia following the results of the local elections in the spring of 2013 when five newly founded political parties, which shared strong ties to civil society, saw success. Building on the existing literature on the crisis of democracy, the authors argue that the low level of trust in political parties is not sufficient for explaining this phenomenon. Seeking to provide a more comprehensive solution, the authors introduce the factor of motivation by analysing the failures of CSOs in establishing a dialogue with the government, as well as the structural features of CSOs, thereby establishing a link between the macro and micro level of analysis. The paper indicates similarities with other post-socialist countries, allowing for speculation about possible similarities between them.

Keywords: participatory democracy, crisis of democracy, civil society, political parties, post-socialism

Introduction

In the last local elections in Croatia in May 2013, several recently founded political initiatives caused an upset, winning a significant number of seats in their respective municipalities and outperforming candidates from the mainstream political parties. Despite origins in different parts of the country, several of these more or less newly established parties share a number of common traits. In addition to similarities in their names – ‘For the City’ (Za grad), ‘For Rijeka’ (Za Rijeku), ‘For Smart People and a Smart City’ (Za pametne ljude i pametni grad), ‘Civic Option of the City of Osijek’ (Građanska opcija grada Osijeka), ‘Srđ is Ours’ (Srđ je naš) – they also predominantly share origins in the civil sector and grassroots movements. They place an emphasis

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The authors wish to thank all interviewees who helped us to understand their political parties better. We thank them for their time and patience. In addition, we owe a debt of gratitude to two anonymous reviewers whose comments helped us to shape this paper into a coherent and analytically sound unit.
on the model of participatory democracy, show a regional orientation and liberal social values and transgress the traditional left-right divide. In this paper, we will search for the conditions that led to their emergence, which resulted in the proliferation of participatory democratic parties in Croatian politics.

The crisis of democracy has surely been one of the most explored areas in the field of social and political sciences for decades. A whole array of political scientists has gone on to explore the loss of legitimacy and faith in democratic institutions that have taken place since the 1960s. This is the period characterized by the withdrawal of the welfare state, the emergence of new social movements and economic crises, all of which followed the unprecedented interval of the post-WWII economic growth. However, for the post-socialist context of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), and Croatian politics specifically, parliamentary democracy established after the decline of state-socialism faced additional difficulties. The long transformation of the political system from socialism to democracy and the lack of democratic culture – an umbrella term referring to a whole series of phenomena that together resulted in unresponsive democratically elected authorities – have made the democratic functioning of political institutions incomparably more problematic than in most countries in Western Europe. In such conditions, the emergence of new political actors might seem a natural progression. Where, if not here, would you expect a rise of new political initiatives advocating for a higher level of political participation?

All of these factors created an opportunity for new political parties promoting civic participation to emerge. In this paper, we will describe this trend by presenting five political initiatives that emerged in five different cities: Zagreb, the state capital, Dubrovnik, Split, Rijeka and Osijek, with the last three being the largest cities after Zagreb. The crisis of democracy, however, did not automatically lead to the above-mentioned trend. In our analysis, we point out additional variables that set the wheels in motion, demonstrating why this empty space in Croatian politics has been filled by the given actors, and why Croatian civil society organizations (CSOs) presented an ideal candidate for this quite unusual role. By defining the external circumstances (a high degree of public support for the civil society, disappointment of the CSOs with the possibilities to cooperate with the authorities) and the internal characteristics of the CSOs (proactivity, adaptability and mobilization) that allowed them to quickly adjust to the political game, we make an important contribution to the debate on “the crisis of democracy”. At the same time, given its area perspective, this paper contributes to scholarship on civil society in the CEE and research on politics in post-socialist societies in general.

The data from which we drew our conclusions were acquired through several qualitative methodological techniques. The newly established parties were analysed through a textual analysis of their statutes, programmes and websites. Moreover, given that desk research can provide little insight into party organizations, the motivation of actors and programme development, data were also gathered using participatory observation. The authors of the article were active in the core team of one of the parties for the entire duration of the campaign for the May elections, during which time they participated in party meetings and took part in various party activities. In order to understand the motivation of actors and the organising principles of other parties, they also conducted interviews with representatives of other parties, either during live meetings or via email communication (the interviews were held in the period between July 2013 and September 2013). The respondents were asked to describe the circumstances under which they decided to switch from the civil sector to the political arena, and also about the aspect of participatory democracy in their decision-making patterns. A series of open-ended questions depended on the respective interviewees and included questions such as: Please describe the circumstances under which your party was created. What were the motives for establishing a political party? How many founding members had previous experience in civil society? Please specify in which CSOs they participated. What is the main objective of your party? Please describe the decision-making process in your party.

Can we assume that our findings from the Croatian case can be generalized to other countries of the region (post-Yugoslav region, region of Southeastern Europe, the post-socialist region) or even broader? On one hand, the results seem strictly related to the specific circumstances and events of recent history that shaped Croatian society into what it is today. Ideally, several other country cases would be included in the research. This would allow us to draw stronger conclusions about tendencies in participatory democracies in different contexts, as well as about the strength and potential of civil society to cure the ills of contemporary, representative democracies in environments that differ from Croatia. However, the methodological approach of this study rendered this almost impossible; methodology resting on in-depth interviews and ethnographic research necessarily limited the number of cases. On the other hand, in this paper we demonstrate the advantages of a case-oriented approach, which is both historically interpretative and causally analytic. This allowed us to consider our case as a distinct entity and to explore it as a configuration of characteristics, not merely as a collection of variables.

The argument will be divided into three parts. In the first section, we will briefly look at the authors and literature that discuss the participatory

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solutions for the crisis of democracy. After providing the theoretical framework of our study, we will move on to the empirical part of the research. We will establish the object of analysis by presenting new political initiatives and their ways of transcending problems of parliamentary democracy, which are explained in the second section. Finally, before providing our concluding remarks, we will analyse the broader social and political conditions that led to this development.

1. The Crisis of Democracy and Participatory Politics
The crisis of democracy has for decades been one of the most explored areas in the field of social and political sciences. A whole array of social scientists has sought to explore the loss of legitimacy and faith in democratic institutions, trying to explain the failure of democratic systems to deliver “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” Due to the fact that democratically elected governments have gradually ceased to represent citizens’ interests, it has been said that the degree of trust in democratic systems has been diminished on a grand scale. The democratic systems based on political representation discussed here deviate from the original model of democracy, instead focusing more on normative acts, institutions and procedures that may not always be in correspondence with the needs and will of the people. At the same time, the state of democracy seems almost indistinguishable from the state of political parties, which are the main actors in the democratic political arena.

As described in some of the classic studies of political science, most notably by Lipset and Rokkan and Sartori, political parties are said to have two main roles: expressive - representation of different social groups, expressing the demands of their members and supporters, - and instrumental - as channels for communication. In contemporary politics, however, as numerous authors have noticed, both functions seem highly problematic. Nowadays, political parties are, as the argument goes, more concerned with obtaining votes and mandates, as well as figuring out the means of achieving these goals. Therefore, they are often promising what people want to hear regardless of their ideology and point of view. As a result of the decrease in the representative function of parties, the aggregation and articulation of interests and their delivery to the political system are becoming ever weaker.

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5 Instead of the word ‘decades,’ one might as well choose ‘centuries,’ as the critique of modern representative democracy has been a topic in numerous classical philosophical accounts, from Rousseau and Marx to Max Weber and Schumpeter (see Bobbio, Norberto. 2005. Liberalism and democracy. London: Verso and Held, David. 2006. Models of democracy. Cambridge: Polity). However, in this account we focused primarily on the contemporary critiques.


Numerous accounts in contemporary social science have dealt with one of the crucial issues of contemporary democracy: how to “rule in common for the common [in a just and democratic way].” The conventional definitions of democracy, which restrict it to the mere electoral process, are in this view simply too narrow. According to Pierre Rosanvallon, there is a need for “a more adequate account [that] would include the various ways in which the people are able to check or hold to account their representatives or the government, irrespective of the electoral process.” How can this be achieved? In Rosanvallon’s theory of counter-democracy, there is only one solution to bring back the trust in political institutions and improve the quality of democracy - active citizenry where individuals demand more power in the decision-making process. Oversight, prevention and judgment are necessary to utilize democracy to its fullest potential, whereas political parties should return to their fundamentals - interest aggregation and the articulation and delivery of citizens’ demands into a political system. If those features were adopted, the argument goes, the political systems would be more responsive and the democratic deficit would decrease.

Attempts to face the ills of liberal democracies, by emphasizing the return to a representational function and stressing a more intensive communication with citizens, represent one of the most interesting theoretical issues in the contemporary theory of democracy. However, if “citizen participation is both the heart of democracy and a mandatory part of many public decisions,” and if individual freedom and personal development can only be achieved by the permanent and direct inclusion of citizens into a policymaking process, then the question emerges, how can this be achieved? Who are the political actors ready to take over the assigned role? Finally, which mechanisms should the participatory democratic parties, which demand deliberation, discussion, higher citizen participation and involvement in the policy-making process, implement to achieve these goals? These questions remained insufficiently elaborated in the empirical (rather than normative) literature on participatory democracy, whereas the analysis of this aspect represents the main theoretical contribution of this paper.

11 The first refers to the various means whereby citizens (or, more accurately, organizations of citizens) are able to monitor and publicize the behaviour of elected and appointed rulers; the second refers to their capacity to mobilize resistance to specific policies, either before or after they have been selected; the third refers to the trend toward the ‘juridification’ of politics when individuals or social groups use the courts and especially jury trials to bring delinquent politicians to justice (Rosanvallon, Counter-democracy).
12 This conception is also close to the idea of council democracy, which can be found in texts by Hannah Arendt, Thomas Jefferson and F.W. Maitland. Council democracy is practiced on the local level with the goal of enhancing community welfare. Instead of representatives being put forward by those in power, managed by party organizations and excluding people at large from the exercise of power, council democracy is conceptualized as a form of government where people meet in their local communities, discuss local problems and some among them are chosen to participate in assemblies higher up. Compare Mosley, Ivo. 2013. ‘Council democracy’ - reform must begin with the local.’ (accessed: 11. February 2015).
14 Held, Models of democracy, 263.
In the following sections, we will analyse the ‘deliberative movement’ among political parties by providing in-depth insight in the cases of participatory democratic parties. However, instead of quantitative cross-country research, we concentrate on the single country-case of Croatia, with a special focus on the ‘new wave’ of recently established political initiatives, which achieved success in the last local elections held in May 2013. What is the logic behind this case selection? Even though the crisis of democracy represents a global phenomenon, which can and should be studied in a large N, in this paper we follow the argument put forth by Schmitter and Karl and Linz and Stephan. According to them, the legitimacy of democratic institutions should be studied as entrenched within contextually specific socioeconomic conditions, state structures and policy practices. The post-socialist context of Croatia represents the political setting and local institutional tradition in which we observe the object of our study. Our goals will, therefore, be twofold. On the one hand, we seek to explain a local phenomenon by elucidating the deeper historical conditions that led to its emergence. At the same time, however, we believe that this local perspective can represent an important contribution to the examination of ‘the participatory turn’ among political parties as part of the global process.

2. The Participatory Turn in Croatian Party Politics

The descending tendency of the degree of trust in democratic institutions that was primarily established in the societies and politics of the advanced, Western capitalist countries proved even more problematic in the post-socialist context of Central and Eastern Europe. High levels of political corruption, devastation to social capital during decades of authoritarian regimes, and political elites broadly found to be unaccountable for their respective constituencies all created conditions in which the crisis of democratic legitimacy was even more noticeable than in their western counterparts. Recently, however, a new political trend has emerged in Croatian politics that has demonstrated the important healing potential for an otherwise seriously damaged health of representative democracy. Even though they are formally unrelated and

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15 Schmitter, Phillip C. and Terry L. Karl. 1991. What democracy is... and is not. *Journal of democracy* 2(3), 75-88.
emerged independently of each other, the five parties were frequently perceived as being part of the same trend and sharing a similar political agenda. In this section, we will present the five cases (the data gathered from the party programmes and websites are complemented by the information given in the interviews by the party representatives) and will conclude the section by analysing ‘family resemblances’ between them.

2.1 For the City / Zagreb
The political party ‘For the City’ is a regional party that was founded in March 2013 in Zagreb by a group of young university graduates, most of whom pursued postgraduate degrees abroad. Even though the party developed from the Zagreb-based CSO ‘The Cyclists’ Union’, which was directed at improving Zagreb’s cycling infrastructure, it soon broadened its scope of interests and embraced a more general, green ideological platform. In the campaign for the May elections, the emphasis was put on three main topics: the implementation of sustainable transport solutions, the promotion of environmental topics and the propagation of participatory democracy. In the local elections for the City Assembly in May 2013, the party won almost 4% of the votes. Despite not managing to cross the 5% threshold, the party won the sixth highest number of votes; at the elections for the 17 city borough councils, it won 13 seats. After the new local government was established, the party continued to promote citizens’ participation in the decision-making processes. In addition to the web platform, where citizens of Zagreb could write their proposals for improvements in living conditions in Zagreb, the party representatives of the respective counties opened Facebook groups and established blogs to enhance their everyday communication with citizens.

2.2 For Smart People and a Smart City / Split
The political initiative ‘For Smart People and a Smart City’ caused the biggest upset in the May local elections, winning 12% of votes for City Council. Marijana Puljak, head of the initiative, became involved in politics before the previous local elections when, together with her neighbours, she started lobbying for the construction of a public elementary school, which in their opinion the neighbourhood lacked. After a disappointing experience of communicating with the city authorities, Puljak, an IT engineer who worked in a bank, decided to run for a position in the council of the city borough of Žnjan, where she was elected in 2008. Encouraged by her success on the city borough level, Puljak and her collaborators decided to run in the 2013 elections with a programme based on the ‘Smart City’ platform, which has been implemented in a number of cities around the world. Puljak’s political initiative avoided topics...

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18 The basic units of local government in Croatia are municipalities and towns that belong to 21 counties (administrative units and their assemblies, which have legislative power; zupanije). Zagreb, the capital, has a special status and represents a territorial and administrative whole, enjoying the status of a county. Lower municipal level units (gradsko četvrti) are actually boroughs (each has its assembly), which are further divided into local councils (mjesni odbori). While Zagreb and Split have this system, smaller cities and municipalities do not have the middle level of local government. In Rijeka, Osijek and Dubrovnik, urban local councils are called city councils, while suburban and rural local councils are called local councils. See more in: Kregar, Josip / Dulabčić, Vedran / Gardašević, Đorđe / Musa, Anamarija / Ravić, Slaven and Tereza Rogić Lugarić. 2011. Decentralizacija. Zagreb: Centar za demokraciju i pravo Miko Tripalo.
of national importance in the campaign for the May elections, primarily emphasizing local topics and advocating for citizen participation. The political programme included various mechanisms for the enhancement of participatory democracy: the introduction of citizen participation in the decision-making processes through public discussions and workshops, permanent and transparent communication with citizens via contact centres, as well as SMS and email referenda, and the use of a pre-existing web platform where citizens can send proposals that are then forwarded to the county governing bodies.

2.3 For Rijeka / Rijeka
The political party ‘For Rijeka’ was founded in 2006 as a regional political party whose representatives have been selected for the City Council for two consecutive terms, in 2008 and 2013. As in the previous two cases, it emerged from the CSO ‘Free State of Rijeka’. Frustrated by the inertia and incompetence of the local political parties, its members decided to become politically active with three main political objectives: decentralization, with an emphasis on the fiscal independence of the city of Rijeka, re-industrialization, with the port of Rijeka having a central role in this process, and the promotion of liberal social values (secularism and multiculturalism, as opposed to Croatian nationalism). Participatory democracy is present primarily through the empowerment of the local authorities by fostering a ‘council democracy’ and including citizens in the decision-making process.

2.4 Osijek Civic Option / Osijek
In the May elections, ‘Osijek Civic Option’ passed the 5% threshold and won two seats in the City Council. Unlike other political initiatives discussed in this context, the leading officials of the ‘Osijek Civic Option’ had prior experience in mainstream political parties, but after several disappointments with this experience, they decided to form a new political initiative. Most of the members, however, have little political experience and are instead professionals, entrepreneurs employed in the private sector and former civil society activists. Besides advocating for transparency values, a more efficient city administration and the development of entrepreneurial policies, ‘Osijek Civic Option’ put a substantial emphasis on stronger participation of the citizens in decision-making processes. It did this through cooperation with local CSOs and various forms of e-referenda (for instance, SMS referendum) on the level of city boroughs.

2.5 Srd is Ours / Dubrovnik
‘Srd is Ours’ was founded in Dubrovnik a few months before the May elections. This was a direct consequence of the failure of the CSO of the same name in preventing the development of a tourist resort on the nearby Srd hill, which civil activists from Dubrovnik saw as a major environmental threat. The tourist resort, which includes hotels, apartment houses and golf courses, had been controversial since its official presentation almost 10 years ago. The controversy stemmed from the environmental risks related to the development of golf courses, the dangers of the ‘Spanish model’ of development of tourist infrastructure (the so-called ‘betonization’ and apartmanization of the coast)
and most of all, the non-transparent procedure through which the project was permitted by the city authorities. In this sense, ‘Srđ is Ours’ clearly demonstrates the specific pathway through which CSOs divert their activities towards formal politics and political engagement; they do so by competing with the very same political structures that were the direct cause of their political involvement, through their unresponsiveness and lack of accountability.

In spite of the independent origins of the five political initiatives described in the previous sections – the interviews with representatives of the parties revealed that all parties grew independently of one another, without the interference of organizational learning from other contexts – the newly established parties share a number of common traits (Table 1). One of the most instantly recognizable shared traits of the political initiatives is the similarity in the official names of their organizations. The names are syntagmatically structured in an atypical manner different from other major political parties – names of most political parties in Croatia consist of three components, containing the attribute ‘Croatian,’ the noun ‘party’ and a third clause representing differentia specifica, e.g. the ‘Croatian People’s Party’ (Hrvatska narodna stranka, HNS), the ‘Croatian Peasants’ Party’ (Hrvatska seljačka stranka, HSS). They even differ from the names of mainstream political parties on a semantic level, evoking an activist spirit and a new mode of political subjectivity (‘For...’ or ‘...is ours’). In this section, however, it has been shown that the similarities between the initiatives transcend the mere formal level, indicating a deeper analogy in the content of their political activity.

Table 1: Shared Characteristics of the Five Parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>For the City</th>
<th>For Smart People and a Smart City</th>
<th>For Rijeka</th>
<th>Osijek Civic Initiative</th>
<th>Srđ is Ours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil Society Background</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory Democracy</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-communication</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regionalization / Decentralization</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Social Values</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ own illustration

In a political context characterized by a low degree of trust in politics and a high degree of contempt towards the political parties, emphasizing distance from the mainstream political parties is surely unsurprising. However, an in-depth analysis of the political parties, which constitutes the subject of this analysis, indicates that all of the new parties have, to varying degrees, origins in the organizations of civil society and very little experience in the frames of formal politics. This, to move over to the second point, has led them to start including practices typical for CSOs – horizontal, instead of vertical, decision making processes and an emphasis on the values of participatory politics.
The ‘broadening of civic participation’ in representative democracy has become a widespread catch phrase even among mainstream political parties. Yet, the concrete mechanisms allowing citizens to take part in the decision making processes distinguish the political initiatives we decided to include in the ‘participatory democratic’ camp from the merely rhetorical usage of the concepts related to participatory democracy. Some of these mechanisms include: e-referenda, SMS-voting, web platforms enabling the direct participation of citizens in creating party programmes, proposals for decentralization and bringing decision making processes to a lower level of political participation. When looking at these parties, the use of all resources that are available for effective communication with citizens is key in transforming a passive mass of voters into involved and informed stakeholders.

As successful civic activists, who are responsible for mobilizing thousands of citizens to achieve their objectives, the leaders of the five political parties put great emphasis on their new modes of communication. In the context in which they were about to compete for the elections, with financial and human resources almost incomparably lower than for the major political parties, communication via Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media, as well as viral marketing in general, proved critical for their campaigns. Besides these communication channels, the programmes of all five parties put strong emphasis on the need for regionalization and decentralization. This was due to three factors: the excessive level of centralization of state administration in Croatia, the values of participatory democracy and the fact that all five initiatives emerged on a local level, and have so far competed solely in local elections.

The content of their programmes represents a final point of convergence. All of the political initiatives analysed in this paper share similar values regarding human and civil rights, the protection of minorities (ethnic, racial and sexual) and the principles of secularism—what we, somewhat inaptly, called “liberal social values.” Instead of alluding to the ideology of individualism in the economic sense, we referred to liberalism as a social doctrine that advocates for the need to emancipate individuals from authoritarian regimes, as well as secular freedoms that enable citizens to resist rigid dogmas of religious communities, which after 1990 gathered significant influence in the political spheres in several CEE countries.

\[19\] It could be argued that, given that the equality before the law, right to non-discrimination and the separation of Church and State are guaranteed by the very constitution, promoting these values merely amounts to stating the obvious. However, these attitudes should be understood in the context of recent social and political changes in Croatia, which were strongly influenced by, as some commentators called it, a ‘conservative revolution’ and intense activities of the Catholic Church and Church-related organizations. The referendum held in December 2013, which approved changes to Croatia’s constitution in defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman, is taken as one of their most significant successes. This development can serve as a reminder that secularization is a process that includes a diminishing public and political importance of religious communities, rather than a unique constitutional arrangement.
3. **Civil Society and New Party Development**

In the previous section, we have pointed out a new trend that has emerged in Croatian party politics. Our analysis demonstrated several traits that these parties held in common. In the following paragraphs, we turn to the question of how to explain the polycentric development that emerged in a similar period in five different settings in Croatia. What are the circumstances and historical assumptions of the Croatian political arena that have led to this phenomenon? Finally, after more than 20 years of democracy and multiple party elections, what made this moment in time suitable for such a development? We start the analysis by discussing different hypotheses that provide answers to these questions.

3.1 **Trust and Mistrust: Civil Society vs. Political Parties**

The crisis of democracy represents an obvious hypothesis for the question of why the political situation resulted in the emergence of participatory democratic parties. Diminishing trust in political institutions, the ideological dislodging of traditional political parties, and a general impression that institutions of democratic representation no longer manage to stand for citizens’ needs and wishes seemingly turned political parties in the direction of higher democratic persuasiveness. There is an abundance of evidence demonstrating that mainstream political parties, while focused on winning elections by using empty rhetoric, failed to aggregate the interests of citizens and represent their will in the political arena. As seen from Table 2, the percentage of citizens tending not to trust any political party in Croatia has exceeded 90% since 2009.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Tend not to trust</th>
<th>Tend to trust</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/2004</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06/2005</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/2005</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/2006</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/2006</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/2007</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/2008</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/2008</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06/2009</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/2009</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06/2010</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/2011</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/2012</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/2012</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/2013</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we argue in this paper, a space opened for some new actors to jump in and take a slice of the political cake as a result of dissatisfaction with the mainstream parties, their unresponsiveness and the high level of political corruption. However, despite achieving record-low levels of trust in political parties in May 2013, the crisis of democracy in Croatia is hardly a recent phenomenon, with figures holding well above 80% at least since 2004. Even if the crisis of democracy provided good conditions for the emergence of new political parties, this factor alone cannot explain the rise of participatory democratic parties in recent years.

A high level of trust in the CSOs provides an alternative explanation (still not incompatible with the previously presented argument). Given the origins of the new participatory democratic political parties in the civil society, it is reasonable to assume the connection between the two factors. Indeed, while the mainstream political parties suffered from the decreasing levels of trust, recent trends show rising levels of trust in the CSOs. The high EU-fund absorption capacities of CSOs, employment growth of 13.3% within the civil sector and the CSOs’ activities, which are open for wide participation of citizens, have resulted in positive attitudes within society. Research on the support for CSOs in Croatia (Table 3.) suggests that almost three quarters of the population have a positive or very positive attitude - especially among the younger generation, employed citizens and the urban population. Furthermore, support rose more than 5% from 2007 to 2012 (a substantial growth even with the margin of error of around 3%). However, the increase in support has been to some extent cancelled out by the 1% increase in negative attitudes.

Table 3: Support for Civil Society Organizations 2007-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSO work is very beneficiary for a society</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO work is somewhat beneficiary for a society</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSOs are neither harmful, nor beneficiary for a society</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO work is harmful for a society</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO work is very harmful for a society</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>1004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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20 Even though there are no sound empirical data on the trust in parties before 2004, there are some indicators that this trend is from an even earlier date, as for instance in Rimac, Ivan. 2000. Neke determinantne povjerenja u institucije političkog sustava u Hrvatskoj. Bogoslovska smotra 70(2), 471-84.


However, even if this sheds more light on the space created for the emergence of new participatory democratic parties, it still does not explain the mechanisms of the newly emerging trend. What was the actual motivation of the actors in switching from civil society to formal politics? How can we construct a macro-micro link when interpreting this phenomenon? In order to explain this, as we demonstrate in the following section, it is necessary to take into account the dynamics of the cooperation between civil society and political authorities and the resulting disappointment of the activists. This can be demonstrated through the case of the civic initiative ‘Right to the City’.

3.2 Right to the City (2005-2010): Failures and Lessons Learned
‘Right to the City’ (RTC) was created in 2005 by various Zagreb-based organizations dealing with non-institutional culture, environmental issues and the youth. As described by Teodor Celakoski, one of the leaders, “RTC is an initiative aimed against the management of space that goes against public interest and excludes citizens from the decision making process in planning the urban development in Zagreb.”24 This initiative, together with the CSO ‘Green Action,’ later became the most important actor in one of the biggest organized activities of civil society in Croatia – the movement for the preservation of Varšavska Street. This street, part of the pedestrian area in the city centre, was supposed to be transformed into an access area for the underground garage of a private shopping mall after a series of favouring.

A number of activities (protests, petition signing, performances and advocacy events) took place between 2006 and 2010, with the climax of these efforts occurring in 2010 with a series of protests. The “We won’t give Varšavska away!” protest gathered thousands of people in the centre of Zagreb to protest against the co-modification of the public space. Civil society activists believed that all permits for the intervention in that public space were issued illegally and at the harm of citizens of Zagreb. Mass rallies were organized that protested the plans to start with the construction. The events culminated in May 2010 when the activists tore down security fencing around the construction site, just as the work was about to start. For more than two months, the activists refused to leave the construction site and held a 24h/day vigil, which lasted until special police forces arrested almost 130 activists and allowed the construction work to continue.

The failure of the RTC to protect the pedestrian zone and to prevent the construction of the shopping mall and the public garage had a profound effect on the members of the Croatian CSOs. For if a civic initiative, which enjoyed massive public support, had after five years of constant efforts succeeded in neither catching the authorities’ attention nor earning a position in the decision-making process, then what is the purpose of civic engagement? If the most organized and most numerous of initiatives could not win against corrupt political elites, could this mean that the idea of civic organization had lost its raison d’être? Finally, what is there left to do, but enter the political arena and

fight against those elites using their own weapons? Even though the leaders of the initiative had not themselves become politically engaged, the RTC served as a safe indicator – and a bitter reminder – of the scope of possibilities of civic organization in Croatian politics.

Certainly, the deliberate turn in Croatian local politics cannot fully be clarified by the history of the RTC. Due to the polycentric development of the five parties explored in the paper, an aim to explain their emergence as a direct consequence of the events related to RTC would be somewhat misleading. Even if ‘Srđ is Ours’ in Dubrovnik was directly influenced by the RTC activists, and the members of Zagreb-based ‘For the City’ were actively involved in the events organized by the RTC, this had less of an impact in the other three cities. Furthermore, the causal sequence appears to be far from unambiguous. Although most members of ‘For the City’ participated in the RTC, the party was not founded after the failure of the project in 2010 – despite the disappointment with political elites. Some activists then founded the ‘Cyclists’ Union,’ which was transformed two years later into the political party. As for the ‘Smart City’ and ‘For Rijeka’ parties, they were founded a few years before the RTC experienced its final failure. However, even if the development of the five parties was polycentric, and not the result of one single, causal chain of events, the history of the RTC can still be considered as illustrative for the pattern through which the CSOs felt motivated to enter the political arena, adding a crucial part of the puzzle of the phenomenon under scrutiny.

In the cases of ‘For the City’ and ‘For Rijeka,’ which developed from interest-based organizations (‘The Cyclists’ Union’ and ‘The Free State of Rijeka’), disappointment grew from the fact that despite years of dedicated work, structured advocacy strategies, quality analyses and strong popular support – similar to the case of the RTC – local governance failed to take these organizations as serious policy actors. In the cases of ‘Smart City’ and ‘Srđ is Ours,’ which emerged from grassroots movements fighting against a new building project that would irreversibly destroy the urban and environmental potential of the city (‘Srđ’) and demanding a new elementary school in the neighbourhood (‘Smart City’), the interest aggregation was articulated through informal civic initiatives, whose members became frustrated by the lack of responsiveness of their local governments. However, despite the differences in the initial level of institutionalization, all of these parties shared one crucial factor. They all emerged as a result of the dissatisfaction with civic groups and the level of dialogue they led with respective political authorities.

Even though the crisis of trust in political parties opened up space for new political actors, and although a high degree of trust in CSOs by itself made

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25 When the plans for the building project in Dubrovnik hinterland became visible, Dubrovnik activists drew on the experiences and advice from RTC activists in Zagreb, who regularly visited Dubrovnik to share their know-how with fellow activists (this was especially facilitated thanks to the fact that some of them were born and raised in Dubrovnik and maintained connection to the town).

26 The ‘Osijek Civic Initiative’ stands out from the pattern somewhat, as it was not developed from a CSO like the other four parties. However, given that members of the party participated in different CSOs and that local authorities in all parts of the country showed a similar lack of interest for the contributions of civil society, our hypothesis can still hold.
these organizations suitable candidates for filling the void, in the previous paragraphs we showed that the disappointment over the failed communication with authorities acted as a trigger for the transition from the civic to the political sphere. However, what allowed them to transfer to politics with success? In the final part of this section, we address this issue by focusing on three properties they inherited from their civil society habitus: proactivity, adaptability and mobilization.

3.3 Proactivity, Adaptability and Mobilization: Civil Society Going Political

The development of CSOs in Eastern Europe since the 1990s has been a topic of much debate among social scientists, many of whose remarks have been unambiguously disapproving. Among other things, CSOs in post-socialist societies were criticized for their weak mobilization capacities, poor organizational structures and their lack of grassroots organizing potential. The CSOs in Croatia, however, appeared to have avoided these pitfalls and, on the contrary, demonstrated a series of successes in setting relevant issues on the public and political agendas.

To name only a few examples, ‘GONG’ has played an important role in campaigning for fair and free elections since its foundation in 1998. The ‘Franak’ association won much support through its efforts to protect small debtors who were jeopardized by the depreciation of the euro in 2011 (similar cases of Swiss franc debtors’ associations can be found in Hungary, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina). Also, branches of numerous international organizations successfully advocated for the rights and interests of various social groups (‘Human Rights House,’ ‘Step by Step Foundation,’ ‘Friends of the Earth’ and ‘Transparency International’). These achievements helped raise the profile of the CSOs in the public sphere, which resulted in increasing levels of recognition among the citizens, as demonstrated in the first part of this section. The success of such activities on behalf of Croatian CSOs helped build a reputation, which quite likely served as important symbolic capital for the newly established parties. However, the civil sector background had an additional impact on the trajectory of the five parties analysed in this paper.

Proactivity played an important role in gaining the public’s support for the newly established parties. The importance of proactive management has been addressed as a staple characteristic of CSOs by several authors. The five parties continued to use this method even after they switched to party politics, thanks to which they began to open up topics that were later taken over by the mainstream parties. For example, both ‘For the City’ and ‘Smart City’ built a large part of their election campaign on the topic of empty and unused spaces owned by the local municipalities (in their case, the City of Zagreb and the City of Split). The two parties advocated for the distribution of the vast spaces in public ownership (which was itself a relict of the state-socialist social and

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economic structure) to the local entrepreneurs (the making of the so-called entrepreneurial incubators), organizations and craftsmen, as a way of fostering local production capacities and social economy. In contrast to mainstream politicians, civic activists have been held in high regard regardless of their respective political backgrounds for their proactive attitudes in putting new topics on the political agenda.

Proactive attitudes were crucially associated with another important characteristic of the CSO: its adaptability to different circumstances. Due to intensive communication with citizens, largely enabled by the usage of social media and other contemporary communication technologies, the civil society in Croatia has been characterized by timely reactions to current issues. Closely related to the previous pattern, this was achieved by focusing on the small-scale issues relevant to ordinary people. This feature was especially present in almost all of the analysed parties. Unlike mainstream political parties, which remained focused on ideological left-right divides that largely corresponded with historical, political and ethnic divides, the topics addressed by the CSOs appeared to be more understandable to the average voter, whether this concerned the construction of a school in a remote city neighbourhood in the case of ‘Smart City’ or the protection of the urban landscape in the case of ‘Srd is Ours.’

Finally, citizen mobilization is key for successful CSO campaigns. In contrast to mainstream political parties, which could easily survive the elections by counting on a steady base of loyal party voters, the CSOs typically needed broad citizen support. This allowed them to lead battles with the government officials on equal footing. In order to achieve this, the CSOs were forced to stay more open to the broader public than mainstream political parties, and to create a sense of community ownership over the corresponding sets of ideas and the means of their implementation. As a consequence, the notion of a common challenge created solidarity among their members, which led to the feeling of commitment in conducting a collective action. This was not necessarily only in the field of social movements, as proposed by Tarrow, but also in civil society in general.

Civil society is according to Putnam’s idea a factory of social capital. However, besides the macro level of analysis – a sum of micro social relations that are beneficial for democracy at large, as opposed to the societies where one ‘bowls alone’ – this notion can also be easily interpreted on the micro level of social analysis. Through engagement in civil society, activists learn social skills and the sense of community management necessary for mobilizing broader groups of people. This can be seen in the experiences of the activists from the five analysed parties. Even though a great majority of the activists involved in the

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However, despite the relative simplicity of the implementation of this project, the mainstream parties, in this case the Social Democratic Party of Croatia in power throughout the previous decade, took over the idea and introduced it into their electoral platform.


parties had little or no political experience, their CSO background provided them with positive predispositions for coping with their most serious challenge: how to gather disappointed voters and convince them to trust them. At the same time, thanks to their involvement in grassroots initiatives – including acquaintanceships and friendships obtained during years spent working, talking and meeting with members of their community – some of the parties we analyse had a head start.

Years of unsuccessful dialogue between politicians and civil society, which in the previous section we presented with the example of the social movement ‘Right to the City,’ surely played an important role in the transformation of CSOs into political parties. The protests, where more than 130 peaceful protesters were arrested, must have left great doubt and a deep impression on many Croatian activists, even if the impact of the RTC has been less immediate. In this sense, the disappointment of the civil activists with the government’s lack of response provided a link between the macro level (crisis of democracy, low degree of trust in political parties, high level of trust in CSOs) and micro level of analysis (the motivation of the actors). However, in this section we turned to the additional features that allowed the CSO actors to take over this role, rounding up the scheme of the opportunity structure, which created a new social and political landscape. In the following paragraphs we move to the concluding remarks.

Conclusion

The concept of active citizenship is in many ways crucial for the principles of civil society. Conscientious citizens seeking to express their social and political beliefs, and thereby to work on solving problems in their community, typically tend to assemble in formal or informal groups with the aim to be heard and represented. Such non-state organizations represent an inevitable part of democratic societies worldwide, whose political spheres, in a narrow meaning, are supplemented by all kinds of civil society initiatives. They thereby fulfil the ‘watchdog’ function. However, according to Rosanvallon’s theory described in the theoretical framework, the counter-democratic reform is to be achieved precisely by (re-)introducing properties that are traditionally associated with civil society to the political field, in a narrower sense. How is this to be accomplished? In order to present one empirical possibility of such a proposal, we have in this paper focused on the recent trends in Croatian local politics.

In our analysis, we described new political initiatives that advocate closer contact with their constituencies and two-way communication with the voters. This enabled them to endorse the wishes and needs of the citizens, all of whom, to a greater or lesser extent, originated from CSOs. Transition from civil society to formal politics is surely not an entirely uncontroversial step. Civil society organizations are by definition supposed to be non-governmental and apolitical. They are part of a sector that seeks to promote its ideas as a partner of the democratically elected government. Direct political engagement – and this is only one part of the problem – brings risk to the very same goals that were meant to be achieved. Indeed, for Croatian CSOs, it took years of broken

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33 Tarrow, Power, 85.
promises and being ignored by the authorities before they decided to act. However, in the case of the participatory democratic parties analysed in this paper, there was a move to formal politics. What has led to this? Why did the CSO actors decide to enter a new field of political action that, in several respects (habitus, political perspective), is quite opposite from the type of action that they were used to in their previous careers?

The crisis of democracy presented the usual suspects. According to this hypothesis, low levels of trust in the political parties and high support for the civil sector motivated the CSOs to engage in party politics. However, an additional trigger was needed. In this paper, we described how this process took place. We demonstrated how disappointment with the non-transparency of policy-making, suspicious priorities on the political agenda and simply not being taken seriously caused these actors to consider their further actions in the CSO sector unfeasible. They instead decided to enter the political arena. At the same time, besides the aspect of motivation, we addressed three additional properties – proactivity, adaptability and the mobilization capacity – demonstrating how the organizational culture of the Croatian CSOs proved important for shaping this political movement. Rather than leading to a solution, we argue that the crisis of political legitimacy merely opened an empty space that was filled by the actors with the best strategic positions. As a result, the arena of formal politics was penetrated by a new sort of political actor with an explicit aim to participate in the political game. Instead of being a mere stakeholder in the policy-making process, this new actor's goal was to govern. This established a new mode of political activity in Croatian politics based on the participatory democracy modus operandi.

Apart from being a relatively recent phenomenon, the parties discussed in this research still do not represent key players on the Croatian political scene. At this moment in time, we cannot know if they will continue to grow and achieve better results in the next elections, or if they will stagnate and perhaps fall apart. Perhaps the five parties will merge, creating a strong alternative for the national level. Alternatively, the trend will remain polycentric, with a further proliferation of parties with a similar profile. Furthermore, we cannot be sure if similar trends will appear in political contexts similar to the Croatian one. Will other countries from CEE follow these footsteps or will this remain a lonely trend? The sequel of this story indeed remains to be seen. However, in this paper we have demonstrated a trend that, despite the focus on one single country case, can serve to provide an interesting comparative perspective for any future improvements in democracy. This holds especially true in the aspect of participatory reforms of political parties, which still represent the main tool of representative democracy. Even if the “golden era” of civil society in CEE is indeed behind us, this case brings forth innovative ways in which civil society continues to play a progressive role in the development of post-socialist societies after several decades of democratic transformations.

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The 2014/2015 Croatian Presidential Election: Tight and Far-reaching Victory of the Political Right

Election Analysis

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The 2014/2015 Croatian Presidential Election: Tight and Far-reaching Victory of the Political Right

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Introduction

The presidential election that was held in Croatia on the last Sunday of 2014 (first round) and the second Sunday of 2015 (second round) resulted in a tight victory for Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, the candidate of the right-wing Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica, HDZ) and another seven right-wing parties, over the incumbent Ivo Josipović, the candidate of the governing Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske, SDP) and another sixteen parties of the left and centre. Although presidential competencies in Croatia, which is a parliamentary democracy, are not extensive, the presidential election provoked great interest not only in the country, but also internationally. Such interest should be attributed to the fact that Croatia, the youngest member of the EU, has been facing serious economic and social difficulties for more than six years, and that its

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1 The President of Croatia is elected to a five-year term, with the whole country serving as one constituency. He or she is elected by a majority of votes. If no candidate succeeds in winning more than fifty percent of votes in the first round, the winner is the candidate who wins the majority of votes in the second round. In this election, the first round was held on 28 December 2014 and the second round on 11 January 2015.

2 According to the Croatian Constitution, the President represents and acts on behalf of the state at home and abroad; he ensures the regular and orderly functioning and stability of the government; he grants pardons; he cooperates in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy; he is the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and has other authorities prescribed by the Croatian Constitution and laws. Although key powers are vested in the Croatian Government, the President is the only national officeholder elected by a general vote and therefore he or she has a great amount of legitimacy and important symbolic meaning. See Ustav Republike Hrvatske, Zakon.hr (accessed: 23 March 2015).

3 For instance, on 17 January 2015 in an article titled “Barbie Wins,” The Economist wrote that “Mr. Josipovic lost largely because the Social Democratic-led government had failed to drag Croatia out of recession,” and that the election was a “test of how voters feel ahead of a general election later this year. The answer: they are fed up.”; in N.N. 2015. A New Croatian President: Barbie Wins, The Economist, 17 January 2015. (accessed: 22 March 2015).

4 Croatia joined the European Union on 1 July 2013.
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governments have not been able to address these problems adequately. Besides, the presidential election is regarded as mere foreplay to the more pressing and important upcoming November parliamentary election. The parliamentary election will primarily be a competition between the country’s two ideological rivals, the SDP and the HDZ, although their primacy might be challenged by new political options that have started to emerge recently as a consequence of the country’s poor economy and the general loss of trust in established political elites.

There are three reasons to consider the latest presidential election an important event for Croatia. First, this election represents the discontinuation of the last decade’s trend of declining voter turnout. The turnout in the second round of the election was 59.1%, which is significantly higher that the turnout in the final rounds of the presidential election in 2009 (50.1%) or the presidential election in 2005 (51%). It was also just slightly lower than the turnout in the second round of the 2000 presidential election (60.9%), when democratic enthusiasm was widespread because the nationalist HDZ – after 10 years in power – lost the parliamentary election that was held just a few weeks before the presidential election.

Second, this is the first time in the history of Croatia’s presidential elections (six elections were held so far) that the incumbent who was running for the second term lost the election. Ivo Josipović lost to Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović despite the fact that he was, according to the public opinion polls, the most popular Croatian politician. He had significant lead in the polls and was predominantly portrayed as the certain winner of the election. Finally, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović is the first woman to be elected to the Croatian Presidency. Grabar-Kitarović, who declares herself a “modern conservative,” has made an impressive political career and was, among other things, the Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2005 to 2008 and the Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy at NATO from 2011 until she was elected President of Croatia. However, Grabar-Kitarović is not the first woman to hold one of the country’s leading positions. From the middle of 2009 until the end of 2011, the Prime Minister of Croatia was HDZ’s Jadranka Kosor, although she was not elected Prime Minister, but succeeded her predecessor, Ivo Sanader, after he surprisingly resigned. By electing Grabar-Kitarović, Croatia has joined a relatively small group of countries whose presidents are women.

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5 The turnout in the first European Parliament election was only 20.8%, which was the second lowest turnout in the history of the European elections. In 2014, the turnout in the same elections was 25.2%, which was one of the lowest scores in that election.

6 For instance, in November 2015 he had 53.1% of the support in the polls compared to Grabar-Kitarović’s 37.7% (the scores refer to the second round and the potential choice between these two candidates). Crobarometer, Ipsos Pula, November 2015.

7 Croatia became the 11th country in the world whose president is a woman.
The Context
The social context of the presidential election was unfavourable for the incumbent Josipović, a distinguished university professor and a renowned composer of classical music. This context was primarily determined by six years of economic crisis, i.e., a recession in which the country’s GDP cumulatively dropped by 13% and investments decreased by 40%. According to the information of the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, in November 2014 Croatia had 312,330 unemployed people and the unemployment rate was at 19.2%. Although the crisis in Croatia has been particularly present in the realm of the economy, it should be regarded as an “overall crisis,” manifesting itself in other realms of life. It has been very deep and conditioned by several factors: the global economic crisis, the crisis in transition (post-communist) countries of Eastern and Central Europe, and finally by the structural disruptions of the Croatian economy and within Croatian society in general.

During the last six years of the crisis, both the HDZ’s and the SDP’s administrations have failed to introduce reforms necessary to overcome the country’s economic perils. However, the failure to introduce required reforms has for the most part been blamed on the SDP, partly because the public memory of the HDZ’s ignorance about reforms and hefty corruption has mostly faded. In the months preceding the presidential election, the SDP was losing voters while HDZ support was constantly growing in the polls, along with the support of the newly established Party for Sustainable Development (Odarživi razvoj Hrvatske, ORaH), which has been attracting dissatisfied voters of the left. Such disappointment with the Government among the citizens has been a burden for Josipović, whose general lack of intervention was widely acknowledged, but did not seem to reflect on his public image until the election campaign. He was mostly criticised for not addressing the incompetence and inefficiency of the Government and for not undertaking actions that were within his presidential powers and that might have urged the Government to be more accountable and effective. Prime Minister Zoran Milanović’s arrogant and offensive communication style was not helpful either; his detachment from the public and a bad economic record have led to the lowest government approval rating in Croatian history.

Addressing the damage that Milanović’s bad image may cause to Josipović, columnist Ivanka Toma wrote: “HDZ’s
campaign against Ivo Josipović is chamomile tea compared to what Milanović has been doing to him.\textsuperscript{16}

Finally, the presidential election was held in an atmosphere of intense political clashes and social tension. These involved severe political conflicts that have been present in Croatia for a couple of years now and that are mostly related to ideological issues and attitudes towards the Croatian Homeland War (1991 – 1995), its actors and consequences. For instance, in October 2014, a group of Croatian war veterans started to demonstrate in front of the Ministry of War Veterans, demanding the resignation of the Minister Predrag Matić. Their demonstration soon turned into a camping protest that lasted throughout the whole presidential campaign and that has still not been terminated. In the course of the campaign, other social protests emerged as well, although much smaller in scale. These have been mostly related to the eviction of people from their homes, mainly due to their inability to pay their mortgages. Activists of the Human Wall (Živi zid), a non-governmental organisation whose main objective is to obstruct the evictions by building a human wall in front of the peoples' homes, have been particularly vociferous. They are led by a 25-year-old student Ivan Vilibor Sinčić, a political rookie who managed to collect the ten thousand signatures required by law to become a presidential candidate, and who consequently joined the group of four candidates who competed for the title of the fourth President of Croatia. Thus, the presidential election in 2014/2015 was a competition between the incumbent Josipović and his three challengers: the HDZ’s Grabar-Kitarović, the rebellious leader of the Human Wall Sinčić, and Milan Kujundžić, the candidate of the rigid right-wing coalition led by the Croatian Dawn – The Party of the People (Hrvatska zora - stranka naroda).

The Campaign
Ivo Josipović entered the campaign with a seventeen% lead in the polls.\textsuperscript{17} His public image was uninterruptedly favourable throughout his entire presidential term, despite the country’s pathetic economy and the growing public discontent with the Government and its performance. For most of the run up and the first part of the campaign, the majority of the media perceived Josipović as the uncontested winner. On 8 November 2014, one of the leading Croatian columnists wrote: “Ivo Josipović is definitely going to win the elections and remain the Croatian president for another term. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović is losing – no Pantovičak\textsuperscript{18} for her.”\textsuperscript{19} So, the prevailing perception was that this is going to be a rather boring campaign and an easy victory for Josipović. Accordingly, Grabar-Kitarović was perceived as an underdog with no actual chances to win the election. However, contrary to the dominant


\textsuperscript{17} According to Ipsos Puls, in November 2014 Ivo Josipović was winning 42.7% in the polls. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović 25.8% and Milan Kujundžić 6.7%. Ivan Vilibor Sinčić had not yet declared his candidacy and was not even considered a candidate. Crobarometer, Ipsos Puls, November 2014.

\textsuperscript{18} The residence of the Croatian president.

\textsuperscript{19} Modrić, Sanja. 2014. Šteta novca, Josipović pobjeđuje. \textit{Novi list}, 8 November 2014.
predictions and the poll results, the first round ended in a tie: Josipović received 38.5% of the votes to Grabar-Kitarović’s 37.2%. Ivan Vilibor Sinčić won 16.4% of the votes, which is a weighty score given that he was previously completely unknown to Croatian voters, while the rightist Milan Kujundžić was left well behind with only 6.3% of the votes. In the second round of the election, Josipović’s rate of approval gradually dissolved – it dropped from 60% in September 2014 to 46% in December 2014. Finally, on 11 January 2015, Josipović lost the election to Grabar-Kitarović by an extremely narrow margin - 49.3% to 50.7%. The reasons for Josipović’s defeat to a challenger, who was at least in the first round given little to no chance of winning, should be, in addition to the political and social circumstances and Josipović’s own lack of delivery, looked for in the campaign itself.

The campaigns of both front-running candidates, Josipović and Grabar-Kitarović, were quite weak in terms of strategy. This was mostly visible in the clumsy attempts of both candidates to find the right message capable of striking a cord with the electorate. Josipović campaigned on a rather abstract and complicated request for constitutional changes that would encourage necessary reforms, and he was unable to translate his program into simple, coherent messages. In addition, the perceived lack of delivery made his messages sound less credible. The overall impression was that he was indifferent and passive, and that in five years he did not do much for the citizens. His approval rating remained stable and his image positive until his indolence was pushed on the campaign agenda, first by his opponents and later by the media. The perception that he failed to deliver was consequently intensifying towards the end of the campaign.

Grabar-Kitarović, on the other hand, was wandering from a Sarah Palin-like “hockey mom” campaign, pledging to have paedophiles chemically castrated, to messages addressing the victims of the communist regime in World War II and “the dictatorship” of Tito. Her campaign was initially focused on conservative, right-wing voters. However, towards the end of the campaign, her rhetoric became less ideologically divisive, more balanced and focused on the economy and people’s everyday problems, probably in an attempt to reach for the voters at the centre of the political spectrum and the undecided: “We have 318,000 unemployed, 32,000 people with blocked accounts, 1.6 million people live on the verge of poverty and 30% of them are children. They all want a better life.” Her forte towards the end of the campaign included attacks on the Milanović government and Josipović’s inactivity: “Croatia does not need a new constitution – it needs a new government instead of this incompetent one” and “Josipović would now like the new beginning. What was he doing for the last five years?”

The HDZ provided strong organisational support to

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20 According to IPSOS Puls, in December 2014 Ivo Josipović was winning 46.5% in the polls and Grabar-Kitarović 34.9%.
21 Ipsos Puls, Crobarometar, 2014.
22 She won by 32,509 votes.
24 Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović at a rally in Rijeka, Večernji list, 7 January 2015.
Grabar-Kitarović’s campaign and canvassed all over the country to summon supporters and attract new voters. According to a number of commentators, the HDZ’s impressive party discipline, which resulted in a huge mobilisation of supporters, was decisive for Grabar-Kitarović’s victory: “Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović owes her success to her own character and to the army-like functioning of her party.”

The campaign slogans on both sides were very vague and unoriginal. Josipović was offering “The right path” and Grabar-Kitarović was pledging “For a better Croatia.” The advertising was equally pale and modest. Several billboards featuring smiling photos of the candidates and their slogans were hardly motivating. Each candidate had a few, rather unimpressive, television ads (Josipović five and Grabar-Kitarović two) that were well below the standards of production set in previous national and local campaigns. Both teams relied heavily on digital technology, especially social media – YouTube, Facebook and Twitter in particular.

Ivan Vilibor Sinčić, a student of electrical engineering, presented himself as the spokesperson of the deprived. He insisted on populist appeals and avoided questions that would position him ideologically on any side of the political spectrum. His social appeals and strong anti-elitist rhetoric resonated well with the politically disenchanted and economically exhausted voters, turning him almost overnight into a prospective political star. The media labelled him “the moral winner of the first round” and “the biggest surprise of the elections.” He had no advertising campaign and relied mostly on media attention. The votes he received were, for the most part, an expression of resentment towards the despised political elites. Milan Kujundžić, a renowned doctor and the candidate of the right-wing coalition, campaigned on rigidly conservative messages with a strong nationalist slant. His performance and rhetoric became increasingly aggressive towards the end of the campaign, which probably pushed away some of his voters. His prospects additionally dropped with the appearance of the young Sinčić, who was more successful in articulating antipathy towards the two dominant parties, the SDP and the HDZ. He campaigned with slogans “Milan Kujundžić - Our President” and “New Croatia.” Sinčić and Kujundžić also relied on social media.

The expenditure limit for presidential elections in Croatia is set at 8 million kunas (somewhat more than 1 million euros) per candidate in the first round and an additional 1.6 million kunas in the second round. The candidates’ preliminary campaign reports showed that even the two frontrunners spent much less than that. This is probably due to the economic crisis and restricted campaign resources, but also due to the fear that in meagre circumstances voters would disapprove of lavish campaign spending. Final reports indicate that Josipović and Grabar-Kitarović spent more than that after all (7.9 million kunas

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28 Večernji list, 3 January 2015; Jutarnji list, 29 December 2014.
29 Kolindi Grabar-Kitarović i Ivo Josipović reported that they spent 3.9 million kunas and 5.8 million kunas respectively. See N.N. 2015 Koliko su potrošili Grabar Kitarović i Josipović?, Gong, 6 January 2015 (accessed: 22 March 2015). Ivan Vilibor Sinčić and Milan Kujundžić reported that they spent 120,000 kunas and 391,000 kunas respectively.
kunas and 8.1 million kunas respectively), but they still did not hit the ceiling.\textsuperscript{30}

Given the previous research that suggests that Croatian election campaigns are highly Americanised,\textsuperscript{31} it may be argued that this campaign represents certain regression in terms of the Americanisation and especially professionalisation of Croatian election campaigns. Nevertheless, Americanisation is still reflected in the presidential debates organised by the three major national television channels - commercial RTL, Nova TV and the public Croatian Television (HTV). Altogether nine debates were held between 9 December 2014 and 9 January 2015. Organisation of debates in Croatia depends completely on television channels, which set all the rules – they decide on the candidates who will participate and independently define the design of the debate. Until recently, Croatia had very strict regulation of the media representation of the candidates. All candidates, regardless of their strength, had to be given equal time in the media, including in presidential debates. However, in 2014 changes were introduced that liberated this segment, and media outlets now enjoy complete autonomy in deciding whom they want in their program.\textsuperscript{32} Extreme provisions – such as severe restrictions, on the one hand, or complete autonomy, on the other – come as a consequence of the generally defective campaign regulation in Croatia, which has been subject to heavy criticism not only from national experts, but also from international institutions, such as the OSCE. In the 2014/2015 presidential election, there were only four candidates and they all had equal treatment in the debates. In the campaign, which was not especially information rich, debates provided a useful platform to inform the voters about candidates’ positions and programs. They were especially useful in introducing “outsiders” Sinčić and Kujundžić to the voters. Although the data is still not available, given the change in the public opinion polls in the last three weeks of the campaign and a generally very weak advertising campaign, it may be suggested that the debates had some impact on voters’ opinion. Finally, an important segment of the campaign consisted of media reports. Josipović and Grabar-Kitarović were equally visible in the media, as opposed to Kujundžić and Sinčić, who were significantly less present.\textsuperscript{33} Although conclusive evidence is still not available, preliminary analyses suggest that the press favoured Ivo Josipović in the first round of the election. In the second round of the election, the media reports became more balanced and the number of stories advocating Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović increased. Yet the most challenging feature of the media reports, which will certainly translate into a number of academic articles, is the gender framing of Grabar-Kitarović. At the very beginning of the campaign, an anonymous offending dossier appeared in which she was labelled “Barbie,” giving her a nickname that would stick to the end of the campaign. Even a superficial

\textsuperscript{30} N.N. Koliko su potrošili Grabar-Kitarović i Josipović?
\textsuperscript{33} Conclusive data are still not available, but a preliminary analysis conducted at the Faculty of Political Sciences suggests that the ratio between the number of articles published in the first round that mention Josipović or Grabar-Kitarović and the number of articles that mention Sinčić or Kujundžić is about 2:1 in favour of the former two.
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glance at the reports suggests that the main indicators of the gendered reporting were vehemently present: she was commonly referred to as “Kolinda,” rather than Grabar-Kitarović, she was questioned about her emotions, looks and the role of her husband and his “strange” choice to look after the children while his wife was pursuing a professional career, and finally, she was subjected to chauvinistic remarks addressing her competency and professional independence.

Conclusion: Implications of the Presidential Election

In conclusion, we examine four trends that will be affected by the presidential election and the victory of the HDZ’s Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović. The first trend refers to the probable change of focus in foreign policy from the region to the West, primarily towards the United States and the European Union. While Josipović was focused on the region, Grabar-Kitarović, who has strong professional links with the United States and the EU, clearly advocated for a shift in foreign policy in the campaign. In this respect, Grabar-Kitarović said: “There will be no more mentioning of the region, the basis for politics with our neighbours are resolved issues.”34 The political right warmly greeted such a change of focus.

The second trend refers to the intensification of political divisions that have become more prominent in recent years.35 Aware of the dangers of such deep social and political rifts, the winner of the election, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, exclaimed “No more divisions!” in her victory speech and called for national unity. However, the understanding of “national unity” that is being reinforced by the HDZ and other parties on the right is predominantly traditional and nationalistic, and for some citizens evokes traumatic memories of the past HDZ governments. Contrary to Grabar-Kitarović, the SDP’s Prime Minister Zoran Milanović has been repeatedly presenting his Manichean understanding of the political situation in the country. For instance, he has said “The choice is clear: it is either us or them. Good or bad, light or darkness.”36 No matter how they communicate about the schisms, the two biggest parties evidently reinforce political divisions in Croatia. The nature of these divisions is primarily linked to Croatian history (the Second World War and the Homeland War) and ideological divisions (nationalism, conservatism and liberalism), and only to a lesser degree to constructive contemporary discussions about the economy and other mundane issues, which is why they will be very difficult to overcome.

The third trend refers to the strengthening of the political right in general and the HDZ in particular. The results of the presidential election have indicated that the voters in Croatia are divided into two camps that are pretty much equal in size. However, they are very different in terms of their behaviour and discipline. The first one gathers enthusiastic voters of the right, marshalled by the HDZ and its mighty electoral machinery. The enthusiasm of the HDZ voters has recently been encouraged by several of the party’s subsequent victories – in the European Parliament elections in April 2013 and May 2014, in local elections in May 2013, and finally in the presidential election in January 2015. On the other side, the voters of the left are relatively weakly motivated. Their political enthusiasm has been disturbed by the defeat of the most popular politician of the left, Ivo Josipović, and before that by the defeats in the European and national elections; most importantly, the voters have been impacted by the loss of trust in the SDP and the Government of the left centre.

Given the idea that presidential elections are considered foreplay to the parliamentary elections and the continuous climb in the polls, it may be argued that the HDZ has a fair chance of winning the forthcoming parliamentary election. Its chances seem even stronger if we take into account its demonstrated efficiency in mobilising voters, which should be primarily attributed to the strong party organisation and its efficient canvassing.

The fourth trend refers to the fragmentation of the political left. The SDP and other parties of the governing coalition, which have failed to drag the country out of the crisis, have been progressively losing voter support. Newly established parties, ORaH and the Human Wall, have benefited the most from such a development. Nevertheless, ORaH, whose ratings were rapidly increasing before the presidential election, started to lose its support right after the election, probably because it advocated for Ivo Josipović.

In the weeks following the election, the Government introduced certain measures to alleviate the situation of socially disadvantaged citizens (for instance, those who have loans in Swiss francs, impoverished citizens who cannot pay their utilities, workers in bankrupt companies). However, all these measures are predominantly regarded as mitigation of the consequences of the crises, rather than a solution for overcoming its structural causes. The repeated attempts of Zoran Milanović to achieve some kind of agreement with ORaH, which still has relevant support in the polls, have failed. The leader of this party, Mirela Holy, who used to be a member of the SDP and who left the party because of disputes with Milanović, refuses any kind of partnership with her former boss. On the other hand, the Human Wall, which is now the third most popular party in Croatia, right after the HDZ and the SDP, with its robust anti-elite rhetoric is hardly a potential partner for the governing SDP.

Given all these trends, the HDZ has significant chances to win the next parliamentary election in Croatia. However, this party too, has not demonstrated a willingness to undertake the reforms ignored by the SDP. Therefore, it may be expected that the ideological divisions between groups of political actors that are not prone to reform, in a country severely devastated

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37 According to Ipsos Puls, in January 2015 the HDZ was winning 27.6% in the polls, the SDP 21.2%, the Human Wall 12.5% and ORaH 12.2%.
by an economic crisis, will continue to decisively determine the political and social life of Croatia.

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Fragmentation as a Silencing Strategy: 
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Fragmentation as a Silencing Strategy: Serbian War Veterans against the State of Serbia

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Abstract: This article draws on Lev Grinberg’s notion of political space, understood as symbolic spheres in which political actors represent and further their interests, identities and agendas. The political space notion is designed to analyze and criticize political power and its dynamics in cases such as the Serbian one, where governments do not rely on heavy-handed control of civil society. I suggest here that following the wars of the 1990s, the democratic governments in Serbia have excluded the war veteran population from the political space of representation, since gaining control over this population was perceived as a crucial step in the attempt to silence any public reckoning of the nation’s criminal past. Through the case study of a decade-long “Per Diem Affair”, designated to alienate the war veteran population, I show how the mechanism of fragmentation has served the ruling elite to close the political space for open debate regarding the role of Serbia in the wars of the 1990s, first and utmost, in order to maintain control over the narrative of the recent wars. This, I suggest, comes as a result of the alteration in the role of the state: from being the direct source of power to becoming a mediator between the opposing local and international demands for particular national images and identities.

Keywords: Political space, Serbia, memory politics, war veterans, fragmentation

Introduction

After struggling for years to gain social status and benefits, a group of Serbian war veterans finally sued the state of Serbia at the European Court for Human Rights in Strasbourg, claiming that the government had violated their rights and discriminated against some of them. The lawsuit was launched because the Serbian government only paid the long overdue wages to those war veterans from the southern parts of Serbia1 who had held large protests in 2008 demanding their money. Though the European Human Rights Court ordered for Serbia to pay around 17 million euro to veterans of the conflicts of the 1990s proving that the state had deliberately discriminated against the veteran population, in the appeal this decision has been suspended followed by the explanation that not all domestic legal remedies have been exploited. I suggest that this “Per Diem Affair” has proved to be an exemplary case of how a post-

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1 Towns of Prokuplje and Kuršumlija.
conflict state may disable major political actors to further their interests and negotiate political and mnemonic agendas. In post-conflict states, where the past is disputable in multiple ways, memory and memorial practices often become contested sites. Thus the politics of memory is increasingly prominent when nation states – more precisely, their ruling elites, which include both the decision making and policy execution bodies – as well as other segments of societies, take an active role in forging collective memories of the contested past. There seems to be a global phenomenon in which post conflict nation-states, or, more correctly, their ruling elites, are engaged in constructing and editing national images and identities suitable not only for local purposes but also for international display in ways more calculated than ever. States strategically not only choose how to deal with the contested elements of their national past but, they apparently also manage their difficult past with clear aims in mind: to portray the nation in a more positive light in international arenas. Apart from the state, the biggest mnemonic groups that employ memory to further both their ideal and material are those which have directly experienced war, such as veterans, refugees or witnesses of atrocities. Those, however, only have a chance to shape the national memory if they command the means to express their vision. Most importantly, narratives will be socially acceptable only if their vision is compatible with social or political objectives and inclinations among other important social groups, like political elites and parties.

Those mnemonic clashes between different segments in society are always revealed in political spaces, i.e. in symbolic spheres in which political actors represent and further their interests, which appears to be crucial for negotiating different political agendas. The political space for discussions and representation is influenced by the internal tensions and local hostilities between different societal segments. Drawing on the Grinbergian analytical conceptualization of political spaces dynamics, I show here that the last resource of legitimate representation channels for the already vastly marginalized group of Serbian war veterans, was to be found in the “Per Diem Affair”, a decade long attempt to achieve legitimacy for the wartime spent in Kosovo in 1999. Through various sets of legal tools, such as road blockades and hunger strikes, court appeals, negotiation with governmental representatives, and finally, bringing the case to the European Court of Human Rights in

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2 I conducted my fieldwork in Belgrade from 2009-2012. My research consisted of about 25 semi-structured interviews with the veteran organizations' representatives and several government officials, together with the collection of rich archival data from the government databases and numerous newspaper articles on the subject.


Strasbourg, the Serbian war veterans struggled to attain the minimum of societal benefits – however, currently, without much success.

I show here that in order to maintain exclusivity over the narrative of the 1990s wars, and consequently political power over visions of the state future, all ruling elites, regardless of their political affiliations, have used simple tactics of allotting different privileges to different war veteran groups. This helped to create a strategic and consistent fragmentation of the war veteran population in Serbia, which consequently served the ruling elites in disabling the war veterans’ participation in the political space. This was intended to mitigate their political power and weaken their struggle for their rights, but also to reduce the financial burden which war veterans might impose on the state budgets. However, this was also directed toward maintaining a supremacy over the memory agenda. Disabling the war veterans’ representation in any public debate regarding the role of Serbia in the wars of the 1990s was crucial for maintaining control over the recent wars’ narrative. The use of this strategy of fragmentation, I suggest, comes as a result of the alteration in the role of the post-conflict state: from being the main source of power to becoming a mediator between the opposing local and international demands for particular national images and identities. This role shift brings to the fore new strategies adopted and distributed by the ruling political elite whose purpose is to control, regulate, design and create lifestyles between the citizens and the state, by the use of power or authority in day-to-day encounters.

Political Space
The political process of contestation needs to be understood in the light of the dynamics of memory, both at the temporal and the spatial level, where memory entrepreneurs operate within certain arenas of articulation. The term “arena” refers to social and political spheres in which various actors struggle for their specific memories. However, this term proves to be vague and is defined only in broad terms. Therefore, I find the term “political space”, as defined by Lev Grinberg, most relevant as it help us analyze dynamic processes of negotiation between different political actors.

Grinberg made the political space concept a useful analytical tool due to its ability to depict complex and multilayered encounters between the state and civil society. This is contrary to other uses of this term where, for the most part, “political space” remains an extremely abstract and elusive concept and its substance is mostly unidentified. Bourdieu used the term “political field”, and defined it as a symbolic field of representations of social groups, arguing for its autonomous character. One current definition in the Anglo European literature on social movements defines political space in terms of a political opportunities structure, which Charles Brockett has neatly summarized as “the presence of

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allies and support groups; the availability of meaningful access points in the political system; the capacity of the state for repression; elite fragmentation and conflict and the temporal location in the cycle of protest. The most common use of the term is both figurative and taken for granted in connection with the politics of the territorial state.

Grinberg gives a more precise and useful interpretation by showing that the political space is a symbolic sphere in which political actors, in this instance memory entrepreneurs, represent and further the interests of specific groups in society through the use and construction of language, narrative, discourse and myth. It bridges tension between the state and civil society, since it mediates conflicts between dominant and dominated groups.

Grinberg analyzes mobilization of social movements, such as the J14 in Israel and the Tahrir Square movement in Egypt, where he also takes into account both the dynamic nature of encounters and the idea of a constantly changing structure of opportunities. According to him, the political actors are entrepreneurs whose primary task is to mediate between the particular groups to which they belong. These actors demand social and economic rights, as well as legitimization for the agendas of the groups they are identified with. Since civil movements and organizations have a possibility to recruit support from different social groups and to mould and change policies, there is a dynamic opening and closing of the political space of representation, which is therefore subject to perpetual change. According to Grinberg, this dynamic feature of political space, due to its symbolic and non-autonomous character, provides us with a set of conceptualization tools enabling us to assess preconditions to possible social movements' outbreaks through a number of parallel processes. Such processes include: constructing and propagating a specific national image, largely generated by the dominant group; forming a system of symbols and ceremonies; creating a differentiation process between those that belong or do not belong to the nation, and finally defining common enemies, whether real or imagined.

The conceptual use of “political space” is of particular worth when analyzing processes such as transitions to democracy, mainly because this demonstrates that the dynamics of the opening and closure of political space are influenced not only by local power relations, but also by global power relations that shape the power of different social groups within the nation-state. It is important to stress, however, that having democratic rules of the game is not a guarantee that political spaces will open to new identities, ideas, demands and agendas. Contrary, they might be an effective tool that facilitates and legitimizes the

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11 Grinberg, Politics and Violence.
12 Grinberg, Politics and Violence, 14.
closure of political spaces of representation as in case of Serbia presented here. As there is always danger that political actors may try to close the political space, barring entry to new identities, agendas and actors, one has to ask under what conditions do they succeed in doing so? I will show here that the analysis of political space in Serbia helps us understand the nature of the encounter between both the state and war veterans that have participated in the wars of the 1990s, as well as the ways Serbian governments are dealing with Serbia’s contested past. I argue that one of the basic mechanisms developed in order to maintain control over political spaces – as part of the encounters between the state and civil society, to debate over the contested nature of the 1990s wars – is to be found precisely in the fragmentation of the war veteran population. The particular social setting, in which the entire war veteran population has been neglected and alienated by both the ruling political elite and the wider segments of civil society, forced war veterans to reduce their memory agendas to the most minimal benefits they were entitled to. Moreover, the use of the fragmentation strategy shows the shift in the way in which the state, through its ruling elite, institutions and practices, uses and distributes power. This functional alteration, from being the source of power to becoming a mediator explains why memory has become extensively perceived as a supplementary and easily accessible source of power.

The Post-Conflict Serbia: War Veterans Pushed to the Margins
Serbian participation in the wars of the 1990s was anti heroic, filled with violence, atrocities and bloodshed. Moreover, to date, there is still no public consensus in Serbia regarding participation in these wars, the national narrative being contested in multiple ways. After the overthrow in the year 2000 and the fall of the Milošević regime, there was a great sense of optimism and enthusiasm in Serbia. The newly elected government heading the country was willing to approach the European Union, and this was raising high expectations for the country’s prospects. However, these expectations, which came mainly from the civil society, soon turned to disappointment. Early on after the overthrow of the Milošević regime, it became clear that the newly emerged political elites were deeply and inextricably linked to the politics of the 1990s. Although many initiatives for taking responsibility for the misconducts during the wars of the 1990s have been brought to the fore by the civil society, the Serbian governments never took full, or even partial, responsibility for their part in these wars, consistently refusing to engage in any publicly transparent reckoning with the past. This is in spite of the fact that, as a part of the democratization processes, the international community conditioned Serbia’s financial well-being and its candidacy for the EU on facing up to the nation’s criminal past. While Serbia did eventually collaborate with the International Criminal Tribune for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and extradited many of its key figures, the process of facing its criminal past was viewed as not only prohibitively expensive, but also politically undesirable, as it would alienate huge segments of society. Those likely to feel aggrieved by

any such public reckoning include not only those who participated first-hand in the wars, but also the wider layers of society who supported the Milošević regime. The vast majority of the population wished to mourn over the lost wars that were perceived by Serbians in general as being righteous. Due to this polarization of Serbian society, all Serbian governments, from the very beginning (including that of the assassinated president Djindjić), have looked for ways to silence any public debate regarding the wars of the 1990s, rather than accept any responsibility. It was deemed preferable to close political spaces in order to avoid publicly dealing with the past, rather than to take potential politically-damaging risks by openly confronting vast segments of the society.

This silent vacuum was a product of an intentional blurring of the links between the state and the army during the wars of the 1990s, as well as a distortion of individual responsibilities and political aspirations. For the past 15 years in Serbia, there has been a tendency to blame the atrocities, allegedly committed by Serbia, on the paramilitary formations, as if it had nothing to do with official Serbian policy. However, it has been shown, predominantly through the work of legal bodies such as the ICTY, investigative journalism and research conducted by certain NGOs, that nearly all paramilitary units not only actively combined forces and cooperated with the Milošević regime, but also were formed under the regime’s sponsorship. Moreover, the regime and the political elite made “deals” with these units by having specific rules; for example, paramilitary units were to go in first and “clean” the area (kill, burn and plunder), and only then the official Yugoslav army was to come in and annex the territories. This, however, has never been publicly acknowledged by any Serbian government to this day. This is, among other things, a direct result of the fact that the majority of the current leadership has already held some decision making position during the wars.

But how did the ruling political elites succeed over time in closing political spaces, preventing any new political actors from entering them, and thereby avoiding any significant dealing with the past? In particular, how did they manage to silence the veteran population that represents close to 10% of Serbia’s entire population? This question becomes especially relevant when bearing in mind that the participants of the wars, such as veterans, refugees or witnesses of atrocities, represent an inevitable factor in the post-war reconstruction period as mnemonic groups, and that national “recovery” cannot be completed without addressing the suffering they have endured in past wars. Thus in many senses, gaining control over the veteran population was a crucial step in achieving control over political spaces, where any public reckoning with the past might be possible.

19 This, however, does not claim ideological homogeneity of the ruling political elites; rather, it suggests that different ideological approaches were blended into a mutually accepted decision to obfuscate the role of Serbia and its responsibility for the crimes conducted during the 1990s wars. Some politicians and smaller political parties did try to implement, at least partially, the idea of acknowledging Serbia’s responsibility (such as LDP), but their influence was marginal.
20 Particularly the Humanitarian Law Center.
21 Gordy, Guilt, 143.
The situation in Serbia regarding the war veterans is drastically different from that in Croatia or any of the Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) entities. According to a World Bank Study\textsuperscript{22} on Veterans in Bosnia, there are over 202,000 direct beneficiaries of current veterans’ programs in the two entities of the country, and if one considers extended family members at least one-third of the population is directly affected by veterans’ affairs. According to data from the Registry of Veterans Affairs and the Census in 2011 of the Central Bureau of Statistics in Croatia, the defenders/war veterans make up about 11% of total population. In Serbia it has been estimated that the veteran population from the wars of the 1990s numbers somewhere between 400,000 to 800,000 people.\textsuperscript{23} According to the Centre for War Trauma in Novi Sad, about 15% of Serbia’s male population are veterans of the ex-Yugoslav wars. The centre estimated that the overall number of people recruited in Serbia alone during the wars of the 1990s was around 700,000, with at least 10,000 combatants who fought in the various paramilitary units.\textsuperscript{24} The exact number is unknown, and while certain lists exist, they are incomplete and secretive. However, while in Croatia and both BiH entities (Republika Srpska and Federation of BiH) war veterans have been in many ways a privileged segment of population, and occupy a special place in collective memory, in Serbia that is not the case.

This is not only due to the fact that Serbia lost those wars and “there are no spoils to share”\textsuperscript{25} but also because the formal policy line regarding the wars is that Serbia never officially participated in them; this contention is further supported by terminology from the Milošević regime, saying those wars were de facto just “manoeuvres”, “armed conflicts” or “military exercises”. It is this stand, held by the ruling political elites, which has enabled a series of additional tactical decisions to be taken – all of which were meant to hinder the veteran population from organizing themselves around a unified meta-narrative on the nature of Serbia’s participation in the 1990s wars. There has been no official narrative whatsoever, especially when trying to understand how Serbia is positioned in relation to the five discrepant wars/armed struggles of the 1990s (i.e. in Slovenia, Croatia, BiH, Kosovo and the NATO bombardment). On the contrary, the post 2000 ruling elite, coming from a variety of political parties, often has used “it belonged to different regime” excuses to escape from taking any direct responsibility for the wars. Apart from sporadic state apologies, which were also highly instrumentalized,\textsuperscript{26} even the ICTY decisions were used to individualize blame rather than to face the national criminal past.

\textsuperscript{23} Numbers vary greatly and are a contested topic, since there is no official institution that has systematically collected data on veterans and related populations. There is no exact number of people, neither of those officially recruited nor volunteers who belonged to various paramilitary units, nor even the wounded or dead.
\textsuperscript{24} Beara, Vladan / Miljanović, Predrag and Boris, Popov. 2004. Zašto uopšte pomagati ratnim veteranima? Pojedinačni projekti u vezi istine i pomirenja u bivšoj Jugoslaviji i svetu. DoiSerbia 7(4), 47-49, 47.
Thus, forging a common collective memory project, that is not backed-up by the state, has proved impossible. This fact is clearly apparent in the tremendous number of different veterans’ unions existing. Indeed, for example, in the Belgrade municipality alone, more than 60 such organizations operate simultaneously. Currently, there are 22/24/25/40/50 organizations – depending on who is being asked – that are operating at the state, municipality and district levels. There are many more who are active on the municipality or district levels alone, which means that a few hundred organizations related to the previous wars currently have or have had, at some point, some membership and activity. The diversity between the groups is enormous, with each organization being defined by any one of a number of different unifying criteria, such as the fighters’ common origins (from the Krajina region, northern Herzegovina...), common battlefields (Slovenia, Kosovo...), belonging to a particular paramilitary or army unit (Yugoslav army, Scorpions...), a common status (invalids, families of deceased, missing, wounded...) and so on. The list is almost endless, and includes very different and sometimes even opposing agendas. Notwithstanding this, each different positioning means first and foremost a different veterans’ perception of what happened in the wars of the 1990s. It would be correct to argue that all Serbs fought for their homeland, yet apparently it was not clear to anyone what that homeland was: was it Yugoslavia or Serbia, and if so – in which borders? Some were forcibly conscripted, while some were already serving in the Yugoslavian military at the time of the wars, and were certain that they were defending the integrity of Yugoslavia. Some saw the wars as a direct threat to Serbianism, and enlisted in the sacred wars in the name of “The Great Serbia”; and some exploited the chaos so as to increase their personal wealth, symbolic or material, through theft, shows of force and dubious businesses. For example, a Serbian who lived and fought in Bosnia had nothing in common with a reserve soldier from Serbia conscripted against his will to fight in Croatia, or with a Serbian policeman who fought in Kosovo, or with “weekend warriors”. All ultimately fought under the banner of “Serbian fighters”, and it is precisely here that the difficulty lies when trying to understand what Serbia was fighting for during the wars of the 1990s.

It is crucial to understand the utmost importance of these veteran organizations, against the backdrop of the war veterans’ ongoing struggle to recover their post-war lives, in the prevailing atmosphere of tacit or open hatred toward them. While in Croatia and BiH veterans are not only provided with a wide range of benefits and privileges and are in possession of significant political power, but also enjoy status of heroes; in Serbia the veteran population is generally neglected by society and typically lives in harsh material conditions, deprived of any social status and positive attitude towards

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27 Various numbers were mentioned: the President of the Army War Veteran claimed there are 22/24 state financed organizations while his Vice President talked about 40, the President of the Fighters of the Wars of the 1990s mentioned 25, the President of the Serbian War Veterans spoke of 50 such organizations; but they all claimed they ‘knew’ the exact numbers.

28 This expression describes volunteer fighters from Serbia who committed acts of theft as well as war crimes, and essentially went to ‘fight’ in order to return with the spoils of war.

its members. Additionally, “without being properly heard”\textsuperscript{30}, the ICTY was determining and re-writing their role in the wars of the 1990s, creating open animosities among the wider society who continued to put blame on the veterans. Thus it is not surprising that in Serbia of today, the frustration of veteran populations, feelings of injustice and deception, are all directed toward the state and not towards the ethnic groups they were fighting during the wars of the 1990s.\textsuperscript{31} Thus for many, the veteran unions are their last resource and refuge for addressing their financial and emotional problems.

**Fragmentation and silencing of the veteran population: “Per Diem Affair” as the last resource of legitimate representations channels**

Praising veterans of lost wars is neither popular nor economically rational. Though many of the members of the ruling political elite themselves participated the wars of the 1990s, ironically, political calculations, economic depression and social instability were at the root of the political elite’s strategic decision to invest its resources in mechanisms that help closing political spaces for new political actors, as the best possible solution for dealing with Serbia’s contested past. All governments have employed various techniques in order to disassociate themselves from these veterans and to belittle their potential united power. Not only did the ruling Serbian elites refuse to frame a unified narrative that could gather all war veterans under one umbrella organization, but they also actively encouraged veterans’ fragmentation to suppress their potential political influence and power. The most effective way of doing so was found to be through allocating different rights and privileges to different groups of veterans according to the place and time of their operations, thereby further fragmenting the veteran population.

After the wars, the Law on Rights of Veterans, War Invalids and Families of the Fallen Soldiers, from 1998 (amended in 2000 and 2005), was found to rapidly become outdated and insufficient. According to this law, veterans eligible for benefits are: “the Serbian and Montenegrin soldiers who participated in the wars between 1912 to 1918”; “participants in the anti-fascist struggle in WWII in the allied troops and the participants of the army of the Yugoslav kingdom”, “the participants at their army duty during the armed attacks after 17 August 1990” and “soldiers on duty that participated in any activity for purposes of defending sovereignty, territory and independence of the Federal Yugoslav Republic.”\textsuperscript{32} Though certain privileges were statutory, in practice the veteran population had to face enormous bureaucratic difficulties even to get registered with the appropriate status. There is no official body in charge of records of those who fought in the wars of the 1990s, and a significant part of the veteran population were also refugees or internally displaced persons, with these factors posing additional challenges to claiming veterans’ rights. Though obvious differences between the war veterans and the ruling elites exist in both Croatia and Bosnia, veterans there provide a crucial

\textsuperscript{30} This perception was a general grievance in many of the interviews I conducted.


\textsuperscript{32} “Zakon o osnivnim pravima boraca, vojnih invalida i porodica palih boraca”, Službeni list SRJ br. 24/98, 29/98, 25/00, 101/05.
category of forging ethnic identities. In Serbia, however, the treatment of the veteran population mostly depended upon the good will of the political structures and of the bureaucrats at the local level. The veterans were often dependent upon the sympathy of local politicians, or upon the self-interest of these politicians who may be induced to act out of the hope of gaining the veterans’ votes. For example, in Belgrade and nowhere else, veterans succeeded in receiving a permanent reduction of 50% for communalities expenses. However, also within Belgrade itself, there are significant differences between various municipality districts in the attitude of the local government toward veterans; only in the Ćukarica district, for instance, do veterans receive financial support on an annual basis, as this has been pre-planned in their budget.

While some districts have shown willingness to support veteran unions, others ignored and obstructed them; nevertheless, the most common attitude was simply not to interfere. This is overtly evident not only in the illegal erection of monuments and memory plaques across both urban and rural spaces, but also in the construction of illegal facilities, where, regardless of the nature of the relationship between the local political structures and the veterans, the local governments preferred to look the other way and avoid any direct confrontation.

While it is true that the veteran population has succeeded in receiving some privileges over the years, these were all conditional upon them keeping publicly silent, thus disabling their representation in any political space. Many of the war veteran informants testified that they had to avoid any encounter with the press in return for these social privileges. Veteran union representatives said that when facing the state, they were frequently offered certain personal benefits in return for “shutting down the protests and avoiding the press”, “directing their union members to vote for certain political parties/figures” etc. The President of Army War Invalids has illustrated this policy of purposeful silencing of the veteran populations, by stating that in 2003, the veterans’ representatives made an agreement with Gordana Matković the General Advisor of the former President of Serbia, Boris Tadić to receive financial support in return for avoiding any public appearances.

The best example of the deliberate fragmentation and silencing of the veteran population, which also best illustrates both the war veterans’ demand for the legitimization of their agenda and their silencing and removal from all political spaces, is to be found in the affair over per diem disbursement for the participation in the wars. After war veterans had engaged in years of unsuccessful protesting in their attempts to achieve social privileges, the “Per

34 Alimpić, Deputy Mayor, interview.
35 As opposed to, for example, the Bosnian veterans who enjoyed the increment of the budgetary spending each year. See more in OSCE OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (2012) The Right to Social Protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Concerns on Adequacy and Equality. OSCE: Sarajevo.
37 Milošević, Mile. “Serbian War Veterans”, interview conducted on 24 April 2011.
38 Vasiljević, “Army War Invalids”, interview.
“Diem Court Affair” in 2007 triggered some truly unexpected outcomes, inter alia, revealing the dynamics of the political space. This affair brought to light the extent to which the ruling elite had been strategically oppressing the veteran population in order to keep them from entering negotiations over the nature of the 1990s wars. In the southern province of Serbia, two war participants Slavko Maljević and Radomir Jovanović, who also happened to be judges by profession, realized that the best way to achieve their social rights was through suing the state for not paying veterans per diem in the fullest for participating in the armed struggles in Kosovo in 1999. Since none of the state army representatives appeared at court, over the course of several months, those two veterans, followed by another 40 of their close friends and relatives, won their cases and were granted serious sums of money. Though they had no intention of representing a wider veteran population, the state refusal to even acknowledge them proved to be very beneficial. A veteran explains: “He starts bragging in a bar that he won (at the court) and then, suddenly, that was not enough. His wife also suffered emotional damage when he was in the war, and he won again. Now everybody wants to appeal.” As a result, over the following months, there was an avalanche effect, with an additional 2,500 lawsuits having been filed. The sheer quantity of the lawsuits actually made the veterans a visible entity in political space, but after this, all their rights were denied. The Ministry of Defense then annulled all new processes, claiming that “In the previous rulings, there had proved to be serious irregularities and abuses of position, in addition to the fact that the lawsuits could not be placed due to the Statute of Limitations.”

The discontent amongst the veterans was enormous, and they started accusing and blaming each other for the situation. In the rise of the veterans’ struggle for the legitimization of their rights and after four months of strikes, daily blockades of roads and governmental buildings and two weeks of persistent hunger strikes, the veterans from the southern province of Toplice finally succeeded in claiming their right to the same privileges that the judges and their families had received. According to the agreement that was signed on 11 January, 2008 by the Minister of Justice Mirko Cvetković and the Minister of Finance Dušan Petrović, veterans from the seven districts of Toplice province, who had fought in Kosovo in 1999, were to receive financial assistance in six equal installments to the amount of 200,000 Dinars. However, as an additional means of silencing the veterans’ representation in political space, the money was classified as “social welfare support for developing the Toplice province” and not as war compensation. This unexpected victory was explained by the veteran who I interviewed as another trick of the regime’s endemic: “The Tadić campaign was getting closer, then someone suggested – we have an extra 2 millions of Dinars in the budget. Let’s give that money away in the south (of Serbia). We will spread it among those 10,000 veterans, …

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39 Opština Kuršumlija.
40 Around 600,000 Dinars per capita (approximately 6,000 Euros).
41 Vasiljević, “Army War Invalids”, interview.
43 Kuršumlija, Lebane, Bojnik, Žitorađa, Doljevac, Prokuplje and Blice.
44 Around 2,000 Euros.
45 Grujić, Južnjački inat i pare.
and they will vote for us in the coming elections.” Naturally, the veterans from other parts of Serbia saw in this agreement verification of their entitlement to gaining exactly the same benefits. In the course of the next year, veterans’ protests were held all across Serbia. However, neither the blockades in the very center of Belgrade nor the hunger strikes brought about the desired results. Excuses, prolongations and promises were all frequently used as part of the strategic fragmentation, while constantly depriving the veterans of any political power. For the Serbian government, these were just minor headaches. As the protests lacked size, partly due to the freezing temperatures, these attempts failed to bring about any serious results. Their representation was denied, with media coverage being very sporadic and didn’t produce any empathy. It seemed as though the protests were taking place on the very margins of society; not only did no one care, but the veterans were also openly mocked: “That Milošević gang is allegedly having a hunger strike, but they actually just hang around, eat and make noise.” After a series of promises, and even a governmental decision from April 2008 to pass a statute that would systematically address the problem, in practice nothing happened, and the appointed committee in charge of formulating the statute was never actually convened. Numerous explanations were offered as to why the government was not meeting the veterans’ demands. The Serbian Prime Minister stated that the problem lies in the fact that the reimbursement would cost the state “around 120 billion Dinars”, and that “in order to pay out so much money, it would first be necessary to pass a new law”. The Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Policy Miro Čavaljuga said that “if there are no clear criteria for granting the financial assistance to the reservists who were fighting in Kosovo, tomorrow there may naturally appear other reservists who were placed, during that period, in the military bases across Serbia, to ask for the same privileges.”

The prolonged attempts to silence and fragment the veteran population and to ensure that their power remained limited eventually resulted in the unprecedented decision on behalf of the veterans, to file a lawsuit against the Serbian state with the European Court of Human Rights. Following the decision of the Government of Serbia in January 2008 to pay wages to reserves from seven municipalities in the south of Serbia, the outraged reservists brought the case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg on the grounds of discrimination, article 14. According to Attorney Aleksić, while the government referred to these payments as “social welfare support”, they were paid exclusively to wartime reservists who were not asked to show any documentation proving that they belonged to a socially underprivileged category; in addition, the lists for this support were composed solely for the

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46 Vasiljević, “Army War Invalids”, interview.
47 Vasiljević, “Army War Invalids”, interview.
48 Mirko Cvetković.
49 1.200,000 Euros.
50 Grujić, Južnjački inat i pare.
51 The case was filed on behalf of 8,500 reserves, under the name “Vučković and 29 others against Serbia”.
purpose of paying wartime wages. Unexpectedly, on 28 August, 2012, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg ruled in favor of the war veterans and ordered Serbia to ensure the payment of war wages that were not paid to these reservists for their service during the NATO intervention in 1999. The Strasbourg court concluded that the payment of wartime wages to a selected number of municipalities constituted discrimination against reservists from other parts of Serbia. In October 2011, the court had delivered an advisory opinion that Serbia was obliged to facilitate a peaceful settlement of lawsuits relating to the payment of wartime wages by 16 December, 2011. The court then concluded that the failure of the courts in Serbia to act upon a number of lawsuits, which were filed by war veterans claiming wages, constituted a violation of Article 6 Paragraph 1 of the Convention on Human Rights. However, contrary to the war veterans expectations, on 25 March, 2014, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Serbian veterans of the Kosovo war should pursue their cases in Belgrade rather than Strasbourg, arguing that not all legal remedies have yet been exhausted to win compensation for unpaid wartime allowances in their home country, what should be done before taking their case to Europe.

A moral and budgetary hole: The Strasbourg decisions

Although the above decision is a recent one, it has already further deepened the existing gap between the state and the veteran population, showing at the same time how the mechanism of fragmentation has been used to mitigate veterans’ power and marginalize them. The unbearable feeling of the war veterans, who perceive themselves as having been betrayed by the state, was very clear, both in the interviews I have conducted and in the wider literature, which brings forth war veterans’ narratives. “The state is our enemy” and “We are second class citizens in our own country” are some of the most commonly expressed statements, which strongly emphasize the veterans’ frustration with the ways in which the state has treated them since their return from the war. Veterans often stated that: “The state was serving its own interests (during the wars), never the interest of its people, never the interest of the participants of the wars (...). The state imposed the war and the combatants are just cannon fodder, expendable goods, nothing else.” Moreover, such feelings of injustice, abandonment and betrayal are reinforced through the combatants’ perceptions of society’s attitudes toward them. Statements such as: “They see in me a monster, they are afraid of me, they

57 Gojković / Basić and Delić, Ljudi u rata – Ratovanja I, 8.
58 Beara and Miljanović, Gde si bio sine moj?, 109-110.
59 Vasiljević, “Army War Invalids”, interview.
think I’m dangerous to live next to” are often expressed, and reflect the extensively adverse effect of perceived attitudes on all war veterans. One of my informants told me the following story, saying that occurrences like it “happen all the time”. He said that “every time a war invalid goes to the Veteran Administration Office, the clerk lady hates you pathologically for no reason, she sees that you receive state money, more money than her, and she hates you – and she is supposed to help you, to give you information, a service”. Regardless of the differences in their motivations for joining the war, the manner of their participation or its duration, upon their return, the veterans were all faced with animosity and even hatred from the wider Serbian society. Society is not perceived as a source of support, but rather a source of further alienation: “Society does not appreciate the fact that we went to war. Now they mock us at the pub. They keep harassing us: Where are you warriors? Where are you heroes, where are you robbers?” Even the Human Rights NGO sector often treat war veterans as part of the problem, passively or actively promoting highly negative images of the entire veteran population. In return, the Human Right NGO sector is widely perceived by the veteran population as “collaborators with the West” and “foreign mercenaries.” “Most of those NGO organizations try to prove that the Serbs are guilty, that the veterans are guilty, in order to justify the NATO aggression, banishment of the Serbs, unification of the Republika Srpska with Bosnia, to justify the Kosovo secession.” The president of “Association of the Families of Soldiers who Died in the Line of Duty During the 1990-1999 Wars of the Republic of Serbia”, mentioned the RECOM project – the civil initiative to promote truth on the wars of the 1990s. In his words: “Yes, they (RECOM) called us. I would go to Nataša Kandić but I am afraid the families of the fallen fighters will hang her. They spent half million Euros per year! What truth? Whose truth?”

This double neglect, both from the state and from the wider civil society, and their inability to create an effective representation in political space, is also a core reason why the international and domestic trials did not, except in the high profile cases, enable the framing of war veterans in Serbia as “heroes”. While in both Bosnian entities and in Croatia, veterans are used to promote master-commemorative narratives and foundation myths, in Serbia, they are pushed aside as “unfit” for the current political aspirations. This is by no means to say that the veterans in Serbia have no support on the ground but those voices are also marginalized, de-contextualized and set on the outskirts of the public discourse.

The absurdity is that though different veteran groups support a wide range of ideological agendas; their solitude and overwhelming feeling of betrayal by the state and society; provide them with fertile ground for creating a commonly

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60 As it is greatly elaborated in Beara and Miljanović.
61 Vasiljević, “Army War Invalids”, interview.
62 Beara and Miljanović, Gde si bio?
63 Those expressions were often used to describe the most influential Serbian NGOs, especially Humanitarian Law Center.
64 Vasiljević, “Army War Invalids”, interview.
65 The leader of the human rights fighters and the RECOM founder.
67 David, Dealing with.
shared social narrative of suffering. This is precisely where an understanding of political space helps us in defining the shared identity, when some social groups are excluded from the national community. Thus, though the appeal to the Strasbourg court finally brought the veterans together, and the results were to some degree in favor of promoting war veterans’ rights, it actually intensified the process of their alienation from the state and from wide parts of society. The war veterans lost this court round, the Strasbourg court decision labeled them as the official burden to society, as in the future, significant sums of money were to be spent on them at the cost of other interest groups.

In addition, and contrary to what might be expected, the Strasbourg court decision did not cause the opening of any political spaces where the national past could be finally publicly addressed. To the contrary, it diminished the possibility of conducting an open debate on the wars of the 1990s, and once again, narrowed the war veterans’ struggle for representation in political space. The decision to harmonize the rights and benefits amongst different veteran groups has only reduced the prism of contested issues of the 1990s wars to finding a legally suitable formula for paying off the veterans. Now, via the encounter between the veterans and the EU, all of the big questions on the role and responsibility of Serbia in the 1990s wars were narrowed down to an “inconvenient hassle” to the state budget, which at this point seems to be unlikely to be ever paid at all. In other words, though war veterans perceived the Strasbourg court decision as a sign of hope, in practice, it further confined the possibilities of collectively debating the contested wars of the 1990s.

The shift in the role of the state
What seemed at the beginning like purposeless and unintentional governmental practices, turned out to be strategic thinking – not always synchronized, but at all times intentional and present. It seems safe to suggest that fragmentation, overtly used by Serbian governments in post-war Serbia, is a strategy of silencing that is meant to mitigate the power of war veterans and disable their representation in the political space. “Silencing” means the closure of political space and the control of public debate. Thus, it seems that the ruling elite “occupied” political spaces in order to maintain control over the narrative of the 1990s wars, and thereby over the role of Serbia within it.

Serbia, like other post-conflict states, or more correctly, their ruling elites, struggles to find ways to deal with the transitional justice mechanisms and with the human rights demands forced upon them by the international community while simultaneously responding to local demands to be acknowledged as the righteous party in the conflict. Caught in between the opposing international and domestic demands and defined by the power-relations with the EU, the ruling political elites in Serbia provided limited or no access to war veterans to political spaces where any open debate on the recent wars could take place. Thus, the role of the state as the main memory promoter, in the process of Europeanization, didn’t disappear but was altered.

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68 My expression.
69 Grinberg, Politics and Violence.
Some researchers, such as Hobsbawm, Hirst and Thompson and Smith argued that the role of nation states in a wider context of globalization and transition, stayed unchanged and that they still have a central function in the propagation of power. Others claimed that the post transitional nation-states no longer function as independent actors and that “their power is substantially limited due to the establishment of international institutions and the rise of transnational organizations.” Kaldor asserted that this has shattered the hegemony of the nation state. I suggest that the particular power relation configuration inevitably alters the “traditional” role of the nation-state but it does not necessarily mean that it also weakens it. The imbalance in power between Serbia and the EU, expressed throughout the processes of Europeanization, forces the post-conflict government to become artful and canny when mediating between external and internal factors. This functional alteration, from being the source of power to becoming a mediator and often a gate keeper explains why memory is often treated as a supplementary source of power. In addition to more traditional sources of power, such as social cohesion, political stability, economical wealth, military capabilities, memory and the representations of the past became increasingly valuable supplies for achieving real and symbolic goals. Thus, in transitional, and more importantly, weak states with troubled pasts, it seems unlikely that the ruling political elites will open political spaces for public negotiation over their contested pasts, mostly as such processes lead to uncertainty, instability and social chaos. Instead, the ruling elites will create, find or adopt mechanisms to promote memory contents that are simultaneously suitable for both international and domestic display, even if it this comes at the expense of whole social segments, such as, for example, the war veterans in Serbia. That is precisely why Gordy, referring to the unwillingness of the Serbian governments to open a political space for the public discussion regarding Serbia’s responsibility for the 1990s wars, rightly coined it “the ongoing persistence of an authoritarian political culture”.

Epilogue
As a response, and in their struggle to open political spaces of representation for their interests and identities, the war veterans tried over years to produce a symbolic language of power that enables articulations of social forces with state authoritative policies. The outcome is that not only are the war veterans, as the most significant mnemonic group, being reduced to a simple “budgetary matter”, but they are completely excluded from the process of reckoning with the past and getting Serbia accountable for the atrocities conducted in the wars. The strategy of fragmentation, transparent in allotting different privileges to different war veteran groups, was part of the government’s effort of resolving not only the high cost problem of Serbian war veterans, but more

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75 Gordy, Guilt, 121.
importantly – that of Serbia’s role in these wars. This was done through a low
cost solution, whereby the government could keep the veterans and the greater
public quiet. Disabling the war veterans from speaking their war-time stories
out loud, enables Serbia to continue blurring the facts, roles and
responsibilities for the atrocities conducted during the wars of the 1990s.76

Grinberg77 pointed out that “once certain marginalized groups have no access
to political space in order to express themselves, and receive no recognition of
their claims, agendas, identities or ideas, they might initiate a movement of
resistance to the oppressing power.” He suggested that once all legitimate
channels of representations are being exploited and closed, massive resistance
and even violence are likely to burst out. Unfortunately, it might be that the
Serbian society is heading just there.

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76 David, Lea. 2014. Mediating international and domestic demands: Mnemonic battles
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Gender and Geopolitics in the Eurovision Song Contest

Introduction

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Introduction: 
Gender and Geopolitics in the Eurovision Song Contest 

Catherine Baker*

Introduction

From the vantage point of the early 1990s, when the end of the Cold War not only inspired the discourses of many Eurovision performances but created opportunities for the map of Eurovision participation itself to significantly expand in a short space of time, neither the scale of the contemporary Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) nor the extent to which a field of “Eurovision research” has developed in cultural studies and its related disciplines would have been recognisable. In 1993, when former Warsaw Pact states began to participate in Eurovision for the first time and Yugoslav successor states started to compete in their own right, the contest remained a one-night-per-year theatrical presentation staged in venues that accommodated, at most, a couple of thousand spectators and with points awarded by expert juries from each participating country. Between 1998 and 2004, Eurovision’s organisers, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), and the national broadcasters responsible for hosting each edition of the contest expanded it into an ever grander spectacle: hosted in arenas before live audiences of 10,000 or more, with (from 2004) a semi-final system enabling every eligible country and broadcaster to participate each year, and with (between 1998 and 2008) points awarded almost entirely on the basis of telephone voting by audiences in each participating state. In research on Eurovision as it stands today, it would almost go without saying that Eurovision and the performances it contains have reflected, communicated and been drawn into narratives of national and European identity which were and are – by their very nature as a nexus between imaginaries of culture and territory – geopolitical.

The expansion of Eurovision in some ways anticipated, in some ways paralleled, and in other ways outpaced a specific set of political, financial and cultural processes in the aftermath of the Cold War which aimed to produce a geopolitical reconfiguration of their own: the expansion of Euro-Atlantic institutions, chief among them the European Union (EU). In June 1993, the same year as Eurovision’s first phase of post-Cold-War expansion, the European Council (the council of EU heads of state) published its “Copenhagen

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Criteria” for the accession of future members, making democratic institutions, the rule of law, human rights, minority rights protections and a market economy prerequisites for any future member states to join the EU. While vague, these criteria set the framework for the policy of “conditionality” that the EU would apply to future membership applications and enabled lobbying on matters including gender equality and LGBT rights to take place at an EU institutional level.1 The most visible symbolic expansion of Eurovision, the introduction of a semi-final in 2004 (meaning that low-scoring countries would no longer be forced to wait a year before participating again), coincided with a landmark in the EU enlargement process even more closely: the accession of Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia took place on 1. May 2004, and that year’s Eurovision semi-final and final were held between 12. and 15. May.

The lists of new members in the two expansions were not an exact match. Malta and Cyprus, the two states outside eastern Europe to be included in the 2004 EU expansion, had started participating in Eurovision in 1971 and 1981 respectively; Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia had all started entering Eurovision in 1993 or 1994, and Latvia in 2000, while the Czech Republic would not start participating until 2007. Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, which also made their Eurovision debuts as sovereign states in 1993,2 plus Romania, which had been part of the 1993 Eurovision preselection process, were still each at varying distances from EU accession in 2004 (with Romania joining in 2007, Croatia in 2013, and Bosnia-Herzegovina signing a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU in 2008 which as of the time of writing had still not come into force).

The 2004 contest was (as I suggest elsewhere) nevertheless wide open to being read, so soon after the celebration of the EU’s expansion, as “Eurovision’s own ‘enlargement’”3 – not least in the context of where that year’s contest and the two previous editions had been held. Under EBU rules, winning the contest gives a broadcaster and country the right to host Eurovision in the following year: the victories of Estonia, Latvia and Turkey in 2001–3 thus led to Eurovision being held in these three countries in 2002–4, and Eurovision’s invitation to viewers to create geopolitical narratives around the staging and performances they see and hear thus turned its lens on each of these countries in turn.

All three countries were part of spaces which throughout the 20th century, and indeed before, had been positioned on the geopolitical margins of Europe by multiple discourses of European identity that employed an “East”/“West”

2 See Andjelic, this issue.
division. Turkey’s opportunity to host the contest in 2004, and thus to temporarily situate Istanbul as the centre from which this performance of European and national identities would emanate, indeed pushed far beyond the EU’s own envisaged boundaries and into the most difficult geopolitical question that the EU of the early 2000s faced (whether and how the prospect of Turkish accession could be accommodated), with the legacies of historical discourses about the European belonging, or otherwise, of Turkey clearly visible in the near background.

In the staging and organisation of all these contests (as one contributor to this issue, Paul Jordan, has already shown for Estonia), and in the responses to them by commentators, journalists and fans, the idea of “Europe” as an imagined geopolitical space that nations could be positioned in relation to was not a static symbol but a resource – something that could be, and frequently was, strategically managed, actively contested and reshaped during the “three minutes” of each song (or longer when a country hosts the contest) in which “a peripherally constructed nation state is literally given centre stage”.

Southeastern Europe in Eurovision Research
The argument that Eurovision is a setting through which states, broadcasters and performers communicate narratives of national identity beyond the nation, to an international audience, recurs throughout the research on Eurovision that by the mid-2000s was beginning to draw together as a subfield of its own in cultural studies. Indeed, many (though not all) of the best-known examples that help to prove that claim come from this very period, when the meanings of belonging to “Europe”, in Eurovision or outside it, were undergoing multiple forms of institutional and cultural renegotiation.

Ivan Raykoff and Robert Deam Tobin’s 2007 edited volume A Song for Europe: Popular Music and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest was the first of several books which sought to draw together multiple researchers’ case studies into a wider argument about Eurovision in international politics and popular culture, and emphasised the importance of historical as well as contemporary

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Eurovision research.\(^8\) Two other edited volumes – one edited by the musicologists Franco Fabbri and Dafni Tragaki, another edited by the performance scholars Karen Fricker and Milija Gluhovic – appeared in 2013.\(^9\) To this, one can add single-author works such as Philip Bohlman’s *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of a New Europe*, in which Eurovision is an important case study,\(^10\) and an ever-growing number of research articles.

Southeastern Europe has contributed both to the collaborative audiovisual text that is the Eurovision Song Contest and to frameworks for critically understanding it. The strategy of using the opportunity of a Eurovision performance to attempt to alter foreign perceptions of a nation was exemplified, Vesna Mikić and Marijana Mitrović have both argued, by the presentation of Serbia-Montenegro’s first Eurovision entry under that name in 2004, Željko Joksimović’s “Lane moje”, which marked Serbia’s “return” to Eurovision after an absence of 12 years and, even in the year of Ruslana and “Wild Dances”, came close to winning Eurovision itself.\(^11\) Joksimović’s embodiment of a modern and gentle Serbian masculinity which could combine elements of (reimagined) folk tradition into a result intelligible through, and appealing to, the conventions of “world music” presentation contributed to an effort on the part of the Serbian broadcaster to reshape foreign images of the country away from the stereotypes perpetuated during the Yugoslav wars.\(^12\)

Three years later, the Serbian representative Marija Šerifović – selected, Shannon Jones and Jelena Subotić argue, as an “attempt to present [Serbia’s] liberal, tolerant and modern face to Europe at a time when the country’s EU application was in jeopardy”\(^13\) – won Eurovision with the ballad “Molitva” (“Prayer”) and a performance that certainly invited a queer subtext even if (with Šerifović not speaking publicly about her sexuality until 2013) it was not yet text. In the meantime, Croatian entries had experimented with similar practices of essentialised/simulated folklore as Ruslana or Joksimović, causing a domestic controversy in 2006 when Severina’s entry claimed to be based on song and dance from the Dinaric highlands and was arranged by Goran Bregović.\(^14\) Bulgaria, befitting or rather building on its position as the country

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\(^8\) Raykoff, Ivan and Robert Deam Tobin. (eds). 2007. *A Song for Europe: Popular Music and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*. Aldershot: Ashgate. For southeastern Europe, see particularly the chapter by Dean Vuletić (on socialist Yugoslavia), as well as those by Alf Björnberg (on ethnicity and folklore), Thomas Solomon and Matthew Gumpert (on Turkey).


\(^12\) Mitrović, “New Face of Serbia”, 174.


where an “international marketing trend” for “Balkan” music in the 1990s world music market had originated, developed a Eurovision niche after 2007 of entries combining folk-style vocals and electronic music, before becoming one of several southeastern European countries that (temporarily?) stopped participating in 2014–15.

A necessary instrument for understanding these strategies and performances, the critique of “self-exoticisation” or “self-orientalisation” in cultural production, also comes from the cultural studies and ethnomusicology of southeastern Europe. Writing in 2001, the film scholar Dina Iordanova pointed to a mode of “voluntary self-exoticism” in 1990s Balkan cinema which, internalising and re-presenting “orientalist” constructions of the Balkans, meant that “the orientalisation of the Balkans cannot be declared a purely Western project”. The relevance of this observation for making sense of self-representation strategies in Eurovision was apparent well before the Romanian singer Elena Gheorghe, participating in what Alexander Kiossev has termed a “Balkan popular (counter) culture” of transnational south-east European pop-folk, sang during her Eurovision entry of 2009 that “the Balkan girls, they like to party like nobody, like nobody” (though on this occasion they also liked to start their weekend not with fruit brandy, as in many other pop-folk representations of “Balkan” hedonism, but “with gin, tonic and lime”).

Towards a Critical and Feminist Geopolitics of Eurovision

All these dynamics can be understood through the lens of “critical geopolitics”, an approach that – as Gerard Toal and Carl Dahlman write with reference to post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina – understands geopolitics as “always a culturally embedded practice operating across networks of power and […] a field of competing political constructions vying to describe the conditions within which states operate and what normative strategy best realizes state and national interests”. Within critical geopolitics, one object of study is the production of “geopolitical cultures”, involving the “borrowing, adapting and reworking [of] available discursive formations in the international arena”. The case studies above, and many others, show that Eurovision has been deeply implicated in these processes.

14 This point is further developed in Baker, *Wild Dances and Dying Wolves*.
18 Toal and Dahlman, *Bosnia Remade*, 11–12.
Yet, following Lorraine Dowler and Joanne Sharp, it is possible to search not just for a critical geopolitics but a feminist geopolitics, that is, “a lens through which the everyday experiences of the disenfranchised can be made more visible”, which moves its understanding of discourse beyond representation into the domain of everyday and embodied social practice.21 In the context of post-Cold-War Europe, Fiona Smith, for instance, used feminist geopolitics to study the “dominant neo-liberal scripts of post-Cold-War restructuring and the tropes of ‘East’ and ‘West’ underpinning reunification” – dynamics, again, in which the Eurovision Song Contest is embedded – by analysing narratives of women in post-reunification eastern Germany about the state and the politics of childcare.22 With these directions in mind, one can begin to ask: what would a feminist geopolitics, not just a critical geopolitics, of Eurovision look like?

Gender, clearly, would be at the centre of such an analysis – taking account both of the multiple masculinities and femininities that have been performed on Eurovision stages in the contest’s many musical dramatisations of national and European belonging, and of the way in which attitudes to gender equality and “LGBT” rights became constructed as indicators of a country’s relationship to an imagined “Europe” or an imagined “West” in post-Cold-War international politics, producing the set of discursive practices that Éric Fassin has referred to as “sexual democracy” and Jasbir Puar, even more critically, as “homonationalism”.23 Understanding these latter dynamics at Eurovision requires attention not only to the politics of what is represented on stage but also analysis of the backstage politics within which Eurovision contests are hosted and organised – the framework through which Milija Gluhovic, for instance, evaluates the “tension over gender/sexuality versus cultural/religious identity in the service of a more progressive image of Europe” that surrounded human rights organisations’ campaigns on the issue of LGBT rights in Azerbaijan when Eurovision was held in Baku in 2012.24

Also at its centre, however, would be inequality and marginalisation as objects of analysis in their own right (and as dynamics to be overcome, not just critiqued).25 Eurovision as an institution exists within international asymmetries of power and also – or so a feminist geopolitics might hypothesise – is likely to contribute to them, even perhaps to create asymmetries of its own. The account of 1993 as a moment of postsocialist European integration given at the beginning of this introduction, for instance, would be incomplete if it did not recognise that, while the EBU was happy to begin welcoming new states into its space of performance, it was not prepared to accommodate them all at once; the new participant broadcasters in 1993 first had to qualify through a

25 Dowler and Sharp, A Feminist Geopolitics?, 166.
preselection event, held in Ljubljana, where Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia were successful but Estonia, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia were not.

Eurovision organisers, indeed, continued to find it (or construct it as) difficult to accommodate the increased number of entrants into the format between 1994 and 2003 (on the grounds that thirty-plus entries would be too many for a one-night show). The initial solution of “relegating” countries with low-scoring track records caused tensions when the broadcasters of two countries that made large financial contributions to the costs of Eurovision (Germany and Italy) were not allowed to participate in Eurovision 1996 after their songs’ poor results in 1995. The rules were changed in 2000 so that France, Germany, Spain and the UK (as the four largest financial contributors to the contest) would automatically qualify for the Eurovision final every year. Even once the semi-final format of 2004 onwards allowed every interested broadcaster to send an entry every year, the automatic entry to the final of the so-called ‘Big Four’ remained, with Italy receiving the same privilege once it began entering again in 2011.

Meanwhile, the participants in or on the margins of the region constructed as eastern Europe which recorded such successful results in the contests of 2001–8 – won by, respectively, Estonia, Latvia, Turkey, Ukraine, Greece, Finland, Serbia and Russia – were commonly perceived in western European media, reportedly even by some broadcasters, as having won their victories through ‘bloc’ or ‘political’ voting (the subject of an on-air diatribe by the then BBC Eurovision commentator, Terry Wogan, after Russia’s victory in 2008). The 2009 change to the voting format (so that points would now be given 50% on the basis of public voting and 50% on an expert jury again), followed by two successive wins for Northern/Western European states (Norway in 2009 and Germany in 2010) could persuasively signify (perhaps to the EBU’s relief) “that the Eurovision song [had] returned from one region in Europe to another” – at least until Azerbaijan’s victory in 2011 took Eurovision to Baku. The very structure of participation in Eurovision thus created a geopolitics of asymmetry based on disparities of economic power, with the conditionality of the acceptance of Europe’s southern and eastern peripheries never very far away. Here, however, one is still talking (albeit with some backstage context) about what ends up being seen on screen. An even deeper critical lens on Eurovision would interrogate it in the same way as critical studies of its fellow “mega-events” such as the Olympic Games – an international event which is also the subject of its own (indeed a larger) academic subfield, but where researchers have emphasised structural and material perspectives just as much as the


“front-stage” action of the event.\textsuperscript{29} Olympics research includes studies of the international politics of representing the home nation,\textsuperscript{30} and indeed even some studies of sport as – gendered and ethnicised – performance,\textsuperscript{31} but also foregrounds the politics of space, security and exclusion far more than most research on Eurovision.\textsuperscript{32}

The contests of 2008 (in Belgrade), 2009 (in Moscow) and 2012 (in Baku), however, created a public agenda around these questions for the first time, through discourses that placed state treatment of sexual and gender diversity under particular scrutiny: from the question-marks over the safety of foreign gay tourists at Eurovision 2008 in Belgrade after the far-right attack on Belgrade’s first Pride march in 2001,\textsuperscript{28} through the violent repression of a Pride march by Moscow police on the day of the Eurovision final in 2009, into the campaigns that sought to draw attention to compulsory urban clearance, arrests of opposition activists and state homophobia ahead of Eurovision 2012 in Baku.\textsuperscript{34} Like the International Olympics Committee (IOC) at Beijing 2008, the EBU in both 2009 and 2012 stood accused by its critics of complicity with the national promotional strategies of authoritarian regimes.

Indeed, discourses about Eurovision and the Olympics not only paralleled each other but converged. For instance, Wogan’s successor as BBC commentator,
Graham Norton, referred to Moscow 2009 as “the Beijing Olympics of Eurovision” while discussing the fate of the Pride march on air; the liberal fantasies of Conchita Wurst winning Eurovision as an act of defiance against, specifically, Putin’s Russia unfolded only a few months after the Sochi Winter Olympics, which had themselves been an occasion for imagining an inherently LGBT-tolerant west and a Russia that just as inherently was nothing of the kind. This Eurovision/Olympics convergence can lead us through and perhaps even beyond the discursive to enable Eurovision researchers to pose questions of security, policing and power: even if it took Moscow or Baku to make them enter the agenda, they deserve to stay part of it even in years when Eurovision host sites might be, on the face of things, much less problematised.

Eurovision after the Mid-2000s: the Politics of Expansion and Crisis

Eurovision research is a field that – significantly – coalesced in the mid-2000s at a moment of apparent growth, when narratives about the expansion of the Eurovision Song Contest and the expansion of the borders and prosperity of Europe could comfortably feed off and into each other. By 2013, on the other hand, it was more than apparent that, as Karen Fricker and Milija Gluhovic noted in their introduction to Performing the “New” Europe, “the utopic hopes of European unity following on from 1989 have not materialized”.

As of 2013, following the global financial crisis of 2008, this was primarily the case in economic terms; in 2014, however, this crisis was joined by the diplomatic and military repercussions of the Russian annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Both developments invited reconfigurations of the meanings of “European” belonging and therefore reconstructions of the geopolitical imaginaries through which the Eurovision of the 2000s had been understood.

After 2004, participation in Eurovision was restricted less by organisational limits on the number of entries that could compete but by the financial limits of whether broadcasters judged the costs of participation to be appropriate uses of their budget. These budgets, after 2008, would be reduced by governments recouping the money they had contributed to supporting failing banks, at the same time as the technical and promotional costs of participating in, let alone hosting, Eurovision continued to rise. The tension between the objective of national promotion and the financial liabilities of participation resulted, far more frequently than before 2008, in the decision not to take part: indeed, some of the very countries that had exemplified the “performance of national identity at Eurovision” argument in the 1990s and early/mid-2000s were not participating in the mid-2000s, including Croatia, (absent since 2014), Bosnia-Herzegovina (absent since 2013) and Turkey (absent since 2013). Serbia, absent in 2014, returned in 2015 to a contest which for the first time since 2002 would not feature the country that, perhaps more than any other, had epitomised the national promotional mode of the 2000s: Ukraine.

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35 Jordan, The Eurovision Song Contest, 41.
Commenting on the “reinvigoration” of Eurovision through its 1990s–2000s enlargement, Katrin Sieg has argued plausibly that “[f]or many post-socialist countries, whose relation to Europeanness was ideologically, culturally or geographically tenuous, the ESC has become a stage where they can perform their imagined relationship to Europe as a ‘return home’ or demonstration of affinity”. Yet what sort of “home” would be being “returned” to after 2008, when the idea of Europe as a common political community was badly undermined both by northern European reactions to the bailouts of southern European banks and by attacks on intra-EU freedom of movement that threatened to undermine many EU citizens’ everyday experiences of European integration? With publics in Britain and Germany questioning why their governments were contributing to bailouts and publics in Greece, Spain and Portugal questioning why their governments were submitting to bailout conditions, the EU’s institutional myth of integration and common purpose had not, therefore, overcome power relations within the Union. One of the most revealing Eurovision-related texts from southeastern Europe in the 2010s was not even from Eurovision, but still about it: the 2011 song “Eurosong” by the Bosnian rap collective Dubioza Kolektiv, which – in terms that would certainly not have got past EBU rules against “political” content if the song had in fact been part of any Eurovision selection process – was cast as an address to elites in Germany, Italy, France, Britain and the European Parliament:

If you wanna meet me, Mr Sarkozy
You will have to learn my language, parlez-vous gipsy?
Don’t want to be annoying, please don’t get me wrong
I’m sick of being European just on Eurosong

Even within the constraints of the EBU’s stated ban on “lyrics, speeches, [and] gestures of a political or similar nature” – a rule which, as contributors to this issue confirm, has hardly prevented broadcasters and states using Eurovision for political communication – occasional narratives about the financial crisis have found their way into Eurovision. The Portuguese representatives in 2011, Homens da Luta (pastiching the revolutionary songs of Portugal’s Carnation Revolution period after 1974), had been directly engaged in the “Geração à rasca” ("Desperate Generation") protests by young precarious workers in Portugal before being selected, on a public telephone vote, to represent Portugal at Eurovision (and were thus much more directly connected to the politics of resistance to austerity in Portugal than might have been visible to most of their Eurovision audience). The musician and satirist Rambo Amadeus, representing Montenegro with “Euro neuro” in 2012, was able to bring on stage not only simulated news tickers but also a Trojan horse to illustrate the song’s “monetary break dance”.

37 Sieg, Cosmopolitan Empire, 245–6.
39 Dafni, Introduction, in Empire of Song, edited by Fabbri and Tragaki, 6.
The second new geopolitical narrative with which imaginations of “Europe” in and around Eurovision have had to contend has been the discourse of a supposed “new Cold War” between Russia and the West. As Felix Ciută and Egbert Klinke note in their analysis of German media coverage of the 2006–8 Russian–German gas crisis, the invocation of a “new Cold War” “reproduces the symbolic order [...] embedded in Cold War geopolitics, working with the same binaries that portray the identities of the protagonists and the bonds of interaction, conflict and in/security that structure their relationship: East / West, aggression / defence, authoritarianism / democracy, irrationality / rationality, and politics / economics”. A feminist geopolitics would note that – after years of discourse and policy that have constructed Western nations as sites of “sexual democracy” on one hand and Muslim-majority societies, as well as racialised immigrants and their descendants, as repositories of intolerance on the other – the imaginary of a “new Cold War” also contains a binary based on attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity.

By the mid-2000s, central and eastern Europe in general had already, as Robert Kulpa argues, been positioned “as the European (homophobic) Other in the[se] emerging discourses of ‘homoinclusive EUropean nationhood’”, not least through the framing of several mid-2000s European Parliament resolutions about homophobia. However, the intensification of state homophobia and transphobia in Russia and especially the passage of a federal “anti-homopropaganda” law in June 2013 increasingly led to this framework being applied primarily versus Russia. Not only did many journalists and viewers interpret Eurovision through these discourses, but events at Eurovision produced new moments in which these discursive configurations would be reworked, with the controversies over Moscow 2009 and Baku 2012 followed by the perfect symbolic storm of a bearded drag queen, Conchita Wurst, winning Eurovision in 2014.

Southeastern Europe, in contrast, is not currently near Eurovision’s geopolitical centre of gravity – potentially another sign that the “nation-building citizenship regime”, as Adrijana Zaharijević has described the policies of post-Yugoslav states in the 1990s, might (as Zaharijević suggests) have been replaced by yet another kind of postsocialist citizenship regime based on adapting states and their citizens to the neoliberal order. In this latter relationship between state, nation, media and public there might be less to be gained from the nation-promoting Eurovision strategies of the past. At the same time, however, the proposition that broadcasters and states actively use Eurovision to perform and promote national identity in relation to Europe

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42 Kulpa, Robert. 2014. Western Leveraged Pedagogy of Central and Eastern Europe: Discourses of Homophobia, Tolerance, and Nationhood. *Gender, Place and Culture* 21(4), 431-48, 431. The term “EUropean” appears in the original to denote the centrality of the EU in these discourses: Kulpa, Western Leveraged Pedagogy, 431.
44 See Ulbricht, Sircar and Slootmaeckers, this volume.
within a specific geopolitical and historical context has not completely ceased to be valid for southeastern Europe. Macedonia, which (like Albania) has been competing in Eurovision without a break since 2004, corresponds to it most closely, and in 2013 Macedonian Radio–Television (MRT) even selected an entry which, titled “Imperija” (“Empire”) and performed by Esma Redžepova and Vlatko Lozanoski, would have showcased through its video the grandiose redevelopment and “antiquitisation” of Skopje’s urban space (the so-called “Skopje 2014” project, which drew a line of continuity between the current Macedonian state and ancient Macedonia). Apparently in response to media criticism in Macedonia, MRT withdrew the song less than a fortnight later and replaced it with another song by Esma and Lozano which retained the multilingual Macedonian/Romani nature of the first song but avoided Skopje 2014 associations.

In 2014 itself, on the other hand, MRT stayed well away from the ancient past. Moreover, the fantasy of an eroticised, homosocial Macedonian air force that was presented in the preview video for Tijana Dapčević’s entry “To the sky” – displaying a homoeroticism which was likely drawing not only on the iconic cinematic masculinity of the Top Gun pilot, but also on the homoerotic aesthetic of contemporary post-Yugoslav pop-folk videos directed by Dejan Miličević and others – did not make its way into Tijana’s live performance at Eurovision. The director of the video, Mert Asllani, did, however, carefully arrange the establishing shot of Tijana’s pilot love interest so that the Macedonian flag and EU flag on his uniform could both be seen – a much more subtle geopolitical narrative of Macedonian nationhood than “Imperija” had provided, and certainly not a narrative that met the same reception as “Imperija” had done.

Outside southeastern Europe, too, the potential to communicate specific narratives of collective identity through Eurovision remains – whether applied for transient purposes or as part of a longer-term communicative strategy. The 2014 Polish entry “My Słowanie” (“We Slavs”) by Donatan and Cleo was a “self-consciously ‘Eastern’ and ‘Slavic’” performance, with women in sexualised folk costume miming rural domestic work through sexually suggestive movements. Musically, it resembled south-east European pop-folk in combining “hip-hop

46 Slovenia, likewise, has participated without a break since 2001. Montenegro began competing as an independent country in 2007 and, though absent in 2010–11, has participated in every year since 2012.
beats with Eastern-sounding folk motifs (think accordions and violins), while lyrically it represented a hyper-essentialised association between the Polish nation, Slavic descent, feminine beauty and (hetero)sexuality, implicitly exclusionary of any non-Slavic belonging to the Polish national whole. The Armenian entry of 2015, meanwhile, had to be interpreted in the context of the Armenian state’s long-term commemorative strategy to ensure international remembrance of the centenary of the Armenian Genocide – drawing the Eurovision Song Contest into the international politics of genocide recognition even though the songwriting team only described the song’s message in the vaguest possible terms as relating to universal “values of love and peace” over time.

The group of Armenian singers assembled for the 2015 contest, known as Genealogy, contained five musicians from the Armenian diaspora in different continents plus a sixth (Inga Arshakian, who had also been part of the Armenian entry in 2009 with her sister Anush) who still lived in Armenia. The song was initially titled “Don’t Deny” and its video, released in March 2015, depicted the singers both in present-day and sepia-toned early-20th-century settings (during the song’s instrumental break, as traditional Armenian stringed instruments play, the room where the sepia family photographs are being taken is suddenly seen with empty chairs). Although the Armenian broadcaster later changed the song’s title to “Face the Shadow”, its chorus (still based around the phrase “don’t deny”) and video still enabled it to stand as part of a much larger, state-led initiative that was able to use nation-branding techniques to campaign against genocide denial. However these aims were going to be fulfilled in live performance, the Armenian example showed that Eurovision, in some cases, was continuing to be the “valuable stage for conducting everyday politics among European nations as a form of state identity branding and status signalling” that it had very visibly become by the 2000s (and perhaps had always been).

In other cases, however, that value was no longer so self-evident, making the geopolitical space imagined by Eurovision’s organisers appear – at least in 2015 – as even more of an abstraction than the idea of “Europe” would be itself. The “bridge” being built to Australia (as per the 2015 contest’s slogan “Building Bridges”), which would send an entry in 2015 as a one-off celebration of the 60th contest, was a bridge that passed silently over Ukraine, where the director-general of the national broadcaster NTU stated that war and the high costs of preparing a competitive Eurovision performance meant that (reportedly for only one year) Ukraine was unable to take part: “We understand

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52 Eurovision was not the only site at which the Armenian state integrated transnational showbusiness into this campaign: in April 2015 the government also co-operated with a visit by the US celebrities Khloe and Kim Kardashian (as well as Kim’s husband Kanye West and their daughter North), who were able to meet the Armenian prime minister Hovik Abrahamyan as well as lay flowers at the Armenian Genocide Memorial Complex in Yerevan.


55 Jones and Subotić, *Fantasies of Power*, 544.
that Eurovision is a prestige contest. But we have no right to make a bad performance. And we have no money for a good one”.  

The papers in this issue explore different dimensions of the contradictions between frontstage and backstage, between representation and materiality, at various historical moments since the end of the Cold War, when Eurovision expanded to accommodate a much greater amount of southeastern European participation than it had done in 1961–92 when its only participant from the region was Yugoslavia. Approaching the nexus of gender and geopolitics at Eurovision from various disciplinary and methodological standpoints, they all demonstrate that as apolitical as Eurovision organisers and many participants may state the contest is – indeed, as depoliticised as Eurovision organisers might sometimes appear to strive to make it – the structure of Eurovision as a musical competition between nations makes it impossible to exclude politics from the event. Neven Andjelić’s paper sets what quickly became a well-known moment in Eurovision history, the 1993 entry from Bosnia-Herzegovina selected and performed while the siege of Sarajevo was still ongoing, in the context of the Yugoslav and Bosnian music industries and the politics of Eurovision in the early 1990s. Paul Jordan, in another interview-based study, documents the complexities of national identification behind four significant Eurovision entries from Ukraine since 2004, showing the extent to which representations and essentialisations of the nation are actively produced – and contested.

The other two papers explore political and media discourses to show some of the routes through which Eurovision has contributed to contemporary geopolitical visions that hierarchically re-imagine a “West” and “East” supposedly divided by attitudes to sexuality and gender identity. Jessica Carniel’s case studies include two Eurovision kisses between women (or rather one, between Krista Siegfrids and a backing vocalist in Eurovision 2013, which actually took place, and another much-anticipated kiss, between the members of t.A.T.u. in 2003, which ultimately did not), as well as the politics of state homophobia in Azerbaijan. Finally, Alexej Ulbricht, Indraneel Sircar and Koen Slootmaeckers compare voting patterns and media discourses in the 2007 and 2014 contests, both of whose winners – Marija Šerifović and Conchita Wurst – departed from heteronormative conventions of gender expression. Their findings point to some noticeable discursive shifts between 2007 and the present day, but also to discursive continuities. If in 2007 the mainstream tabloid press of Germany and the UK attributed Šerifović’s victory to eastern European “bloc voting” rather than the triumph of tolerance that they projected on to Conchita’s victory in 2014, what might this suggest about developments in geopolitical imaginaries of sexual and gender diversity between then and now? One thing, however, is constant in both their cases: the extent to which a hierarchical “West”/“East” division structures geographical imagination in these two countries, and indeed beyond.

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Conclusion

Eurovision research, now a flourishing subfield of its own, will likely continue to explore its key domains of performance, media discourse and fan cultures whatever changes the contest undergoes from year to year. Within and around these priorities, there is also scope for its lens to continue to widen, following perhaps the agendas mapped out by feminist geopolitics or contemporary Olympics research, but without having to dispense with its recognition of the pleasures of Eurovision as a televisual – and live – event. Current Eurovision research is, indeed, already acknowledging that, as Fricker and Gluhovic write:

*there is a wide discrepancy between a European citizenship proclaimed in official EU discourses and the actual lack of rights experienced by many ethnodiasporas, migrants, and refugees from non-European and Eastern European countries, which raises many questions about the politics of belonging and non-belonging and the cultural identity of the “new” Europe – questions that are vital for the future of the European continent.*

Sustained engagement is therefore necessary with the material and discursive dynamics of exclusion within current and historical imaginations of gender, geopolitics and “Europe”.

Indeed, already Eurovision researchers are interrogating the limits of Eurovision as a multicultural space: Karen Fricker, for instance, argues that Eurovision is demonstrating “positive progress towards a contest that more accurately reflects the mingling of nationalities, ethnicities, and cultural traditions that is the reality of today’s Europe”

*58* whereas Katrin Sieg is less optimistic, suggesting that even the many Eurovision performances by Afro-Europeans since the 1990s (but very rarely before) “obscure more fraught axes of racialized difference prevailing in their respective contexts”

*59* These, as Ioana Szeman notes, include but are not limited to the marginalisation of Roma.

*60* For Sieg, Eurovision still exhibits a lack of examination of “the relationship between contemporary conditions of globalized migration and commerce […] and the colonial past”.

*61* One might, for instance, ask whether it could be conceivable for a Eurovision performance ever to stage the kind of critique that queer and trans people of colour have made of the new sexually diverse nationalism in many European countries, which in this view incorporates gays and lesbians into the nation while putting racialised immigrants under suspicion of not sharing the reframed national values.


*58* Fricker, *It’s Just Not Funny Any More*, 75.


Perhaps it goes without saying that it could not; but, as when anything seems to go without saying, it is always worth thinking through the reasons why.

Eurovision as an institution has always operated with discourses of “bringing Europe together”, in parallel with political discourses of European integration even though institutionally separate. Its geopolitical imaginations of where Europe starts and ends have always been flexible, often expanding, but also subject to fragmentation and absences from within: the contest’s own on-screen maps of Europe, becoming increasingly less “coherent” after 2006 and tending to vanish from screen altogether after 2009, are tantalisingly suggestive of the difficulties of coherently defining this space. At the same time, the show and the event are structurally dependent on performances of cultural differences and thus cannot escape the wider politics of representation within which they unfold. To what extent can Eurovision organisers, Eurovision performers, and participants in cultures around Eurovision reshape the elements of those politics that have silencing and marginalising effects? Maybe the question is still not asked enough; but there is room to try.

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National Promotion and Eurovision:
from Besieged Sarajevo to the
Floodlights of Europe
Research Article

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National Promotion and Eurovision: 
from Besieged Sarajevo to the 
Floodlights of Europe

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The Eurovision Song Contest, as an important part of the entertainment industry, has offered European countries a platform for national promotion. The original format has developed over 60 years and has come under scrutiny and criticism as allegations of block voting, politics and nationalism have been raised. It has also been argued that similarity of cultures, linguistic connections, and close national identities, rather than national interests and politics, are what actually bring countries together in this competition. This study has two focuses in an attempt to determine what role the contest has had for participating countries and how they have used it. The first focus is on analysing historical incidents at the competition when countries have attempted to politicise the contest. The second focus and the main part of the study is a thorough investigation into the organisation of the first Bosnian-Herzegovinian delegation to participate in Eurovision, their escape from besieged Sarajevo and their participation at the contest in Ireland in 1993. After taking into account the history of the contest and the specific case study of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1993, the conclusion is that, although cultural similarities exist, the politics of national promotion do also play an important role in the competition and, in countries sending such entries, actually influences audiences at home towards stronger national pride and self-identification. Therefore, one might argue that the festival has been hijacked from the entertainment industry by political leaderships, especially those that have based their legitimacy on nationalism. Hence the success stories coming from the “New Europe”.

Keywords: Eurovision, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Yugoslavia, Music, Politics, Nationalism, Identity

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Introduction
A perception held by many Eurovision Song Contest commentators is that geopolitics, close relationships between neighboring countries and secret trade deals are in the background of the voting results. The states that used to make up Yugoslavia are frequently mentioned in these terms. Interviews with people who have participated in Eurovision in various roles, however, give the impression that this is not the case: all the interviewees for this paper who were involved in the contest as participants, organizers, jury members, producers or editors claim no or very little connection to politics. The general view among these professionals is that similarity of cultures, close ties between neighboring nations, shared identities and languages are factors that make juries, and indeed people, more likely to vote for each other. Despite this strong opinion, the politicisation of the contest has to be investigated to be able to draw conclusions.

This paper will show whether the professionals involved in the contest are right or possibly unaware of the widespread practice of the political use of Eurovision for the purposes of national self-promotion. The claims of “Eurovision politics” often originate in the west and are supported by bloc voting stating that former Soviet republics offer mutual support to each other. Former Yugoslav countries are another bloc. The fact that all former Yugoslav republics awarded Serbia 12 points when it won the competition in 2007 might support this argument. However, even Albania awarded a point to Serbia on this occasion. Therefore the result might also support the argument that cultural similarities account for neighbors giving each other points. This is not a practice introduced into the competition by “easterners” or the “New Europe”, but one that already existed, as the Scandinavian bloc or the “special relationship” between Greece and Cyprus might confirm.

Considering these facts and arguments, this paper first briefly investigates the history of the Eurovision Song Contest in search of incidents or practices of political involvement or politicised participation in the contest. The second and the main part of the paper is a specific case-study which aims to provide insight and in-depth knowledge of operations within a national Eurovision contest team. The focus is on the participation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1993, using a series of Research interviews providing invaluable material about the background of this participation in particular and the Eurovision Song Contest in general. It is then possible to offer a conclusion about whether competition, participation and voting in Eurovision is actually a reflection of politics or whether it based on norms of cultural similarities and close identity links. It is also possible to draw a conclusion that participation in the competition and voting simultaneously reflect politics and norms of cultural similarities and identity linkages.

The case study presented in this paper is qualitative, based on interviews with members of the delegation from Bosnia-Herzegovina that competed in Eurovision in 1993. The interviewees were speaking with a time-lag of more than two decades, and intervening events have certainly influenced their judgements and memories to some extent. It is possible, however, to draw
certain conclusions based on their interpretations and opinions, whether they are unanimous or even when they disagree on some points.

The members of the first delegation of Bosnia-Herzegovina interviewed for this study have followed very different paths since 1993. Milan Stupar, a long-serving senior music producer at Television of Bosnia-Herzegovina (previously named TV Sarajevo), was the Head of Delegation in 1993. He eventually left Sarajevo and joined his family in Montenegro, where he helped set up a local television station and some festivals in Budva. Ismeta Dervoz, who was behind the idea of joining the competition and getting approval from the bosses of Radio-Television of Bosnia-Herzegovina (RTVBiH), was awarded a “Crystal Star by the Irish Culture Minister and the EBU (European Broadcasting Union) as the best Head of Delegation.”¹ Thus there is a contradiction that the Bosnian delegation actually had two Heads; Stupar was more senior in the hierarchy in Sarajevo, but Dervoz was the real executive behind the whole process. She was also the Bosnian broadcaster’s commentator for Eurovision from this contest onwards. Dervoz had contacts with the Eurovision Song Contest ever since she, with the band Ambasadori, had represented Yugoslavia in 1976. In the meantime she had become a music producer at RTVBiH and was the driving force in getting the country to participate in the contest when Bosnia-Herzegovina gained independence. She followed her professional career with political engagement as a deputy in the state parliament on behalf of the Party for Better Future (Stranka za bolju budućnost).

Muhamed Fazlagić, the lead singer of the Bosnian entry in 1993, had been on the fringes of the Sarajevo music and fashion world prior to the war. He was known among his friends and, by now, fans as Fazla. He later emigrated to the USA, together with his wife Sanda, who had been his girlfriend at the time of the contest in 1993. Fazla, however, remains strongly connected to Bosnia-Herzegovina and was an unsuccessful candidate of the Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina (Stranka za BiH) at the elections in 2014. Erliha Bičakčić, a backing vocalist in 1993, remained in Sarajevo for a long time after the war until she took up a position at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Vesna Andree Zaimović, who subsequently to 1993 would be involved with the Eurovision Song Contest in several capacities, was a pioneer in setting up the “Djeca pjevaju hitove” (“Children are Singing Hits”) competition in besieged Sarajevo, a format which was to be found much later globally in the form of Pop Idol and similar shows. role in 1993, She was later involved in the music world and the Eurovision Song Contest as a journalist, editor, producer, musician, public relations manager, national jury member and jury chair. She resides in Sarajevo and runs a web portal. Fionnuala Sweeney, the presenter of Eurovision 1993, is now one of the leading newscasters at CNN.

Most of the interviewees are long-standing friends of mine while I have known all of them for more than ten years if not twenty. Therefore the interviews could have been conducted in an unorthodox fashion. They were thorough and detailed conversations (by phone, e-mail or Facebook private messages) between people who had full confidence in each other.

¹ Ismeta Dervoz, research interview conducted by e-mail and telephone, 7. January 2015.
Public interest in the domestic politics of Eurovision Song Contest participants is not a novel development. The competition was open to non-democracies from the outset, and in “1961 the first representatives of fascist Spain and communist Yugoslavia shared the stage.” The first Yugoslav participant, Ljiljana Petrović, “later recalled that ‘the appearance of Yugoslavia aroused much interest [...] as the first socialist country at the festival...’” Fazla, commenting on representing Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1993, similarly said: “You become a picture of your own country during this few days and your behavior and act determine whether the judgement about your country is going to be positive or negative.” This statement received an indirect confirmation in 2012 when the German jury’s spokeswoman, Anke Engelke, actually addressed the political system in that year’s host country, Azerbaijan. While delivering the results she said: “Tonight nobody could vote for their own country. But it is good to be able to vote. And it is good to have a choice. Good luck on your journey, Azerbaijan. Europe is watching you.”

The “New Europe” often uses the contest as an opportunity for self-promotion. One BBC producer, for instance, already considered in 2005 that “former Eastern bloc countries saw the contest as a way of gaining visibility, albeit briefly, in the international arena.” Academic authors are of no dissimilar opinion. “While Eurovision is marked by international politics,” argues Dean Vuletić, “it can also be a force in politics too.” This was certainly realized by many nations, and Catherine Baker describes an attitude at Croatian Television that “treated Eurovision as a deliberate site of political and cultural messages about what Croatia was and was not.”

These arguments about politics and the Eurovision Song Contest could be divided into two groups: the first group of arguments are about songs with some political connotations, and the second are about political voting patterns, discreet alliances, praise or criticism of some political issue, and attempts at national promotion. In fact, both kinds of political involvement in the Eurovision Song Contest have a long history. While The Guardian claimed in 2005 that “[o]nly rarely has a song carried a political message: Portugal’s 1974 entry, After Goodbye, was the coded signal to launch a coup against the country’s rightwing dictatorship, and Bosnia-Herzegovina funneled the trauma of war into The Whole World’s Pain in 1993”, this claim was obviously wrong:

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6 Galván Deniz, Eurovision Shows Political Side.
7 Vuletić, The Socialist Star, 97.
the politicisation of the Eurovision Song Contest can be found in songs and what they symbolize and represent, whether this is to the country itself, to other countries in general or to some specific country.

One would struggle to define what a political song is. It usually depends on lyrics but it also depends on interpretation. When Great Britain was at war with Argentina in 1982, for instance, the Spanish entry was a tango melody, and this choice was interpreted as political. The Portuguese Eurovision entry in 1974, though non-political in its lyrics and melody, “was chosen as a signal for the start of that year’s Carnation Revolution.” Ukraine in 2005 and Georgia in 2009 were both told their songs were “too political”. The Eurovision executive supervisor in 2005, Svante Stockselius, described the Ukrainian entry as “a political song so we cannot allow this”, and the song’s lyrics had to be changed. Georgia not only boycotted the competition in Moscow in 2009 after the rejection of its entry “We Don’t Wanna Put In” but went as far as staging an alternative festival, the “AlterVision Open Air Song Contest”. Political messages have also been sent by simple participation or boycotts. “Austria decided to stay at home for political reasons” in 1969 because that year’s host country, Spain, was under the rule of Franco’s dictatorship, while Turkey boycotted, and Yugoslavia also failed to broadcast, the contest held in Israel in 1979. Thus the competition has often had political dynamics, and songs have often carried some political connotations, whether in lyrics, melodies, or contexts that were to be read into the performance. The contest might have been described as “the kitschy extravaganza in which viewers crown the best pop song,” or “the cheesiest, campiest and arguably most ridiculous of all music competitions,” meaning we are considering “the trashiest, splashiest event on the global pop calendar.” However, it was also political.

**Yugoslavia and the Geopolitics of Eurovision in 1990–93**

The Eurovision Song Contest of 1990 took place in a country, Yugoslavia, that was about to dissolve, while many songs celebrated European unification. Only six months earlier, the Berlin Wall had symbolically fallen. In Zagreb, an Austrian song “Keine Mauern mehr” (“No more walls”) came tenth while the Norwegian entry also referenced the end of European divisions with “Brandenburger Tor” (“Brandenburg Gate”) but still came last in the competition. The German entry in 1990, “Frei zu leben” (“Free to live”), comes...
within this group of songs celebrating European unity too. The winning song in 1990 itself strongly reflected current trends in European politics and integration, with a title in Italian, “Insieme: 1992” (“Together: 1992”), lyrics partly in English (“Unite, Unite Europe”) and celebrating the forthcoming European Single Market, Maastricht Treaty and the creation of the European Union. The title of the Yugoslav song, “Hajde da ludujemo” (“Let’s go crazy”) might have been an irony or just an example of how much Yugoslavia was out of touch with current trends in Europe. As Yugoslavia had been participating in the contest for three decades, “Yugoslavia’s distinct Cold War character,” as Vušetić observes, “found expression at Eurovision.” In the early 1990s, this era and character, and indeed the state, were coming to an end.

Geopolitics played an obvious role in the 1990 competition. Yugoslavia, a federation with eight television centres, all state-owned and all having the status of official state broadcasters, had first to decide on the host city. The country’s federal system was reflected in the fact there was no central broadcaster for the whole country and it became clear, once more, that particularistic interests were being placed above the common interest. This was not a unique situation, as the Swiss and Belgian examples (where there are also multiple broadcasters able to participate in Eurovision) are not very dissimilar. Thus the competition was staged in the Croatian capital, Zagreb, because the winning song had come from Croatia in the previous year. The contest was not affected by the growing Yugoslav political crisis but was affected by some technical problems. The main issue was the choice of presenters. Surprisingly, given the ethnic problems in society, the issue was the age of presenters and not their ethnic background.

“The 1990 [Eurovision Song Contest] ESC took place on 5. May, a day after the anniversary of Tito’s death and, coincidentally, on the birthday of Karl Marx; perhaps more meaningful for the time, however, was that it also fell on the Council of Europe’s Europe Day.” In the background, however, were the first ever multiparty democratic elections in Croatia. The second round of the elections was to take place the day after Eurovision and would bring into power the nationalist Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica – HDZ). Its leader, Franjo Tuđman, became notorious for his calculation that five and a half Serbs were editing and presenting the main news on Croatian television. If he had been in power at the time of the Eurovision Song Contest, the ethnicity of presenters might have been an issue.

Yugoslavia survived for another year, and television bosses came up with an interesting solution for choosing a representative for Eurovision in 1991. A kind of “mini-Eurovision” contest was organised in Sarajevo with representatives from each of eight television centres, i.e. federal units. The show was known as “Jugovizija” and the winner was decided by jury votes from each of the republics and provinces. Votes were traded between television

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20 N.N., Eurovision Song Contest 1990.
21 Vušetić, The Socialist Star, 84.
22 Vušetić, The Socialist Star, 94.
centres and did not necessarily reflect political alliances; close business deals between music managers, television producers and members of the juries were of greater importance. Two managers confided in me that they had organised a system that would benefit a particular singer. On this occasion, the singer in question finished very close to the top but did not win the contest, as someone along the line did not respect a pre-agreed voting pattern. “Jugovizija was a competition that replaced a festival where a song was chosen for Eurovision,” Milan Stupar describes. “The voting system was similar to the Eurovision contest. I managed to organise ‘smaller’ centers to vote for each other and stopped domination by Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana. Thus, the voting was agreed but there was no politics in it. It was based on professional interests.”

The winning entry in 1991, however, shows the opposite. The song came from Serbia and was awarded maximum points by the juries from Belgrade (rules allowed juries to vote for their own competitor), Novi Sad and Pristina, with some points awarded by the Montenegrin jury. Thus it reflected political alliances and the situation in Yugoslavia in 1991. One might conclude that both practices – voting based on professional interests and voting based on politics – were actually coexisting at the end of Yugoslavia. The Serbian jury, however, also awarded some points to the Croatian song and to others who were not politically allied to Milosević’s camp. It might have been the case that music managers from Belgrade took advantage of the regime controlling several centres and got their song to win the national competition; this would have meant music using politics to achieve its own aims, and not the other way around. The song, “Brasil” by Bebi Dol, received just one point at the Eurovision Song Contest and thus marked the end of the state.

Yugoslavia dissolved in the same year. Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina eventually became independent states, while Milošević controlled Serbia and Montenegro, retained the name of Yugoslavia, and attempted to continue the legacy of the former state. On a more trivial level, they sent an entry to the 1992 competition as Yugoslavia, while the newly independent countries did not meet the deadline for participation. They were preoccupied with wars on their territories, as Serbia and Montenegro pretended not to have anything to do with these conflicts.

The new Croatian leadership paid attention to state promotion during the war, and under nationalist leadership the songs were carefully chosen to send a message to the outside world. Croatia’s first ever entry was in 1993, alongside two other former Yugoslav states, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Croatian song “Don’t ever cry” was understood as “a rare expression of patriotism in the lyrics of a Eurovision song,” and “an opportunity to propagate a Croatian perspective on the war: Don’t Ever Cry contained an appeal to angels for peace, a prayer for an 18-year-old boy called Ivan and as much English as was then permissible,” and the messages “peace, give us

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24 I was personally involved in the entertainment industry in Yugoslavia and was well aware of these schemes. I am not prepared, however, to produce names or affiliations of the managers in question. They would not go on record with this information as it would be the end of their careers.
25 Milan Stupar, research interview conducted by telephone, 5. January 2015.
26 Vuletić, The Socialist Star, 97.
27 Baker, Sounds of the Borderland, 201.
peace, sky of love” (mir, daj nam ti, daj nam ti nebo ljubavi). The Croatian head of delegation, quoted by Catherine Baker, justified the choice of the song: “It was wartime, every promotion of Croatia in the world was more than welcome.”

Bosnia-Herzegovina in the Eurovision Song Contest 1993

The song representing Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1993 also sent an important message to the world, just by virtue of participating during the war. When the multiethnic country declared independence, its cosmopolitan capital of Sarajevo was put under siege by Bosnian Serbs’ forces in April 1992. Many Serbs left the city and joined the besieging forces but a significant number stayed within the city, together with the Bosniaks, Croats and others who either belonged to minorities or did not belong to any ethnic group. The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the siege of Sarajevo in particular, attracted huge media attention. The citizens’ human suffering, without electricity, water or gas supplies and under almost permanent sniper and rocket fire, received much sympathy from the international community. Although this did not mean support for a particular political system, Sarajevo became a symbol of the multi-culturalism that Europe was embracing. The city was dominated by Bosniak nationalist politicians, but non-Bosniaks were not only tolerated but included in many aspects of life of the besieged city. This did not mean there were no discrimination and crimes against non-Bosniaks, but discrimination was not a general public policy of the government.

At Eurovision in 1993, Muhamed Fazlagić - Fazla sang “Sva bol svijeta” (“All the pain in the world”), clearly a message to the world from the besieged city. The song was heard after more than a year in which Sarajevo had been under an international media spotlight. The stories had been told already, and journalists were searching for new angles to narrate the same tale of the destruction of a European capital city at the end of the twentieth century. Participation in the Eurovision Song Contest provided such an opportunity, and in this context the lyrics of the song worked well.

First, Bosnia-Herzegovina, together with several other post-communist countries, had to qualify. The qualifying competition was held in Ljubljana, and Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the hosts of the pre-selection, Slovenia, proved that previous Yugoslav experience was invaluable as they qualified at the expense of Estonia, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary. Fazla describes a “tense atmosphere” at the pre-selection. “We gave ten points to Croatia. Ksenija Urlicic, the head of the Croatian delegation, insisted on reciprocal voting and the exchange of ten points but she did not honor the word. We voted first and awarded the Croats ten points but they did not give anything to us. They did not want us to qualify.”

This competition had coincided with the beginning of war between Croats and Bosniaks. Many refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina were being rounded up by Croatian authorities and sent back to fight on the side of the Bosnian Croats,

28 Baker, Sounds of the Borderland, 201.
29 Muhamed Fazlagić, research interview conducted on Facebook, 8. January 2015.
while Bosniaks were suffering increasing persecution in Croatia. The voting pattern between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina at the pre-selection clearly reflected politics and war. While officially Croats and Bosniaks were fighting against Serbs together, the reality was that by 1993 it was a war of all against all. In addition it shows a dose of naivety on Bosniaks’ part. Firstly, the delegation in 1993 was not a delegation of Bosniaks but a Bosnian delegation. However, Bosniaks did dominate in the delegation and in the politics of the Sarajevo government. While the policies of Sarajevo government and the army were primarily in the interests of Bosniaks, they also reflected a multiethnic character, if often only in form. The Bosnian delegation, therefore, was more open to regional cooperation. The Croatian delegation, on the other hand, had firm nationalist aims presented to them by their government which firmly controlled national television, and the head of their delegation, Ksenija Urličić, was close to the political leadership of the country.

Ismeta Dervoz also describes “regional cooperation. The head of the Croatian delegation gave Bosnia-Herzegovina zero points. I gave Croatia 10 points. It remained like this for years.” No such “exchange”, however, took place in the final. Bosnians had clearly learnt the lesson from Croats that in war, like in a song competition, everything is allowed in order to achieve one’s aim. The aim was obviously country promotion and drawing global attention to the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The importance of the Eurovision Song Contest is recognized in national broadcasters’ behavior. Croatia had attempted to participate immediately after international recognition in 1992 but was late with the application. Bosnia-Herzegovina was recognised in April 1992 and Ismeta Dervoz “initiated the process of joining the EBU [European Broadcasting Union] which would enable participation at the Eurovision Song Contest.”

A very small team organized the process of selecting the song. Sarajevo was “under siege, radio-television building was semi-destroyed, there was no electricity.” War and the siege are the main features in memories of the Bosnian participants at the competition. “A competition was announced. It was wartime and Sarajevo was under siege. Therefore it was of limited appeal. War atmosphere prevailed. Nothing was like before,” says Milan Stupar, who was to lead the delegation to the ESC in Ireland. “In such an atmosphere,” says Ismeta Dervoz, “it was almost logical the winning song was the one that sent a message [about] what was going on in the heart of Europe.” This firmly connects the competition and national promotion. While Eurovision in politically stable countries might be mainly business, countries experiencing not only turbulent politics but actual violent conflict use the opportunity for self-promotion and to attract attention to their most immediate needs.

Nevertheless, there was the question of how to select a song in the middle of the war. “Authors themselves chose who would sing their songs,” says Dervoz.
The state broadcaster's television signal could not reach even the whole of the territory controlled by government forces. Therefore it was only Sarajevo songwriters who could offer songs for the competition. “It is more a curiosity that one song was delivered from Konjic on VHS tape by channels unknown to anyone.” The contestants reflected the fact Sarajevo was under siege. Communications were cut off. “The invitation was sent by word of mouth to all authors and singers who happened to be in Sarajevo,” explains Dervoz.

Fazla describes how he “was playing billiards when I was told about the contest.” One author offered him a song, but the leading songwriter made another offer, and they entered the competition together instead. “Forty-seven songs were entered. Twelve were chosen by editors at the Television.” Dervoz remembers “eleven songs were in the competition. We broadcast a television show on 27. February. It was minus 17 degrees in the Radio Television building. We will never know how many people actually saw the show.”

Erliha Bičakčić was surprised when Fazla asked her to join the team. “I thought he was joking,” before inquiring “how do you imagine leaving the city?” The only way out was to run across the airport runway, which was controlled by the United Nations forces.

“We did this all to defend our professional and human dignity,” confides Dervoz. “There were no combinations about ethnic backgrounds of participants. Politicians did not understand what we were doing. Most of them thought we did not stand a chance to reach Ljubljana and especially Ireland later.” The winner was decided by a jury made up of television music editors and songwriters. “To cut it short, I won with twice as many votes as the second placed,” Fazla provides the details.

Sarajevo was under siege and mainly without electricity, with no communications to the outside world. “Ham-radio operators helped us to apply for the competition and to contact colleagues abroad,” explains Dervoz. The siege provided another obstacle for the team. The only way out was to run across the airport runway and dodge sniper fire. “The whole team had to run across the airport runway in order to escape the besieged city. We did it at 3 or 4 o’clock in the morning,” describes Milan Stupar. “We took a risk and all eleven members of the team ran across the runway.” Bičakčić also remembers the exit well: “We were attempting to leave for three nights but UNPROFOR [United Nations Protection Force] caught us and returned to the city. Once you are caught, they shower you with lights and you have to throw yourself immediately into mud to avoid sniper fire. We managed to cross to the other side on the third night only.”

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35 Dervoz, interview.
36 Fazlagić, interview.
37 Dervoz, interview.
38 Erliha Bičakčić, research interview conducted by e-mail, 7. January 2015.
39 Dervoz, interview.
40 Dervoz, interview.
41 Stupar, interview.
42 Dervoz, interview.
43 Bičakčić, interview.
“As soon as I stepped into the mud in Dobrinja [a Sarajevo suburb next to the airport], I lost my shoes. Thus I reached Igman (mountain on the outside of the siege of Sarajevo) in February literally barefoot,” Fazla describes the difficulties.\textsuperscript{44} “It took us three days to reach Zagreb,” says Bičakčić.\textsuperscript{45} Dervoz stresses the “lack of financial means, no travel visas. The Embassy [of Bosnia-Herzegovina] in Zagreb took care of us and organized our journey to Ljubljana. [...] Everything that we needed, costumes for singers, money to stay, participation fees, was donated by friends, colleagues, successful citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina from the whole of Europe.”

The team attracted plenty of attention because of the war at home. The ethnic element of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina provided for a not uncommon explanation of the post-Yugoslav wars. This was reflected in questions in Millstreet, where the contest was organized. “There were 20 TV crews waiting for us. We held a press conference immediately. One of the questions was how had it come about that a Serb is the head of the delegation.” Milan Stupar had worked as the “head of music production for 25 years” and “[t]herefore it was normal, pre-assumed I would lead the delegation,” he explained in an interview.\textsuperscript{46} Ismeta Dervoz puts the number of TV and press crews at 70. “The interest in our press conference was unprecedented. The BBC provided coverage of our team in the main news. Everyone was apparently surprised by ‘these cultivated, professional, well prepared, non-aggressive Bosniacs’.”\textsuperscript{47} “All major media companies, including BBC and CNN,” describes Erliha Bičakčić, “broadcast lengthy reports about our team and interviewed all of us. However, they paid special attention to Fazla and Sanda. Their love story was of interest to them.”\textsuperscript{48}

Sanda is not a name that could lead to conclusions about her ethnic belonging, while Fazla’s name Muhamed clearly described him as Bosniak. Regardless of Sanda’s ethnicity, which I refused to ask about, she and Fazla made a good story for international journalists showing this side of multi-culturalism that had been preserved in Sarajevo. This was another way of telling a story about the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina by pointing to youth, their lives and loves, like any other young people anywhere in the world; it was just that they had been caught up in the war. Stereotypes and clichés came forward regardless, and they proved that the West was not immune from similar behavior some of their journalists ascribed to those in the Balkans. “Given the circumstances we came from,” Fazla explains, “it was logical we attracted huge attention from media who were interested in our motives and aims for participating in the Eurosong. I think we articulated the then situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina very well.”\textsuperscript{49} “A French journalist, however, claimed Fazla, being blond-eyed and blond-haired, tall and handsome, was not a Muslim from Bosnia. He said that I certainly lived abroad,” confides Ismeta Dervoz, “because I spoke English and French and wore a mini-skirt.”

\textsuperscript{44} Fazlagić, interview. 
\textsuperscript{45} Bičakčić, interview. 
\textsuperscript{46} Stupar, interview. 
\textsuperscript{47} Dervoz, interview. 
\textsuperscript{48} Bičakčić, interview. 
\textsuperscript{49} Vele, Muhamed Fazlagić Fazla.
Patriotism was certainly part of the mission, as Dervoz concluded: “I realised then that all our efforts came through and we did a great thing for Bosnia-Herzegovina.”56 “We were proud and happy following the show. This feeling I still bear in my heart,” Erliha Bičakčić shows her emotions. “We cried when the connection was established with Sarajevo to get the results of the votes of the jury.”51 “Back in Sarajevo, there was electricity. Thus they watched the show and took pride in our participation,” described Milan Stupar.52 The presenter of the competition, Fionnuala Sweeney, stated during the show: “This was a particularly difficult link that we have been trying to establish whole day but thankfully it came through, just about.”53 Now a leading political journalist at CNN, Sweeney remembers twenty-two years later:

> What stands out in my memory from that night was that when the juries were calling in from their respective countries with their votes, there was a huge round of applause when the Bosnian call came through. The applause was in recognition of the difficulties of trying to get through live from a warzone and also in appreciation that the jury had indeed got through. ... Everybody in the arena that evening welcomed the distant, crackly phone line announcing the votes of the jury in Sarajevo.54

In addition to media attention, everyone showed sympathies for the Bosnian team. The question might be whether this was reflected in the voting patterns. “There were no pre-agreed voting arrangements,” says Stupar. “No cheating. There might have been some votes for Bosnia-Herzegovina out of sympathy but nothing was arranged.”55 Dervoz is of the same opinion, stating “the voting showed there was no regional cooperation.”56 This was shown in Millstreet by “a big round of applause from the audience,” the presenter of the show recalls.57 They showed this kind of appreciation only for those scoring the highest numbers of points. Thus, the question might be: was it political, or just an expression of human appreciation? “Their song had a message in keeping with the times its countrymen and women were experiencing,” remembers Fionnuala Sweeney. “It was also a big moment for them because they had travelled at some risk to get to Ireland to compete in the contest.”58

**Conclusion**

This special appreciation for the Bosnian delegation in Ireland might be described as a human response to the efforts and struggle they had to go through in reaching Millstreet. However, the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina had been making headlines across the world for more than a year and very diverse interpretations and explanations had been offered to viewers. Therefore showing a warm welcome to the team from Sarajevo, the city under siege, was also a political statement of support. The official government side in Sarajevo,
though dominated by the Muslim nationalist Party of Democratic Action (Stranka Demokratske Akcije – SDA), was still multiethnic; the head of delegation immediately attracted questions about his ethnicity, and the media interest in the simple love story of Fazla and his future wife was material deemed interesting enough by the news desk editors of the global media. Even when organizers’ or the audience’s intentions are not strictly political, if they are perceived to be political they become political. There is a reasonable expectation on the organizer and the audience to be aware of the possible political perceptions of participating in Eurovision. It therefore becomes possible to say that participation is a political statement or the competition is used for political purposes: the promotion of a country at the Eurovision Song Contest is a political purpose of participation.

This leads to the renewed question of whether the Eurovision Song Contest is politicised by competitors, national broadcasters and the ordinary public. It is certainly an entertainment, as a former singer, delegation member, head of delegation and chair of the national jury testified.\(^59\) Another former jury member, jury chair, a musician on stage at one contest and PR for the participant at another contest, who has also reported on Eurovision and been an ordinary member of the audience on one occasion, says “it is a huge industry that offers a great chance for success but the team has to come to the competition prepared for exploiting success.”\(^60\) It seems everyone involved professionally is of a similar opinion, as another former music producer with 25 years’ experience argues along the same lines.\(^61\)

Many commentators, those who observe from the outside (which might provide them with objectivity, but also deprive them of inside knowledge), see it as “highly political, albeit flavored with a hefty dose of camp.”\(^62\) Duncan Watts, while on sabbatical in Europe from Columbia University, explained in his *New York Times* column:

> It’s just a game, after all, and the outrageous bias in the voting is as entertaining as the songs themselves. But it does offer an unexpected glimpse of how ordinary Europeans perceive one another. More than anything, it seems, blood is thicker than water, and not just in the Balkans.\(^53\)

Watts saw a “pointed rejection of Western Europe” in the contest’s voting patterns that “might even be seen as a poignant metaphor for contemporary Europe as a whole.”\(^64\) Thus there is more to the competition than pure entertainment.

When it comes to former Yugoslavia, Eurovision has worked as a reconciliation tool “suggesting that memories of war and ethnic cleansing can be set aside with surprising ease when it comes to the serious business of winning a singing contest.”\(^65\) However, one of the leading experts on the competition offers a

\(^{59}\) Dervož, *interview*.

\(^{60}\) Vesna Andree Zaimović, research interview conducted by telephone, 26. December 2014.

\(^{61}\) Stupar, *interview*.

\(^{62}\) Rachel Donadio, *Hamster Wheels*.


\(^{64}\) Watts, *The Politics of Eurovision*.

\(^{65}\) Watts, *The Politics of Eurovision*.
different view. “It was not reconciliation that led to awarding votes to neighbouring countries. It is a reflection of a common cultural space, common language, common media space,” explains Vesna Andree Zaimović. “Pop-Culture is extremely regional. There is mutual identification with a culture that is common. It creates mechanisms of liking.”66 In this view, it is a sincere taste in music and culture that creates voting patterns:

The press in the former Yugoslav countries was of huge importance. It created regional tastes. The tabloid press was read widely across the societies of the former Yugoslavia. It was this tabloid press and women’s magazines that contributed the most to the common media space. Internet came in later.67

Thus one might come to the conclusion that a commonality of cultures, languages, and tastes creates spaces in which similarity of identities is mutually recognized. The Eurovision Song Contest only provides a platform for the public acknowledgement of these recognitions.

This connection to cultures is especially reflected in the system of casting votes by telephone, which has provided the opportunity for three different kinds of votes. Expert juries have been replaced by an exercise in democracy with very few rules. One group of votes reflect people’s voting intentions and support, which nicely references ideals of liberal democracies in post-Cold War Europe. Another kind of voting, meanwhile, came from diasporas, after the forces of globalization, borderless Europe and integration inspired millions to become migrants and move abroad. This vote is partly patriotic when cast for their own country but it is also a sign of reintroduction of self-dignity, of revenge against a new country whose society often did not recognise the skills and qualities of migrants. A Serbian professor or Bosnian television presenter working as a plumber in London does this for financial reasons but often blames the host country for this. “Those who finally crowned their struggle for freedom with victory in Eastern Europe have become almost overnight, losers,” analyses Boris Buden.68 It is the Eurovision Song Contest that provides migrants, “overnight losers” as Buden describes them in a different context, with recognition of their own nation as equal or even better than a west European country.

These voting patterns, however, resulted in votes often ignoring rich nations and the competition’s traditional powerhouses. The rule was therefore changed in 2009 and half of the votes again come from national juries while the “democracy” of tele-voting accounts for another half. The current model of the Eurovision Song Contest is a combination of democratic rules combined with meritocracy based on political-economic power. A minor digression into the end of Communism provides a telling example. Polish communists offered democratic elections in 1989 but preserved an uncontested half of parliamentary seats for themselves. The rule changes at Eurovision have not solved the problem of mysterious results. It has finally been recognized there were some suspicions about the operations of national juries as “allegations

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66 Andree Zaimović, interview.
67 Andree Zaimović, interview.
that oil-rich Azerbaijan [...] trying to buy votes” became too difficult to handle. Since then, the names of jury members have finally become public.69

Not everyone has been happy with the change. “Turkey has sat out Eurovision since 2013 to protest this change, which diluted the power of the Turkish diaspora vote,” claimed Duncan Watts in the New York Times. As an insider and expert, Andree Zaimović, however, explains: “It is expensive to participate. This is based on the number of viewers from each country. Therefore, the more populous the country, the more expensive it is to participate. This is why Turkey stopped their participation.”70 While boycotts of the contest have been political in the past, they have become more often caused by economic reasons over the recent years. Poorer countries, even those with smaller numbers of viewers and therefore responsible for a smaller financial contribution as a Eurovision participant, simply could not afford further participation. This has been the case for Bosnia-Herzegovina and for many countries in the neighboring region.

Finally, the issue of organized voting patterns cannot be ignored. “SIM cards are playing an important role,” Andree Zaimović explains. “It is estimated that only one to two percent of viewers actually vote. Smaller countries award the same number of points as big ones. Thus a couple of hundred of SIM cards can change the voting result of a smaller nation.”71 This usually comes in addition to preparatory efforts prior to the contest. “Regional promotion campaigns are bringing in the votes. It requires investment and it is not necessarily restricted to one region only.”72 “The Eurovision Song Contest is a competition of production teams and machines with enormous resources and means that are necessary for victory,” says Ismeta Dervoz. “Teams of voters are easily organized in countries that participate if one has enough money and teams capable to create an infrastructure.”73

One might conclude that the contest itself might lack quality but is certainly entertaining enough for Europe. There might be differences in perceptions of the competition, and the continent’s division on old and “New Europe” is often reflected in this understandings. “New Europe” tends to give more importance to it as a means of national promotion and national pride. Votes are often given to allies and neighbours but this is not necessarily political; more often it has been a reflection of similarity in cultures. Yet, there is politics in the Eurovision Song Contest, as has been proven throughout its sixty-year history. “It is a job for professionals,” as Ismeta Dervoz stated. “[It is] a huge business. It is a national interest too, of course.”74

70 Andree Zaimović, interview.
71 Andree Zaimović, interview.
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From Ruslana to Gaitana: Performing “Ukrainianness” in the Eurovision Song Contest

Research Article

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From Ruslana to Gaitana: Performing “Ukrainianness” in the Eurovision Song Contest

Paul Jordan*

This article considers how the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) has come to be used as a platform for the politicisation of national identity in Ukraine. Ukraine can be described as an amalgam of regions with different ethno-linguistic, economic, cultural and political profiles. The rhetoric concerning some Ukrainian Eurovision entries illuminates these complexities and as such sheds light on the construction of Ukrainian nationhood in a post-Soviet context. In particular this paper uses interviews with key decision makers involved with the Ukrainian selection process in the Eurovision Song Contest and examines the rhetoric surrounding four Ukrainian Eurovision entries which have generated considerable interest and controversy both in the country itself and within the wider context of the European media. Eurovision presents an opportunity for Ukraine to present a unified national identity to a global audience. The question is however, which Ukraine and for what purpose?

Keywords: national identity, Ukraine, nation-building, nationalism, Eurovision Song Contest

Introduction

This article considers how the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) has come to be used as a platform for the politicisation of national identity in Ukraine. If Eurovision entries can be seen as a reflection of the state-centric nature of national identity, then the discussions that they engender within the state can provide a unique insight into how that identity is both constructed and contested. The narrative of the nation rarely speaks with a straightforward voice and in the case of Ukraine the way in which nationhood is defined is far from simple. Ukraine presents an interesting case study given the geopolitical position of the country, between Russia and Europe, and the acute cultural and political discourses that this engenders. In particular this paper uses interviews with key decision-makers involved with the Ukrainian selection process in the Eurovision Song Contest and examines the rhetoric surrounding

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four Ukrainian Eurovision entries which have generated considerable interest and controversy both in the country itself and within the wider context of the European media. Eurovision presents an opportunity for Ukraine to present a unified national identity to a global audience. The question is, however: which Ukraine, and for what purpose?

Research that aims to scrutinise any part of identity can only be an inexact process, since identities themselves are dynamic. The methodology used to investigate issues such as national identity needs to be appropriate and an awareness of the potential limitations of the research design is necessary. The use of qualitative interview research, as done in this study, continues to be a subject of debate; indeed, it has been asserted that the data gathered using qualitative methodology is hardly distinguishable from journalism. Yet, the value of qualitative interviews lies in the fact that they place emphasis on the way in which individuals interpret their social reality; interviews capture and deconstruct meanings attached to social phenomena by particular actors at specific moments in time. They therefore add an invaluable additional perspective to the study of identity construction and the meanings attached to such identities.

This paper analyses perspectives on the ESC and the nation from “above”, namely by using the viewpoints of political figures, opinion leaders and individuals involved with the ESC in Ukraine in order to ascertain what visions of the national political community or nation state were propagated through it. Much of the emphasis of my research is on official representations of the country rather than being totally focussed on public opinion, of which this paper therefore does not claim or aim to be completely representative. The majority of the data for this article was collected by carrying out in-depth interviews both at an elite/political level and public level in Ukraine in 2007–8 as part of my doctoral research. I conducted 28 interviews in total, 16 of which were with so-called elite level respondents. The elite level can loosely be defined as politicians, journalist, television executives and opinion leaders. Respondents were initially asked about their sense of national identity and the image of Ukraine more generally. I then went on to explore their views on the Orange Revolution and the Eurovision Song Contest itself, since these two events presented an opportunity for the country to manage its own image on its own terms for the first time since independence. Among the people interviewed as part of my original research were the Executive Producer of the 2005 ESC as well as the Head of CFC Consulting, a PR firm based in Ukraine which orchestrated Ukraine’s debut in the contest and oversaw the selection of several of the country’s representatives. Moreover, other respondents were drawn from a large sample using a snowballing technique, an established method for sampling and in this case, the only practical means of gaining access to these elites. The elite level does, however, provide only one perspective. Much of the recent literature on issues of nationhood and nationalism in the post-Soviet region has stressed the need to examine issues

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at the “ordinary” level. Rogers Brubaker, in his work on Transylvania, argues that a perspective from “below” is needed if we are to truly understand the nature of identity processes in these countries:3

Ethnicity and nationalism could best be understood if studied from below as well as above, in microanalytic as well as macroanalytic perspective. From a distance it is all too easy to “see” bounded and homogenous ethnic and national groups, to whom common interests, perceptions, intentions and volition can be attributed. Up close, on the other hand, one risks losing sight of the larger contexts that shape experience and interaction. The study of large- and mid-scale structures and processes remains indispensable, but I came to believe that it must be complimented by research pitched at a level close to everyday experience if one is to avoid unwarranted assumptions of “groupness” and capture the way ethnicity actually “works”.4

I therefore also undertook a selection of public-level interviews in order to gain an overview of opinions relating to Ukraine’s representation through the ESC. Whilst carrying out the research I was affiliated with the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, a university in Kyiv. I was able to access a large network of students within a short space of time, many of whom had been active in the Orange Revolution of 2004–5, which was why they were specifically chosen. I also interviewed members of the general public. However, as stated earlier, rather than seeking to explore public opinion, this research aimed to investigate key debates with specific actors in Ukraine who have been involved in both the organisation of the ESC and the selection of Ukraine’s official representatives. As such, the narratives between the two groups of respondents reveal interesting insights into the construction and contradictions of Ukrainian nation-building in the post-Soviet period.

Deconstructing “Ukrainianness”

Attempting to define and encapsulate what the essence of Ukrainian national identity is far from simple. Ukraine can be described as an “amalgam of regions” with different ethno-linguistic, economic, cultural and political profiles.5 Ukraine itself can be seen as a “study in ambiguity”.6 The rhetoric concerning some Ukrainian Eurovision entries illuminates these complexities and as such sheds light on the construction of Ukrainian nationhood in a post-Soviet context. An examination of representations of Ukrainian national identity through participation in the ESC raises interesting questions concerning the way nationhood is both constructed and challenged.

4 Brubaker, Nationalist Politics, xiv.
A debate on nationhood raises many questions concerning the identity and legitimacy of the nation state, since nation states are modern fictions with clear political intentions disguised as ancient myths but without any old mythological background.7 Discussions concerning national identity and statehood in turn pose the question of what a nation actually is. Benedict Anderson famously described the nation as an “imagined community”, a construction of the post-industrial age.8 Anderson argues that the nation is imagined since members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.9 In order to keep a state together in the modern world, populations have a shared feeling of belonging, bound together by loyalty toward the same institutions, symbols and values. However, as Pål Kolstø argues, creating a common identity does not necessarily imply that all inhabitants of the nation state must have the same ethnic identity. National identity may, and in many cases, must be political rather than cultural.10

Discourses on nation-building set the agenda for inclusion or exclusion from a particular nation-state. Titular citizens of ethnic states hold membership automatically through their ethnic affiliations, whereas citizens from non-titular groups can be seen as (more or less explicitly) members of a second order.11 Ralph Grillo argues that nation states are not natural entities; “they clothe and enclose an existing or developing political and economic framework”.12 John Keane sheds further light on this issue by arguing that, historically, the nation did not refer to the whole population of a region but only to those classes which had developed a sense of identity based upon language and history and had begun to act upon this.13 If the nation is constructed then logic dictates that national identity is too. National identity “infuses citizens with a sense of purposefulness, confidence and dignity by allowing them to ‘feel at home’”.14 A nation is a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture as well as a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members.15 What constitutes a national identity in a country with populations with differing understandings and interpretations of recent history, language and culture is therefore problematic. Arguing, like many of the modernist theorists, such as Brubaker, that national identity is constructed, I also assume that it is a learned attribute. What is it that makes someone Scottish, Irish, British or Ukrainian? As such, identities can be

9 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 6.
14 Keane, Nations, 186.
contested. Whilst there is inevitably a tolerance of difference, that difference or
diversity is only tolerated by mainstream governments responsible for nation-
building if it does not compromise or threaten the sense of self of the titular
population, or their ownership of the nation.

As the Soviet Union disintegrated, it forced changes in the political space and
the identities within the new Soviet successor states. The rediscovery of
the national self represents a symbolic break from the past which in turn aids the
development of the new independent state. As in other Soviet successor states,
after the passage to independence, ruling elites embarked on a process of
forging a national identity by (re)constructing the discursive boundaries of
nationhood.\textsuperscript{16} Nation-building in the post-Soviet region was therefore fraught
with tensions, complexities and contradictions. Nation-building in the post-
Soviet context essentially represented the competition for power in which the
various national elites in the region sought to “naturalise” their own particular
model of state institutions and gain legitimacy for their own claims to power.
They did this by invoking a particular vision of what constitutes the national
political community and by propagating this amongst the population through
speeches, interviews and within the wider media. The aim was to create and
impose, from above, a new “imagined community” (to use Anderson’s term)
amongst the state’s population. Further to this the dimensions of state and
nation-building also involve deciding who “belongs”, essentially in terms of
citizenship on the legal level. There is also a cultural dimension of nation-
building projects which draw upon various cultural “raw material” such as
language, ethnicity and religion. Language is a key part of the nation-building
process, a further way of distancing the republics from their Soviet past.

In Ukraine, language has played a symbolic role in terms of nation-building,
and the implementation of one official state language (Ukrainian) is therefore a
clear signal of the direction of nation-building in the country. However, unlike
in other former Soviet republics such as the Baltic States, Ukrainian nation-
building is not so easy to categorise. Kataryna Wolczuk’s assertion that
Ukraine is an “amalgam of regions” means that these regions have different
understandings of what constitutes a national culture and identity and indeed
nation-building. For western Ukrainians, it implies breaking with Russia, and
for others in the East less so. There are paradigms of post-colonialism,
propagated by “Ukrainophiles” who subscribe to a post-colonial view of their
Soviet past, enmeshed with discourses of oppression and forced Russification.\textsuperscript{17}

On the other hand, the situation in Ukraine is further complicated by the
presence of Russophone Ukrainians as well as ethnic Russians. Whilst Ukraine
might be seen in the same vein as other bi-national states such as Belgium or
Canada, the boundaries in Ukraine are far more blurred. Rigid distinctions
between a Russian speaking east and Ukrainian speaking west Ukraine do not
necessarily tell the full story regarding Ukrainian identity. This ambiguity or
complexity of Ukrainian identity is exemplified strongly in the capital, Kyiv,

\textsuperscript{16} Wolczuk, Kataryna. 2000. History, Europe and the “National Idea”: the “Official” Narrative of

\textsuperscript{17} Wilson, Andrew. 1998. National History and National Identity in Ukraine and Belarus, in
Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: the Politics of National Identities, edited by Smith,
Graham / Vivien Law / Andrew Wilson / Annette Bohr and Edward Allworth. Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 23–47, 40.
where Ukrainians “commute” between identities. However recent anecdotal evidence suggests that the Ukrainian language has and is becoming more widely spoken and its use more politicised following the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the Russian annexation of Crimea. The rudimentary East/West divide therefore may not be sufficient in conceptualising discourses on national and linguistic identity in Ukraine which speak with more than one voice. However there are some broad generalisations which can be made: the west, which tends to be Ukrainian-speaking, views the Soviet past and identity differently to the east. In 2005, only 6% of Ukrainians in the west saw themselves as “Soviet”, compared with 18% in the east. An examination of the rhetoric concerning portrayals of Ukraine through the prism of the ESC sheds further light on these identity questions.

Judy Batt argues that Ukraine cannot be considered to be a “nation state” in the conventional sense of the word, given the sizeable Russian speaking population who have deep historical roots to the territory and also the fact that Ukrainians themselves are far from homogeneous in terms of how they perceive their own identity. In the Ukrainian case, language is not necessarily a marker of identity. Miss Ukraine 2005 did not speak Ukrainian yet still identified very much as a Ukrainian rather than Russian. Moreover, Batt points to the fact that many in Ukraine are also bilingual and there is an element of fluidity in terms of language, which in turn makes the boundaries blurred and subject to change. In the 1990s and early 2000s presidents Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma promoted a sense of nationhood which was not based on ethnic criteria. Despite the implementation of only one official state language, Ukrainian, both Kravchuk and Kuchma accepted the use of Russian. This can be seen as in stark contrast to paradigms of nationhood in the Baltic States, for example, which emphasise that knowledge of the titular nationality is the marker of belonging to the national community. The ongoing armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the government-initiated “United Country” campaign suggests that a new process of nation-building is taking place in Ukraine.

Nation-building in Ukraine was slow and piecemeal. This is reflected by the fact that a new constitution was adopted in June 1996, making Ukraine the last former Soviet republic to do so. Under Kuchma, the country’s relationship with Russia improved, the two countries being seen as strategic partners whilst at the same time Ukraine drew closer to Europe. In reality this dual-vector approach did little to advance Ukrainian nation-building. Ukrainian political elites essentially walked a tightrope between emphasising EU integration whilst balancing the demands of the Russian government. Wolczuk deems the

19 Author interviews conducted in November 2014.
22 Velychenko, Ukraine, 10.
policies of the 1990s to be “declarative Europeanisation” in that lip service was paid to the idea of Ukrainian integration with European structures such as the European Union but little else in reality. Kuchma highlighted the EU as an aspiration, but did little in practice to move Ukraine towards that goal, nor did the EU embrace Ukraine as a prospective member. Arguably Ukrainian nation-building has further problematized given the “junior partner” role that Ukraine played in governing the USSR. It is this legacy and the fact that Ukrainians did not inherit a more uniform understanding which has had an impact upon the formation of a congruent national identity in the post-Soviet era as well as nation-building itself. A significant question therefore emerges: what kind of Ukraine has been promoted by participating in the ESC?

The Eurovision Song Contest in Context
The political, economic and social realities of Europe as well as understandings and definitions of what Europe is as a geographical, political and cultural entity have shifted since the collapse of communism. Europe has become a transitory site of competing flows of power. Since its inception in 1956, the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) has served as a platform for cultural exchange between European countries and has reflected the wider geopolitical discourses which these competing flows of paper have engendered. The original idea behind the contest, and still its defining feature today, is that nations (whose television companies are active members of the European Broadcasting Union) submit original songs which are performed and televised live. This is followed by telephone voting and since 2009, jury voting, to determine the “best” European song of the year. Although officially the Eurovision Song Contest is a non-political event, its history can be seen as part of the Cold War process of fashioning Europe as a unified bloc. In this context, the “Europe” referred to here is the West; the ESC can be seen as an event uniting western European countries in terms of popular culture and one which, with the exception of Yugoslavia, did not include any communist nations. The event also represents a mirror image of the development of the European Union in that both have continued to expand their memberships eastwards since the fall of communism, the event has therefore reflected the changing map of Europe. Daina Eglitis argues that amongst post-communist countries there was a desire to embrace the political, social and cultural traditions of Western Europe. Thus participation in the event can be seen as confirmation of a nation’s European, or more specifically, western European, identity and culture.

Eligibility to participate in the ESC is not determined by geographic inclusion within the continent of Europe, despite the inference in the title of the competition. Rather, entry to the event is dependent upon the national broadcaster being a full and active member of the EBU. Several countries which are outside the “natural” boundaries of Europe, the Ural Mountains to

26 Kuzio, (ed.), Contemporary Ukraine, xii.
the east and the Mediterranean Sea to the south, have competed; Israel since 1973, Azerbaijan since 2008 and Morocco appeared in 1980. In addition, Turkey and Russia, which are both transcontinental countries with most of their territory outside of Europe, have competed since 1975 and 1994 respectively. Thus Europe, as a socio-political construct, is not only mirrored in the ESC but effectively reinforced. The integration of Eastern European countries into the competition led to various qualification systems being introduced from 1993–2003 before live semi-finals began in 2004. Since the 1990s the number of competing countries has nearly doubled (from 22 participants in 1990 to 43 in 2011), and new entrant countries have come to dominate the Contest. Six out of twelve winners in 2001–12 were former communist countries which entered Eurovision after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Turkey, Greece and Finland, on the periphery of Western Europe, also won during this period. These developments have provoked consternation amongst some Western European countries and media who have viewed this as unfair domination. These anxieties echoed, and were fuelled by, larger tensions within Europe about Westward migration, and perceived differing levels of economic and cultural development between Western and non-Western European nations. The failure of the Netherlands to reach the final in 2005 was held up in the Dutch media as an example of how power within the EU has shifted eastwards. The 2007 Eurovision Song Contest semi-final, where all ten qualifiers came from east of the Danube, inflamed the passions of critics and arguably paved the way for further changes to the organisation of the contest. In 2009 the EBU re-introduced a jury vote, which had originally been abandoned in 1998, combining the jury vote in equal proportions with the public telephone vote. Such a move can be seen as evidence of the EBU desire to continue to expand the competition whilst at the same time providing reassurance to long-standing (western) participants that their concerns were being addressed whilst at the same time ensuring that the funding for the competition continues to be secured. The ESC has therefore become a platform on which the wider geopolitics of Europe is played out.

Articulating Nationhood, Nationality and Nationalism in the Eurovision Song Contest

The ESC is a stage where national identity and the politics of identity are performed not just through the songs but also the way in which the individual contests are staged. Throughout its history the ESC has served as a platform for performing essentialised narratives of national identity, and this can even be seen in the choice of outfits for performers; a folk dress for Sweden in 1958,

33 See also Ulbricht, Sircar and Slootmaeckers, this issue.
a kilt of the UK in 1966 and traditional costume for Albania in 2006. Ruslana’s “Wild Dances”, which represented Ukraine in 2004 was a modern take on the ancient Carpathian Hutsul culture which had been widely suppressed during the Soviet era. Estonia, also in 2004 – the same year it had become a member of the EU – entered a song which was performed in the Võru dialect. Thus the Contest has acted as a platform for the representation of ethnic cultures and national and minority identities within a pan-European context.

Eurovision can be considered a platform for the reproduction of certain narratives of the nation in the sense that singers are encouraged, according to the rules, to reflect the national identity or the culture they represent. However this reflection of national identity is questionable given the fact that there are no set rules regarding the nationality of the performer or songwriter. It also raises further questions regarding who decides on each entry and what is deemed to be representative of a particular nation and what is not. National entries in Eurovision represent essentialised narratives of national identity, and their selection as a national song for Europe involves numerous choices and decisions about what is appropriate for representing the nation. A question then arises: which version of national identity is being communicated and for what purpose? This paper argues that, in the case of Ukraine, it is typically a small, elite circle that has made these decisions.

National musical style is an ideological construct connected to the rise of nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries. A central tension therefore emerges between the apolitical ideals behind Eurovision and the reality of the content of the show both in terms of music and also broadcasting. Switzerland, the founding Eurovision nation, exemplifies the construction of national identity through the way it has presented itself on the Eurovision stage. Switzerland last won the contest in 1988, when Céline Dion, a French-Canadian, took the prize with a song written by a Turkish songwriter, Atilla Şereftuğ. In recent times the country has opted for a girl band from Estonia, Vanilla Ninja, in 2005 and an international group, Six4One, in 2006. The entry in 2006 was written by the German songwriters Ralph Siegel and Bernd Meinunger. The group itself consisted of six performers from countries across Europe: Malta, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sweden, Switzerland, Israel and Portugal. Switzerland as a united country representing its national identity in the Eurovision Song Contest is therefore a construct. The group Six4One can be considered to be reflective of the complexities concerning Swiss identity.

Despite the continuous flagging of the apolitical nature of the ESC by the European Broadcasting Union, the event is used by competing countries as a stage upon which the politics of protest are performed, as demonstrated by a number of incidents since the 1970s. After the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, Greece withdrew from the contest in 1975 when it was announced that

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36 Baker, Wild Dances and Dying Wolves.
Turkey would enter, and neither country took part in the same contest until 1978. The Greek entry of 1976, “Panaghia Mou, Panaghia Mou” (My Lady, My Lady) was a direct protest against the Turkish invasion. The lyrics included references to napalm ruins and fields of refugees. At the time of the 1993 contest, the war in the Balkans was raging on, and this was given particular attention in the songs from Bosnia Herzegovina and Croatia which reflected the turmoil in each country: the Bosnian entry was entitled “Sva Bol Svijeta” (“All the World’s Pain”) and the Croatian effort “Don’t Ever Cry”. At the 2000 contest, the Israeli representatives, Ping Pong, waved Syrian flags during rehearsals. Israel and Syria were officially in a state of war at the time and Israel’s then Deputy Education Minister, Shlomo Yahalom, called for the group’s participation to be banned claiming that they failed to represent national values.

In 2009, a series of disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan unfolded throughout the live broadcasts of the semi-finals and final. During the semi-finals, an introductory “postcard” leading into the Armenian performance depicted, amongst other monuments, a statue located in Stepanakert, capital city of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, which constitutes a part of Azerbaijan. The statue was built in Soviet times to celebrate the Armenian heritage of the area. The delegation from Azerbaijan complained to the EBU that the video clip was unacceptable based on the fact that Nagorno-Karabakh is a part of Azerbaijan, and it was subsequently edited out for the broadcast of the final. In retaliation, the presenter of the Armenian votes held up a clipboard with the monument’s picture on it multiple times as she read off the votes, and in the background a screen in the capital’s main square could also be seen to display the disputed monument.

In August 2009, the BBC reported that several people had been questioned in Azerbaijan after their votes for Armenia were traced by mobile phone service providers. According to the BBC “one man was accused of being unpatriotic and a “potential security threat” after he sent a text backing Armenia’s song [...] the Azerbaijani authorities said people had merely been invited to explain why they voted for Armenia”. The issue was investigated by the EBU and, whilst they found no evidence to pursue the affair, a clause preventing telecom communication providers from disclosing personal information was added to the rules of the contest. Thus the ESC has regularly acted as a platform for political protest, highlighting the contested nature of the construction of nationhood in a post-communist contest.

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39 See Andjelić, this issue.
Selling Ukraine to Europe

Ukraine made its debut in the Eurovision Song Contest in 2003, a decade later than some other former Soviet republics such as Estonia, Russia and Lithuania. Ukraine's participation in Eurovision reflects the country's arguably slow approaches to economic reforms in the 1990s as well as other state-building exercises, namely European integration. CFC Consulting, a private marketing and public relations organisation based in Kyiv, engineered Ukrainian participation in the ESC with the aim of improving the international image of the country.

When we started with the idea of having Ukraine in the Eurovision [...] what we had in mind was how to use it to work on improving the image of Ukraine internationally [...] I remember when we had to present the entire project of Eurovision to the vice Prime Minister of Ukraine [...] we had to draft all the positive benefits Ukraine would get should we actually win the contest. So it was on the back of our minds from the very beginning, how to use this television musical project for the benefit of Ukraine’s image [...] the idea that we had to be there [in Eurovision], it was a good opportunity to showcase Ukraine [...] so we teamed up with the National TV Company of Ukraine, we have helped them [...] to secure Ukraine’s participation [...] firstly it was the broadcasting rights in 2002 and in 2003 we had the first singer from Ukraine.42

This raises interesting questions concerning nation-building processes in Ukraine, given that the country was being promoted internationally by a private organisation. Thus the narrative of Ukrainian identity sold to a wider European audience was controlled by a select group of elites in the country. I will now draw upon four very different acts which have represented Ukraine in the ESC. What “official” representations of national identity have been presented through hosting and participating in the ESC? Who ultimately took the decisions on how Ukraine would be represented? What debates did these representations elicit and how contested were they?

Ruslana’s Wild Dance

The song “Wild Dances” performed by the Ukrainian singer Ruslana in 2004 is said to be derived from Hutsul songs and rituals from the Carpathian region of western Ukraine. Ruslana’s performance drew upon various “ethnic Ukrainian” motifs and victory in Eurovision arguably boosted self-esteem and the image of the country. The song which features traditional drums and the Hutsul alpine horn, the trembita, immediately connects with Ukrainian tradition; the various incantations in the song carries associations with Hutsul culture and the Carpathian region of Ukraine.43 However, what is perceived by audiences as Hutsul may be in fact be references to a more generic European folk sound.44

Transferred to the Eurovision stage, this essentialised depiction of a local, western Ukrainian culture comes to be seen not as a local representation but as a national one; speaking on behalf of Ukraine as a whole. Further analysis of the song itself reveals interesting insights into the nature of this construction of identity. The song was performed in both English and Ukrainian and not Russian. The absence of this effectively shows that the performance of Ruslana was an ethnic Ukrainian narrative of national identity. Ruslana’s sexualised and almost militant style led her to be dubbed Xena: Warrior Princess, by UK commentator Terry Wogan. Ruslana was not only “wild” for the purposes of the performance of her song; she also projected this image in the promotional material for her song, even sharing a cage with wolves. “Wild Dances” therefore served to sexualise and exoticise a particular narrative of national identity whilst simultaneously presenting Ukraine, or more specifically, the Carpathian mountains, which inspired the performance, as being at the heart of Europe.  

Ruslana was selected internally as the Ukrainian representative for the ESC in 2004 and promoted internationally by CFC Consulting. This publicity strategy involved Ruslana appearing in a number of other countries prior to the contest, usually featuring as an interval act in the various televised selections across Europe. In representing Ukraine as a nation-state, Ruslana’s performance raises interesting questions about how nationhood is defined and affirmed through Eurovision:

We didn’t have any national selections here so it was pretty much the decision of CFC and the National TV Company of Ukraine and we came up with Ruslana […] her act and her performance was very ethnic but it was very particular to special rituals in Western parts of Ukraine, from the mountains […] it was very Ukrainian […] it was an act itself which did a great deal for promoting Ukraine the country.  

It is interesting to note that Myroshnychenko appears to suggest that this western Ukrainian style is perhaps more organic than something reflecting the eastern influences in the country. “Wild Dances” is therefore a product of a small elite circle that decided and disseminated understandings of what constitutes national culture in Ukraine, and promoted that message to the rest of Europe. “Wild Dances” ultimately had little to do with the folk traditions of east-central Ukraine, by far the most populous area of the country. Thus the constructed nature of national identity in Ukraine and the underlying power relations behind it are revealed.

In terms of how interview respondents read Ruslana’s performance, most highlighted the crude divisions between east and west Ukraine; “there is a division between eastern western Ukraine […] It’s like a struggle […] therefore Ruslana can’t be seen as representing all Ukraine”. This is a notion which another respondent touched upon. Professor Valentin Yakushik from the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy emphasised that Ruslana “does not represent the whole of

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45 Baker, Wild Dances and Dying Wolves.
46 Myroshnychenko, interview.
47 Yekelchyk, What Is Ukrainian about Ukraine’s Pop Culture?
Ukraine, in the east she is foreign to them with the Carpathian culture". Ukrainians who saw the performance in ethnicised terms drew a strong distinction between East and West, Ukrainian and Russian. It is also worthy of note that that many of the public-level respondents for this paper came from the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, which embodies a “nationalising” tendency within Ukraine in the sense of upholding the use of Ukrainian language over Russian and promoting a clean break with the Soviet past. Despite the connotations some attached to the song, it was not necessarily perceived in adversely ethnic terms by Russian-speaking Ukrainians. Alexander Feldman, in an article taken from a Russian-language newspaper in Ukraine, Den (Day), highlights the issue of language and “Ukrainianness” and appears to be representative of the general trend:

*The new nation has acquired new symbols that embody its success on the international arena: the footballer Andriy Shevchenko, Ruslana Lyzhychko and boxing champions the Klitchko brothers. No matter what language they speak, no matter where they were born and where you work at this time, it is important that they feel themselves to be Ukrainian.***

The discourse concerning Ruslana reflects the complexities and difficulties in defining Ukrainianness, which is complicated further by the apparent absence of a linguistic divide that exists in other post-Soviet states. The journalist Mykola Kniazhyts'kyi argues that, regardless of language or narratives of identity, figures such as Ruslana present an opportunity for Ukrainians to build a common identity and can act as an antidote to what he calls the “national inferiority complex” in Ukraine. It is interesting to note that some Western Ukrainian “purists” objected to the alleged corruption of traditional Carpathian musical styles, thereby further highlighting the complexities of identity.

The debates surrounding Ruslana’s narrative of national identity and traditional Carpathian music reached the UK, with the BBC reporting that Ruslana’s Eurovision victory had triggered a folk revival in Ukraine. However there was comment from one Carpathian musician that the authenticity of Carpathian music was in danger of being lost as a result of the increased commercialisation of the tradition: “I think it would be better for the world to see the real authentic music, in its natural surroundings”. It is interesting to note that Ruslana’s selection as Ukrainian representative at Eurovision took place when Leonid Kuchma’s allegedly “pro-Russian” regime was still in power. Ruslana presented a narrative of Ukraine which was exotic and sexualised; arguably Ruslana’s performance was a highly competent piece of PR and one which was directly orientated towards a wider European market. Ruslana therefore represents the contested nature of encapsulating Ukrainian national identity; the narratives of identity which can

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51 Pavlyshyn, Envisioning Europe, 482.
be discerned from her Eurovision performance are questioned in the west of Ukraine amongst the people who can arguably understand it the most. The rhetoric concerning Eurovision 2005 in Kyiv and the selection of Greenjolly as Ukrainian entry to the ESC sheds even further light on the contentious and politicised nature of performing Ukrainian nationhood.

**A Revolutionary Eurovision: Kyiv 2005**

In the immediate aftermath of Ruslana and Ukraine’s victory in the 2004 Eurovision Song Contest, explicit references were made to the connotations that the event would have for Ukraine’s image and standing in the world, both in the Ukrainian media and by Ruslana herself. The event was afforded significance given that it provided Ukraine with the opportunity to host a major cultural event for the first time since independence and a medium with which to control its own image on its own terms. The winning performer, Ruslana, declared at a press conference immediately after the event that “all of us are making a positive image of Ukraine. I want my country to open up before you with friendship and hospitality […] I would like you to forget about Chernobyl”. Thus from the outset the victory was linked to the international image of Ukraine and as such it was seen as an opportunity to present a different view of the country to the rest of the world. The hosting of the 2005 Eurovision Song Contest in Kyiv took on even greater significance following the political protests which took place across the country at the end of 2004, which became known internationally as the Orange Revolution.

By 2004 Ukraine was said to have slipped into an increasingly authoritarian state with widespread corruption which went largely unchallenged by the Kuchma government. The first vote was held on 31 October 2004 and since neither candidate, the pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko or the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovych, had surpassed 50% of the vote (they received 39.9% and 39.3% respectively) the election passed to a second round. On 21 November the second round of voting took place, which appeared to show that Yanukovych was the victor. In the immediate aftermath, widespread protests took place against the apparent falsification of the election results. Reports emerged of corruption, voter intimidation and electoral fraud. When it emerged that the opposition candidate Victor Yushchenko had been poisoned with dioxin, it served as a rallying call to people, and effectively the presidential election came to be seen as being “stolen”. People took to the streets of Kyiv with orange flags, banners, and symbols representing their opposition to the government. Later, counter-protests from pro-Yanukovych supporters, with blue as their emblem, emerged. In crude terms, the Orange Revolution can be seen as a clash between east and west. However, as Velychenko points out, not all western regions were 100% pro-Yushchenko nor were all regions 100% pro-

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Yanukovych in the east.\(^{56}\) Thus the Orange Revolution can be seen as a further reflection of the wider difficulty in succinctly defining Ukrainianness.

The Orange Revolution was of notable interest to western observers for several reasons: firstly, Ukraine's strategic positioning, essentially a border between Russia and the European Union. At one point the geopolitical shift appeared to be so monumental that Ukrainian membership of the European Union began to be discussed in the context of continuing enlargement. Moreover the Orange Revolution in Ukraine brought unprecedented publicity for the country, presenting a positive image of Ukraine; a country which made the transition to democracy through peaceful means. An analysis of the 2005 Eurovision Song Contest offers a potentially rich set of insights into the nature of the “Orange Revolution” and its accompanying debates on Ukrainian nation-building and Ukraine's place in Europe more generally.

The Orange Revolution became a platform for other expressions of protest namely through music. Ukrainian bands performed for the hundreds of thousands of people who were gathered in Kyiv’s Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square). The reigning Eurovision champion Ruslana also became heavily involved in the proceedings and went on hunger strike in protest against what she saw as a stolen election and later went on to become a politician herself as a member of parliament for Yushchenko’s ruling Nasha Ukrayina (Our Ukraine) party.\(^{57}\) The political turmoil caused by the Orange Revolution also meant that the preparations for the 2005 contest were seriously hampered. The delays were so significant that in March 2005 the European Broadcasting Union threatened to move the event from Ukraine unless immediate action was taken. Given the involvement of the newly-elected President Yushchenko, who actively intervened in the preparations for the competition, the importance of hosting the competition in order to enhance Ukraine’s international standing is plain to see.\(^{58}\)

Given that the Eurovision Song Contest was taking place in a country which only months before had become the focal point of the world's attention as a result of political protests, it is perhaps unsurprising that the contest that year was tinged with political rhetoric. The slogan for the competition in 2005 was “Awakening”; this along with the selection of the band Greenjolly, who had been active in the political protests, as the Ukrainian Eurovision entry that year meant that the contest was highly politicised and, as such, highly contested. The insights of Svante Stockselsius, the EBU Executive Supervisor, and Juhan Paadam, the Executive Producer of Eurovision 2002 in Tallinn and a member of the EBU Reference Group in 2005, are crucial in understanding the way in which Eurovision was used as a political platform for Yushchenko’s government. According to Paadam, Yushchenko initially intended to make a lengthy political speech at the contest itself:

\(^{56}\) Riabchuk, Mykola. 2007. *Ambivalence or Ambiguity?: Why Ukraine is Trapped Between East and West, in Ukraine, the EU and Russia*, edited by Velychenko, Stephan, 70–88, 85.
\(^{57}\) Krushelnycyk, An Orange Revolution, 294.
President Yushchenko wanted to come to the show and have a speech for forty minutes. I think the EBU had a strong word and explained that it was a TV show. The president agreed to come and give the award [trophy to the winner] which is ok as it was a revolution situation, democracy won and so on. But they could have used any celebrity for the final, the Klitchkos were there. They had their president.  

Svante Stockselius asserts that the Yushchenko government “tried to influence it [Eurovision] more than they were supposed to”. Yushchenko’s appearance at Eurovision was a brief affair; however, the fact that he went on to the stage is significant. In the history of the Eurovision Song Contest, such a move was unprecedented, and it took place despite the continuous reinforcement from the European Broadcasting Union that the contest was a non-political event.

Another issue which was highly politicised in 2005 was the selection of the Ukrainian candidate. In autumn 2004, the National Television Company of Ukraine (NTU) announced that it was to host a national selection for the first time. The Ukrainian national final comprised 15 rounds, where each week five songs were presented to the audience and the winner put through to the grand final, which was to be held in February 2005. Ani Lorak, one of Ukraine’s most popular singers and a vocal supporter of Viktor Yanukovych, was one of the acts who had competed in the qualifying rounds. However, controversy arose when four “wildcards” were entered into the national selection programme at the request of the Deputy Prime Minister, Mykola Tomenko. One of these was a pro-Yushchenko political anthem by the band Greenjolly, a group from the Ivano-Frankivsk region in Western Ukraine. The group’s entry, “Razom nas bahato, nas ne podolaty” (“Together we are many, we cannot be defeated”), went on to win the competition and were to represent Ukraine in the Kyiv final. Largely seen as a political coup, the actions were highly controversial with both competing artists and the public alike.

They [Greenjolly] did nothing before and nothing after. It was purely political I don’t think that one song of Greenjolly can represent the whole country.  

I really don’t think the people voted for it, I seriously doubt it […] I was at the first national channel listening and reporting […] I don’t know. They tried to link Ukraine and the revolution with Eurovision but I don’t think it was the right decision.

The decision to insert a band from the Orange Revolution into the national selection at a late stage was one which was not seen as appropriate by the majority of respondents and therefore highlights a disparity between the political elite at the wider public just months after a new government was elected. Such actions on behalf of politicians and management at NTU were
seen as a throwback to the pre-revolutionary corruption which was supposed to have been suppressed as a result of Yushchenko’s rise to power.

Further controversy ensued when the EBU rejected Greenjolly’s song as it contravened the rules of the Eurovision Song Contest which state that political messages are banned. The original lyrics of the song “Razom nas bahato, nas ne podolaty” include direct references to Yushchenko and the political situation at the time of the Orange Revolution; “No to falsifications... No to lies. Yushchenko – yes! Yushchenko – yes! This is our president – yes, yes!” The mention of Yushchenko as President in the chorus of the song was dropped, and more generic phrases were introduced in English: “We won’t stand this (no), revolution is on, ’cause lies be the weapon of mass destruction [...] all together we’re one, all together we’re strong, God be my witness, we waited too long”. The entry then was allowed to proceed to the Eurovision finals, having become a non-specific call for greater democracy. It is interesting to note one of the points made by the respondent above; that Greenjolly cannot be seen as representative of the whole of Ukraine. Thus Greenjolly acts as a mirror for the frustrations of a Yanukovych supporter, which Natalia identified herself as; neither Greenjolly nor Yushchenko represent the Ukraine with which they identify. Greenjolly’s participation in the ESC therefore represents a specific political narrative, that of the ruling elite, the Orange Revolution government.

Despite the delays to the organisation of the contest, the 2005 ESC was a success for NTU. Closer reading of the broadcast sheds further light on the way in which Ukrainian elites chose to present the country to an international audience. A cursory glance of the scenes depicted in the postcard images shown between each national performance suggests that this was an event in which the eastern urban regions of Ukraine were not the point of focus. Many of the images depicted non-descript rural regions whilst others focussed on Kyiv and in particular western Carpathian traditions. The significance of Eurovision itself was routinely flagged; the preparations of the host city were shown regularly, along with scenes of the semi-final which had been held two days prior to the event. Two postcards in particular appear to depict elements of eastern Ukraine, namely mining and steelworks. However the ratio of these two segments compared to images of Kyiv or of the Ukrainian countryside is very small and appears to serve a point in hand; this was not a contest for promoting Eastern Ukraine. Moreover the scenes were disjointed and seemingly incoherent; shots of ballet were intermingled with fishing, weddings and shipping. The ambiguity of the scenes depicted are a metaphor for Ukrainian national identity itself; difficult to encapsulate in a limited narrative. The clips shown directly before the Ukrainian entry were scenes from the Orange Revolution, featuring protesters, tents and banners bearing Yushchenko’s name as well as shots of the president’s inauguration. It was undoubtedly a political message depicted through Eurovision. Moreover the actual performance of “Razom nas bahato, nas ne podolaty” included direct and explicit references to the Orange Revolution, contravening the EBU rules governing political messages in ESC entries. The song, like “Wild Dances” the preceding year, featured lyrics in both English and Ukrainian. At the start of the performance the two backing dancers wore handcuffs, symbolising the stifling of democracy which had been such a driving force for protestors in Ukraine. As the performance culminated, the handcuffs were broken. Again
this can be seen as a metaphor for Ukraine: as a result of the protests described in the song, the country was now free.

Eurovision was big news in the popular press in Ukraine in 2005. In a special-edition magazine, the Executive Producer of the 2005 event, Pavlo Grystak, highlighted the importance of the event for Ukraine in the wake of the Orange Revolution: “I want to thank you for your support and your trust in us”. This was followed by Ruslana herself who wrote that Ukraine is “a modern European country with an ancient past”. Such articles have highlighted the political relevance of hosting Eurovision but they also reveal interesting insights into the way Ukraine was being promoted at the time. Neither magazine presented any information regarding eastern Ukraine. The Hutsul and Carpathian regions were focussed on but the east of the country was not. These articles were written in the immediate aftermath of the Orange Revolution and so reflect the mainstream political discourse at the time: othering of eastern influences. The discourses reflect how contentious and contradictory narratives of national identity and symbolism are in Ukraine. If we consider Ukraine to be a divided country, these divisions appear to have been airbrushed, Ukrainian national identity is therefore represented in the international arena by specific, elite-driven narratives of identity. Ruslana, Greenjolly and the 2005 ESC itself can be seen as manifestations of this.

Verka Serduchka: From Ukraine with controversy

The character of Verka Serduchka, played by the comedy actor Andrii Danylko, was selected as Ukrainian representative in the ESC by a mixture of jury and public votes. Whilst the character was well known both in Ukraine and Russia, this decision to send the act to represent Ukraine on the Eurovision stage was met with anger, with many believing that such an act was “vulgar and grotesque” act would be damaging to Ukraine’s international image. A Ukrainian Member of Parliament, Taras Chornovil, called on Ukrainians to boycott the event, stating that the selection of Serduchka would not be perceived by other European countries as “normal” and that it would bring shame upon the Ukrainian international image.

All these hermaphrodites have never been accepted anywhere. Therefore I think that this will be a serious embarrassment factor and the world will see us as complete idiots.

The entry was called “Dancing Lasha Tumbai” and was performed in English, German, Russian and Ukrainian. Further controversy erupted when the lyrical content of the song was analysed; “Dancing Lasha Tumbai” bore a phonetic resemblance to “Russia goodbye”, a further ode to the Orange Revolution of 2004–05. Serduchka’s claim that “lasha tumbai” was Mongolian for “whipped cream” was dismissed by the Mongolian Embassy in Moscow, suggesting that the ambiguity had deliberate political connotations. The lyrics also make


reference to Maidan Square, where the political demonstrations of the Orange Revolution took place. For pro-Russian Ukrainians and Russian nationalists alike, the performance represented Ukrainian nationalism at its most vulgar. In Ukraine, nationalists rejected Serduchka as a parody of the Ukrainian nation. The character is said to be based on Soviet-era train conductors as well as a caricature of middle aged women and is therefore a manifestation of Sovietness which speaks to a larger post-Soviet space. Like most people moving from the Ukrainian-speaking countryside to Russian-speaking cities, Serduchka uses a mixture of Ukrainian and Russian, reinforcing provincialism thus conveying a reflexive irony towards Ukrainian nationhood.

Serduchka’s linguistic transnationalism can be seen as a reflection of the disconnection between elite and public national identities, in that the Ukrainian state imposed one official state language, Ukrainian, despite the norm in many cities of commuting between languages. The choice of outfit, with a silver star as the headpiece, ridicules a failed Soviet utopia and a parody of the Soviet past, arguably arousing consternation amongst Russian nationalists. The controversy Serduchka engendered is therefore a curious one; by mimicking Sovietness, it links Ukraine to its past which is arguably what some Ukrainian elites, namely from the west of the country, have been trying to move away from since independence. Further reading of the performance, which mixes languages frequently, often interchanging between Russian and Ukrainian, suggests that the character of Serduchka may be entirely representative of Ukraine, a country with often ambiguous national and linguistic identities. Serduchka was seen as denigrating Ukrainians on multiple levels – their folk culture, linguistic identity, and representations of femininity. For Ukraine’s political elites the image of the country is paramount and Eurovision therefore is a platform which promotes a certain narrative of the nation, the debates surrounding Serduchka exemplify this. The rhetoric concerning Serduchka reflects wider debates in Ukrainian society with regard to minority rights and the way the relationship with neighbouring Russia is imagined given that the apparent parody of Soviet rule and the timing of the performance, with ambiguous lyrics, which came at a particularly tense time in Russian–Ukrainian relations.

Interpreting Ambiguity: a View from the Field

For many post-Soviet Russian speakers, Sovietness represents what Svetlana Boym has called a “common place” (nostalgia for the past, before the unpredictability of the transition to a market economy). The 2007 Ukrainian performance, parodying both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras (Serduchka the character, the Soviet star headdress versus the ambiguous “Lasha Tumbai” / “Russia Goodbye”), can be read on multiple levels. The responses from those interviewed in Ukraine provide an insight into the wider debates on Ukrainian

66 Yekelchyk, What Is Ukrainian About Ukraine’s Pop Culture?.
68 Miazhevich, Ukrainian Nation Branding.
nationhood as well as a lack of congruence of national identity. Many expressed a disconnection between the image that the act portrayed and the Ukraine they felt should be showcased. One issue which manifests itself strongly in the interviews is that the image of Ukraine is important; respondents care about what the world thinks about their country, even when viewed through the gaze of Eurovision. When questioned about their views on Serduchka representing Ukraine in the ESC many respondents immediately returned the question; “What is your opinion on this man?”\textsuperscript{71} Other respondents were more confident:

\begin{quote}
\textit{I think the image is not very positive, Eurovision maybe promotes Ukraine but most of the people don’t like this singer Verka. He is a man or a woman, we don’t understand. Ukraine is not Verka Serduchka and I don’t want to associate Ukraine with this, it’s shameful for Ukraine to have such a representative.}\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

Many other respondents flagged the fact that the artist himself, Andriy Danylko, identifies as heterosexual, publicly at least, as well as the parodist nature of the performance. Serduchka’s obvious masculinity beneath an unflattering female stage costume suggests that it was, unlike the Danish entry that year (the drag act DQ), not commodity camp, even though it may have been interpreted this way by foreign audiences. The repeated re-inscription that Serduchka’s creator is heterosexual, as well as the general tone of the responses, provides an insight into social attitudes in Ukraine. Other respondents were more pragmatic in their view:

\begin{quote}
\textit{I think they [critics of Serduchka] were taking the competition too seriously, they thought that if Verka goes to the competition then everyone would think Ukraine is a strange country, full of transsexuals who dress up like women. This is too conservative. These are people who take it too seriously. Eurovision is a fun competition, in 2006 those monsters [Lordi] won. It’s a song competition but it’s also about the show, costumes and the entire show. She did well so why not?}\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textit{I think they were scared that Europeans would not take Serduchka or understand the humour. Ukrainian humour is a bit different from European and English, it’s not as liberal or straightforward and people were afraid that there would be shame for the country.}\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

Closer reading of these responses suggests that there is a subtle rift between the public and political elites in Ukraine regarding image, a reflection of a wider public disconnection with the Orange Revolution government at the time. Verka Serduchka’s “shameful” performance therefore shows the post-imperial inferiority complex that some Ukrainians still suffer.\textsuperscript{75} In particular the use of the term “hermaphrodite” by the politician Taras Chornovil demonstrates that

\textsuperscript{72} Anne, interview.
\textsuperscript{73} Volodymyr. Interview, Kyiv, 16. December 2007.
\textsuperscript{74} Olena, interview.
the image Serduchka presented to Europe through the ESC was peripheral to the heteronormative construction of national identity in Ukraine.

Performing Multiculturalism: Gaitana in ESC 2012

The nature of the discourse surrounding Verka Serduchka revealed unique insights into ideals of masculinity in a post-Soviet context. The selection of the singer Gaitana as Ukrainian representative in the 2012 ESC provoked further controversy both in the country and across the wider media in Europe. The singer, who is of Congolese descent, won the right to represent Ukraine after winning the national selection, which consisted of 50% public telephone votes and 50% jury. Gaitana is the first non-white performer to represent Ukraine in the ESC. The song *Be My Guest* was an up-tempo number. Closer reading of the lyrics of the song suggest that it sought to promote Ukraine as an open and welcoming country to visitors:

*Welcome! Stay with me, Be my friend, You are free, To live your life, To share your love with world, You can count on me, Darling, I'm your friend, I'll do anything for you, From the bottom of my heart, I wish you, I wish you the best, You can be my guest, People be my guest, Now you can be my guest!*

Ukraine was indeed welcoming guests in 2012 as the host of the UEFA European Football Championships. This presented Ukraine with an opportunity to present a positive international image through both the gaze of the international media and the tourists who would inevitably travel to the country as spectators of the event. The song “*Be My Guest*” takes on significance when striking counter-narratives concerning underlying racism amongst Ukrainian football fans are taken into account. Former English football player Sol Campbell urged fans not to travel to the country because they “could end up coming back in a coffin”.76 The Foreign Office advised fans of African-Caribbean or Asian descent to take “extra care” when travelling to Ukraine. However, others such as Yuri Bender, a journalist in Kyiv, argued that the allegations of racism in Ukraine had been sensationalised and were no more acute in Ukraine than in other countries.77

Regardless of the truth of the matter, Gaitana’s participation in the ESC, wearing a traditional Ukrainian headdress, the vinok, represented a performance of Ukrainian multiculturalism. However, this representation of multiethnic Ukraine did not sit well with some political elites in the country. Yuri Syrotuyk of the Freedom Party condemned the selection of Gaitana as the Ukrainian ESC entry on the grounds that she was “not an organic representative of Ukrainian culture”:78

*Millions of people who will be watching will see that Ukraine is represented by a person who does not belong to our race [...]*

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77 Harding, *Euro 2012*.
vision of Ukraine as a country located somewhere in remote Africa will take root.\textsuperscript{79} Syrotuyk later claimed that he was merely criticising the lack of transparency in the Ukrainian selection process. However the rhetoric engendered by Gaitana’s selection reveals a more hard-line, nationalising element to Ukrainian nation-building which had not been so apparent in, for instance, Estonia, which won the ESC in 2001 with a black performer, Dave Benton. This is curious given the restrictive citizenship policies in place in Estonia towards the Russian-speaking minority. If Russians were to a certain extent excluded from political life then it is not improbable that a black immigrant would be too. This was not the case. Syrotuyk’s comments also fail to take account of the complex nature of the construction of Ukrainian identity. As highlighted earlier in this article, many in Ukraine have fluidity in terms of identity, and the narrative of Ukrainian nationhood does not speak with a linear voice. Interestingly, the rhetoric from Syrotuyk was not necessarily internalised by the Ukrainian public and all mainstream political parties and several high-profile figures, including Ruslana, spoke out condemning such comments. Gaitana herself spoke of her shame that the comments brought: \textit{I was in tears, it was extremely hurtful. I was ashamed also because of the image these comments would give to Ukraine. My country is Ukraine, it is beautiful and people should visit and be our guest. I am a Ukrainian as well as African girl. I am both.}\textsuperscript{80}

Arguably Ukraine is a multi-ethnic state, given its sizeable Russian speaking population; however, like many post-communist states, the country does not have an established black community. The response from Gaitana is therefore rather unique; it is unlikely that such rhetoric (“I am a Ukrainian as well as African”) would be repeated by a black British performer for example. The discourse from the singer is interesting in that she appears to almost justify her existence as a Ukrainian. The attempt by political elites to argue that one person does not represent Ukrainianness opens the door to questions concerning what actually constitutes organic national identity in the Ukrainian context. The furore that Gaitana’s entry into the ESC engendered therefore highlights a lack of congruence between Ukrainian nation-building and multiculturalism in a post-Soviet context.

\textbf{Conclusion}

This article has examined the rhetoric concerning four Ukrainian entries in the ESC. As such the ESC represents a site where cultural struggles over the meaning of nationhood are performed. In the Ukrainian case the ESC is a highly politicised event and has continued to reflect nationalist antagonisms in the country. The ESC is a stage where the sensitivities of national identity in Ukraine are performed. The Ukrainianness performed through entries such as Ruslana and Greenjolly is that of an elite-level, western Ukrainian narrative of


\textsuperscript{80} Gaitana. Interview, Baku, 15. May 2012.
nationhood which arguably does not represent significant proportions of the country. On the other hand, Verka Serduchka and Gaitana highlight the contested nature of identity politics in Ukraine and exemplify the battleground that Ukraine has become in terms of representing a unified narrative of that identity. The nationalist antagonisms presented through Eurovision reflect the wider discourses of the Ukrainian political scene. The ESC upholds the notion of the nation-state as the primordial framework for identity, in-line with nationalist discourses on statehood thus the ESC itself can viewed as a platform for nationalism itself. The somewhat conflicting narratives on nationhood in Ukraine reflect the overall ambiguity and complexity in defining what Ukrainianness constitutes.

Ukrainian entries have continued to reflect narratives of identity and domestic politics. The Ukrainian entry for the ESC in 2014, “Tick Tock”, was essentially a metaphor for the tensions which are on-going as a result of the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the Russian annexation of Crimea. Ukraine withdrew from the ESC in 2015 citing the on-going turmoil in the country as one of the main reasons as well as financial pressures facing the national broadcaster. A process of nation-building is taking place in the country as it comes to terms with destabilised borders and displaced internal migrants. Given the country’s previous record in the contest, if and when Ukraine ever returns to ESC it is likely the domestic politics of the country will be performed on the international stage. A comment from one respondent concerning Ukrainian Eurovision entries provides a fitting closing remark to this article. The Ukrainian narrative of identity at Eurovision can be seen as a metaphor for wider political developments in the country, developments which, like Ukrainian nation-building, are continuing to unfold.

In 2004 Ukraine was really wild, she was fed up with everything but she was very positive and energetic so she produced Ruslana and she produced the revolution. In 2005 she was so optimistic about the future but not really professional so she produced Greenjolly, Orange Government. In 2007 she is so cynical about everything so she produced this chaotic democracy [...] Verka Serduchka.

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From Ruslana to Gaitana: Performing “Ukrainianness” in the Eurovision Song Contest


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Skirting the issue: finding queer and geopolitical belonging at the Eurovision Song Contest

Research Article

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Skirting the issue: finding queer and geopolitical belonging at the Eurovision Song Contest

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This article examines how the ideological boundaries of East and West are built, maintained and challenged through the performance of sexual and other politics in the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC). It argues that the contest is a useful prism through which to examine and understand contemporary European debates about sexual politics, and the role that this plays in defining the borders of modern Europe and its conditions of belonging. The contest itself offers an important site for belonging to the European community both to states on the eastern margins and to queer communities throughout Europe. It examines examples of performances that have challenged sexual politics, such as the Finnish entry from 2013, as well as state responses to the queer dimensions of the contest, such as those from Russia and Azerbaijan. It concludes that different states may challenge the ESC rules on political gestures depending on their own status within the European community as well as the extent to which that gesture challenges or reaffirms “European” ideology.

Keywords: sexual politics, human rights, Eurovision Song Contest

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that, despite its glittery, wind-machined appearance, the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) is a highly political event. Although the Eurovision Song Contest rulebook explicitly states that “No lyrics, speeches, gestures of a political or similar nature shall be permitted during the ESC”, various political messages have been encoded into songs and performances over the years, and enacted through the fairly entrenched voting blocs, which are based upon historical relationships, geographical proximity, transnational connection and ethno-religious affinity. Indeed, Eurovision has as much been a site for acting out the contentious geopolitics of post-WWII and post-Soviet Europe as it has been commercially imagined by the European Broadcasting

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Union (EBU) as the song that unites Europe. Yet it could be argued, as this article contends, that in recent years this geopolitical tension has been further charged by the politics of social justice. Russia’s controversial “anti-gay laws”, in which it is illegal to spread so-called “gay propaganda”, has caused the nation to be a site of global protest, especially as Russia hosted such high-profile international events as the Winter Olympics in 2014 and the Eurovision Song Contest in 2009. Furthermore, the expansion of the event into the eastern margins of Europe, where legacies of Soviet ideologies intersect with contemporary Islam, has also fuelled tension over the role that liberal sexual politics play in defining modern Europe. Given the much-documented strong gay fan base for the Eurovision Song Contest, as well as its reputation for high camp, this article argues that the event has become an effective site for understanding contemporary European debates about gay rights and identity politics. This has been achieved in a manner that has somehow effectively skirted around the European Broadcasting Union’s ideas and rules about what constitutes political gestures and political causes. However, eluding these rules and regulations is dependent upon the status of the entrant’s state in “Europe” and the extent to which their political statement contributes or detracts from Europe’s defining and dominant ideologies. The article also explores how this movement is enacted in specific geopolitical dimensions that perhaps further exacerbates the political and socio-cultural divide between eastern and western Europe.

Defining the borders of Europe through Eurovision
The very origins of the Eurovision Song Contest belie its political significance. Modelled on the Italian San Remo Festival, the ESC was conceived with the intent of uniting the nations of post-war Europe; its more prosaic intention was to promote the European Broadcasting Union’s Eurovision distribution network.2 The first contest, held in Switzerland in 1956, comprised seven EBU nations: Switzerland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy and the Federal Republic of Germany. Although Denmark, Austria and the United Kingdom were also part of the network and did screen the contest, they did not register in time to participate.3 This post-WWII, Cold War historical context of Eurovision’s origins places the contest firmly within an implicit set of Western European values. The fact that the Soviet bloc established its own song contest in 1977, the Intervision Song Contest,4 only serves to reinforce the symbolic status of Eurovision as a Western European cultural (and implicitly political) event.

The history of Eurovision and its participants nonetheless presents a significant challenge to binary understandings of the East and the West and to

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The list of contestants and founding nations of the EBU paints a specific portrait of post-war “Europe” that is also firmly located within an historical alignment of Europe with the West, but as the contest has evolved and the list of EBU member nations has grown the implicit meanings of “Europe” and “Europeanness” in Eurovision have shifted significantly. Many newcomers to the Eurovision audience are often astounded to see entries from countries such as Israel and Azerbaijan, as these nations do not fit into their idea of what constitutes “Europe”. Even when the EBU eligibility is explained, this membership can still be understood as different or distinct to “actual” membership in Europe and its community, revealing particular cultural, linguistic and religious assumptions about what constitutes a European nation. EBU membership is seen as an economic or commercial relationship, which results from considering television as a business enterprise in addition to a cultural venture. Television and radio broadcasting, as well as the arts and popular culture more broadly, are important sites of cultural exchange that can foster a sense of shared identity, community and citizenship. Karen Fricker and Milija Gluhovic argue that the ESC specifically is an ongoing and historical “symbolic contact zone” for European countries that facilitates these processes of exchange and communal identity formation.

The very concept of “Europe” itself has historically shifting borders that suggest an ongoing interplay between the persistent binary of its eastern and western reaches. As Etienne Balibar states, “Europe has never been a closed space since it emerged as a historical reality and will never become one”; its borders are “arbitrary”. Geographically, the European and Asian continents are conjoined, virtually indistinguishable, which Balibar has described as the “un-limited character of the European continent”. This is illustrated further in the post-Cold War era as “Europe” expands to incorporate Turkey and former Soviet states that are geographically proximate but are considered by some to be ideologically different on the basis of assumptions about historical and cultural specificity. Even the mythology of Europe suggests an ambiguous cultural origin and geographical identity. Anthony Pagden’s wry account of Europe’s Eastern origins perhaps illustrates this best: “an abducted Asian woman gave Europe her name; a vagrant Asian exile gave Europe its political and finally its cultural identity; and an Asian prophet gave Europe its

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Furthermore, the processes of colonisation and immigration have led to the permeation of various European cultures across the world, which arguably further expands the reaches of “Europe”, its culture and its ideologies. This has in turn influenced the reach and appeal of the ESC. As Ivan Raykoff highlights, the Middle Eastern contingent of the ESC is a natural result of French colonialism and British presence in the region during the formative years of the EBU, while Eurovision’s Australian audience is the result of significant waves of post-war European migration and a government policy of multiculturalism that facilitated transnational cultural connection through the establishment of a dedicated multicultural broadcaster, SBS, which subscribes to EBU content.

Despite the apparent arbitrariness of European borders observed by Balibar, and by extension the borders of the EBU, there is resistance against incorporating historical differences into its definition. The distinction between East and West lingers in the political and cultural imaginary, which is in turn reflected and challenged by the Eurovision Song Contest. Ivan Raykoff and Robert Deam Tobin argue that the contest provides literal and figurative access to an ideal of post-war, modern European society that is “democratic, capitalist, peace-loving, multicultural, sexually liberated and technologically advanced.” This provides a significant challenge for the newer European states that are seeking belonging within the European community, or older states seeking to maintain their status in a changing social and political environment, while simultaneously developing and maintaining an individual national culture and identity that may at times be at odds with those modern European values outlined above by Raykoff and Tobin, particularly around issues of sexuality. Éric Fassin’s appropriation of Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilisations” thesis as a sexual clash of civilisations clearly indicates the importance of gender and sexual politics in understanding modern geopolitical affiliations, particularly within Europe. The idea that sexual politics are an important ideological boundary has also been taken up in Jasbir Puar’s concept of “homonationalism”, which addresses the normalisation of queer politics and identities into nationalist discourse and its utilisation in delineating the boundaries between the progressive West and the oppressive ‘other’. While this other is increasingly stereotyped as Islamic in post-9/11 discourses, Conor O’Dwyer’s examination of gay rights movements in Poland highlights how other historical and socio-political differences are also at play. Specifically, the tension between the liberal West and post-communist East can also result in a potential backlash against European Union (EU) expectations. O’Dwyer found this clash of norms to be productive in the Polish context, but warns that in

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14 Raykoff and Tobin, Introduction, xviii.
other places could result in a threat to minority rights. The announced revival of the Intervision Song Contest in 2014 in partial response to the victory of Conchita Wurst underlines two key issues: there is an ongoing sense of ideological affinity amongst the former Soviet states, and sexual politics plays an important role in defining these boundaries.

Sexual politics has thus become a means of redefining ideological borders and is, quite literally for some political and economic organisations such as the EU and Council of Europe, a condition of belonging in “Europe”, as will be discussed later in relation to Azerbaijan. As such, attitudes to sexuality expressed and performed at Eurovision as a significant site of cultural exchange are charged with political value that can be the cause of tension or, more optimistically, harnessed positively. As Milija Gluhovic observes, “this European cultural performance can serve as a productive locus of tension over gender/sexuality versus cultural/religious identity in the service of a more progressive image of Europe.”

The soft and hard politics of the ESC

Despite the contest’s rule against political statements and gestures, European politics have played an important part of the culture of the ESC. For example, amongst the more notorious characteristics of the ESC is the practice of collusive or bloc voting, in which certain culturally and politically aligned countries “swap” votes with one another. In some instances the underlying reason is regional, such as amongst the Scandinavian nations. In others, such as the Eastern bloc, regional affiliations may be further influenced by other historical connections, such as an ongoing sense of political or cultural affinity in the post-Soviet Eastern margins, while the German-Turkish bloc reflects the effects of migration flows on communities’ sense of cultural identity and loyalty. In rarer instances, arguably minimised by changes to voting rules and practices that allow for popular votes from audiences, countries may be either “punished” or “rewarded” with votes in relation to current political issues. Eurovision has also been the launching pad for the political careers of several contestants: Norway’s 1966 contestant, Åse Kleveland, later became the minister of culture; Ireland’s winner, Dana, became a member of the European Parliament in the late 1990s; and the 2004 winner Ruslana also

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secured a seat in the Ukrainian parliament after actively endorsing the Orange Revolution, and has been an activist on various human rights issues.

Politics have also not been entirely absent from the songs themselves. Italy’s winning entry in 1990, “Insieme: 1992”, sung by Toto Cutugno, was one of several songs in the early 1990s that sought to invoke the changing face of Europe with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dismantling of the USSR. While the politics of “Insieme: 1992” were probably soft enough to be palatable for audiences and passable to auditors, producers requested that Ukraine revise the overtly political lyrics of their 2005 entry, perhaps unsurprisingly as it was also the anthem of the Orange Revolution. Although not overtly political in its actual performance, Portugal’s entry in the 1974 competition was used as a secret signal to begin the coup known as the Carnation Revolution. In the same year, Gigliola Cinquetti’s “Sì” was subject to censorship in her home state of Italy as a referendum on a liberalised divorce law was due to be held, and it was feared that the song could be interpreted as a political statement in favour of the laws, thus influencing voters. Although applauded by the Israeli president for their contribution to the nation and to peace, Noa and Mira Awad’s 2009 Israeli entry, “There Must Be Another Way”, courted controversy due to Awad’s Arab ethnicity and the use of Arabic in the song. Also including lyrics in English and Hebrew, the song provides no direct political commentary but is thematically preoccupied with peace and respect for humanity. Iceland’s 2014 entry, Pollapönk’s “No Prejudice”, also sought to draw attention to respect and social justice and succeeded in a much less controversial manner. These examples illustrate how broad commentary on ideologies core to “European” human rights and social justice can slip past the ESC rules and regulations, while songs relating to specific political situations are subjected to greater scrutiny.

The politics of kissing: performing gender politics on the Eurovision stage

Eurovision’s gender politics have gained prominence since the 1990s and are arguably increasingly important as human rights issues pertaining to sexuality have increased in global importance, and the ESC’s queer audience have garnered more attention. Various scholars have observed that Dana International’s winning performance of “Diva” for Israel in 1998 symbolised Eurovision’s “coming out”. Prior to this, Eurovision’s gay appeal, while present, was considered closeted. Eurovision’s camp aesthetic, which remains a large

22 Raykoff, Camping on the Borders, 44.
part of its appeal to its gay audience, has become increasingly overt in recent years. Ukraine’s Verka Serduchka is considered by many to be a pinnacle of Eurovision camp that at once plays with gender politics, by virtue of its drag queen artist, and the harder politics of Ukrainian tensions with Russia. Yet the camp aesthetic does not completely contain the appeal and importance of Eurovision for the gay and queer communities of Europe. As Peter Rehberg observes, Eurovision “certainly provides the opportunity for queer people to experience a feeling of belonging on both the national and transnational level, which is rendered more complicated or foreclosed in other cultural mainstream contexts and the public sphere in general.” In short, it is a site where the idea of “European citizen” is open to those otherwise marginalised. As equality on the grounds of sexual orientation increases in importance throughout Europe and the world, such politics begin to permeate the concerns of the songwriters and performers, just as they have been preoccupied with other political trends, such as, in the early 1990s, the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Finland’s Krista Siegfrids’s performance of “Marry Me” in the 2013 ESC provides a significant text for examining the gender politics of Eurovision and its role in instigating debate about significant issues in queer human rights and social justice. In her live performance, Siegfrids is surrounded by female backup dancers dressed as male wedding attendants, who later reveal bridesmaid dresses under their suits. Two female backup singers dressed in highly stylised, 1940s-inspired outfits accompany her. This ostensible paean to the heterosexual institution of marriage is subverted by a kiss shared between Siegfrids and one of the backup singers. (Such public kisses between women are referred to popularly and in the media as “lesbian kisses”, regardless of the sexual orientation and identities of the women involved. Use of the term to refer to kisses between women seeks to draw upon this popular discourse, but is acknowledged to be misrepresentative and problematic.) The live performance contrasts against the official music video for the song, in which Siegfrids aggressively pursues her recalcitrant boyfriend with the assistance of her leather-clad female friends, one of whom Siegfrids slaps suggestively on the bottom as she passes her to enter the awaiting car. While certainly more heteronormative than the live performance, Siegfrids’s slap on her friend’s behind suggests the possibility of a more fluid sexuality, even as she pursues marriage to a man; conversely, the slap occurs in the presence of male onlookers, which could also suggest a performance of queer sexuality for a male gaze. While the live performance of “Marry Me” was derided by some as too kitsch, it was nevertheless a pointed statement regarding gay marriage rights throughout Europe.

The kiss was a highly publicised dimension of Siegfrids’s performance. According to the rules of the ESC, the stage performance at the finals must be identical to the dress rehearsals. The kiss was thus a known element of the performance, featured in press coverage of the rehearsals, and one that had passed the scrutiny of the officials despite complaints from more conservative

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countries that the kiss broke the ESC rule regarding political statements. In response to these complaints, Siegfrids stated, “I don’t think ‘Marry Me’ is political. It’s about love and tolerance. But gay marriage is not allowed in Finland and that’s wrong. I wanted to make a statement about that.”\(^{29}\) The Turkish and Greek media disagreed that the kiss was not political, citing the rule about political gestures and bringing the contest into disrepute in their criticisms of her actions.\(^{30}\) Turkey cancelled its broadcast of the event, citing poor ratings, while gay activists outside of Turkey claimed it was due to the media furor over the kiss.\(^{31}\)

Siegfrids’s statement was in response to the failure of a Finnish marriage equality bill in 2012, which the Finnish parliament eventually passed in December 2014 by a narrow vote of 102 in favour and 92 against. The act removed the distinction between same-sex unions and heterosexual marriage, affording same-sex couples equal rights in adoption and shared surnames.\(^{32}\) Prior to this change, Finland was the only country in the Nordic region to have maintained conservative marriage laws, although registered partnerships between same-sex couples had been permitted since 2002.\(^{33}\) While Scandinavia holds, in the global imaginary, a reputation for being more socially progressive than other parts of Europe, Finland’s stance on homosexuality had, until the passing of the 2014 bill, been slightly more conservative in comparison to its Nordic neighbours. This is due in part to conservative, often religious-based aspects of traditional Finnish culture and to Finland’s geopolitical status as a boundary between progressive Scandinavia (and by extension the West) and Soviet Russia. As Jens Rydström explains, Finland’s geography placed it in a precarious political position during the Cold War, with significant repercussions for its internal politics, including its approach to social issues, such as gay rights.\(^{34}\) Homosexuality was constructed as a foreign concept – specifically “something that was done in Sweden”\(^{35}\) – much in the same way that is has continued to be constructed as an foreign import in Russian discourse about homosexuality.\(^{36}\)

Siegfrids’s on-stage kiss is evocative of fellow Eurovision contestants t.A.T.u, an established Russian pop act who gained global notoriety for their faux lesbian antics both on stage and in their music videos prior to their appearance as contestants in the 2003 ESC at Riga. Comprised of Lena Katina and Yulia Volkova, t.A.T.u emerged in the 1990s as a contrived girl band that deliberately played with faux lesbianism as a commercial ploy that was openly

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\(^{33}\) Jussi and Ercanbrack, *Finland Votes to Legalize Same-Sex Marriage*.


\(^{35}\) Rydström, Odd Couples, 63.

acknowledged in Russia by both the performers and their management.\textsuperscript{37} In 2003, they gained success beyond Russia with their single, “\textit{All The Things She Said}” and its follow-up, “\textit{Not Gonna Get Us}”. They were selected to represent Russia in the 2003 ESC in the hopes that an internationally-recognised act still experiencing global popularity would secure a Eurovision victory.\textsuperscript{38} While t.A.T.u were bookmakers’ favourites to win and did achieve third place, their unprofessional behaviour in the lead-up to the contest, such as arriving late to the required dress rehearsals in Riga and insolent attitudes in press conferences, marred their reputations with contest officials and voters prior to their lacklustre and off-key performance at the finals. Unlike Siegfrids at Malmo, t.A.T.u did not kiss during their 2003 ESC performance. Beyond some handholding and a moment where Katina and Volkova knelt down together at the back of the stage and gazed at one another, t.A.T.u’s notorious antics were almost entirely absent.

Although the performers were full of bluster in the days leading up to the contest, they were ultimately compliant with its rules and expectations when it came to the performance itself. Nevertheless, t.A.T.u attributed their loss to homophobia rather than to a poor performance that could not be saved by votes from an existing fan base. Yet, this rationalisation was at odds with Eurovision’s famed queer fan base and its significance for these gay viewers, even though t.A.T.u had been subject to homophobic criticisms throughout their career.\textsuperscript{39} Furthermore, such claims are undermined by t.A.T.u’s use of lesbianism as a spectacle of (male) heterosexual fantasy rather than a political statement. While t.A.T.u were not entirely apolitical – they were notoriously outspoken on the US involvement in Iraq and frequently articulate a strong Russian nationalism – their gender politics are rendered suspect by their exploitation of the image of lesbian desire as commercial product. As Heller observes, t.A.T.u were designed to be both titillating and offensive to everyone, including feminists and gay activists.\textsuperscript{40}

While Siegfrids and t.A.T.u may hold acts of faux lesbianism in common, they differ significantly in terms of political intent. Even in performances where they did kiss and touch one another intimately, making statement on gender issues was never t.A.T.u’s intent, whereas it is central to Siegfrids’s 2013 performance, even if she denies that the act or statement is “political” by her understanding. In their analysis of queer public kissing, Charles E. Morris and John M. Sloop insist that same-sex kissing should be seen as “at once cultural representation and a political imperative.”\textsuperscript{41} Where straight kissing reaffirms heteronormative values and behaviour, same-sex kissing performed in public spaces disrupts these norms and “constitutes a paramount political performance”.\textsuperscript{42} Morris and Sloop focus on male-on-male kissing in their research, arguing that women kissing is far more tolerable in mainstream

\textsuperscript{37} Heller, \textit{t.A.T.u. You!}, 203.
\textsuperscript{38} Heller, \textit{t.A.T.u. You!}, 203.
\textsuperscript{39} Heller, \textit{t.A.T.u. You!}, 203.
\textsuperscript{40} Heller, \textit{t.A.T.u. You!}, 201.
\textsuperscript{42} Morris and Sloop, “What Lips”, 3.
society; they do not suggest that it is normalised but that it has been appropriated into male heterosexual fantasy, thus does not have the same political impact as two men kissing. Such an argument may rest upon context and audience. While not all Eurovision viewers are gay men, their prevalence within the audience alters the reception of the performance, which by Siegfried’s own admission is targeted at a social issue of direct relevance to them, albeit not necessarily for the purpose of gaining votes. Placed within the camp pantomime of a wedding, Siegfried’s relatively chaste kiss does not aim at titillating the straight male gaze (nor even the queer female gaze); it is a political performance that seeks to disrupt the idea that the institution of marriage itself, and the desire to enter into it, is the sole domain of heterosexuality.

Conversely, t.A.T.u objectify lesbian sexuality for the purpose of fulfilling heterosexual male fantasy, and in doing so reaffirm heteronormative values. Their faux lesbian performance was political only inasmuch that its contrivance strikes out at Western identity politics, as Heller argues, and illustrates how such a politics had not developed in Russia as it had in the West. As Brian James Baer observes, homosexuality in Russia is “inscribed with Western hegemonic claims”; within this particular discourse, to align with gay identities and activism, therefore, is to align with Western ideology and to abandon Russianness, although some activist movements in post-Soviet Russia do work to legitimate homosexuality within this idea of Russianness and vice versa. The politics of t.A.T.u’s Eurovision performance is thus couched in the more traditional terms of national identity and foreign relations than sexual politics. Their song selection and performance was emblematic of Russia’s relationship with the West. By singing in Russian and flouting the contest rules in the lead-up to the event, t.A.T.u (and Russia) alienated their non-Russian voting audiences and articulated an historical Russian defiance of and disdain for dominant Western culture and politics. Declaring themselves “Russian body and soul”, the open secret of the inauthenticity of t.A.T.u’s performance of lesbianism becomes a joke at the expense of pop music marketing as a product of the West itself, and a statement of “Russian immunity and superiority”.

Nevertheless, as Julie Cassiday has argued, t.A.T.u signify the beginning of Russia’s “gay trajectory” throughout the 2000s, culminating in Dima Bilan’s 2008 homoeroticised performance of “Believe”, in which he was accompanied by a virtuoso violinist and a champion figure-skater, both of whom were male. Expanding upon Yana Meerzon and Dmitri Priven’s contention that Russia developed a deliberate strategy for winning Eurovision, Cassiday argues Russia “went gay” throughout the 2000s for the purpose of winning a contest renowned for its gay audience and camp aesthetic. While Meerzon and Priven provide a useful analysis of Russia’s shifting geopolitics and its strategic use of international events like the ESC to promote a specific image of a modern,

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44 Baer, Queer Russia, 3.
post-Soviet Russia, they fail to tease out concepts used in their analysis, such as “progressive” and “tolerant”, in light of Russia’s reputation for social and cultural oppression, particularly in relation to gender issues. Furthermore, they overlook the camp dimensions of Eurovision and its gay fan base, which responded to the “seductive spectacle of masculine virtuosity and vanity”\textsuperscript{48} in Bilan’s ESC performance. As a consequence, Meerzon and Priven’s analysis of recent entries such as Bilan and the Buranovo Grannies in 2012, as well as the earlier performance by t.A.T.u, is fairly conservative, failing to acknowledge how ideas of tradition, nostalgia and wholesomeness hark back to more conservative and heteronormative gender politics. Such dimensions are explored more successfully in Cassiday’s analysis of camp and queerness in Russia’s Eurovision acts from t.A.T.u to Bilan. She emphasises that the gay trajectory evident in the entries of the 2000s had little to do with the reality of Russian LGBT identities and politics, as the increasing queerness of Russia’s Eurovision entries is in stark contrast to the increase in state-sanctioned homophobia that occurred at the same time. Russia has abandoned or perhaps completely reversed its strategy of queer performance since Bilan’s 2008 victory; performances since then, such as Bilan’s reprise of “Believe” at the 2009 ESC opening ceremony in Moscow and the Buranovo Grannies of 2012, have exhibited “blatant heteronormativity.”\textsuperscript{49}

**Eurovision and homonationalism: redefining ideological boundaries between the West and the rest**

Russia’s strategic deployment of the gay trajectory highlights the importance of sexual politics to not just to Eurovision victory but also to Western socio-political identity. Jasbir Puar’s conceptual framework of homonationalism is useful for understanding how and why such a gay trajectory would be useful for securing a victory from Western European audiences. Short for “homonormative nationalism”,\textsuperscript{50} the concept denotes how acceptance or tolerance of previously marginalised sexualities has become a criterion for legitimating national sovereignty in both domestic and global discourses. Puar developed the term out of frustration with traditional constructions of the nation as heteronormative,\textsuperscript{51} which did not adequately reflect the complex interactions between queer politics, nationalism and global relations. She argues that homonationalism is “a facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality.”\textsuperscript{52} It produces particular narratives of progress and modernity that can be used to delineate and evaluate political difference within and between nation-states based upon their attitudes to queer identities and the access queer subjects have to civil and human rights. In other words, homonationalism has become a way of distinguishing between the liberal, democratic West and the rest. Homonationalism’s more cynical corollary “pinkwashing” refers to the strategic

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\textsuperscript{49} Cassiday, *Post-Soviet Pop Goes Gay*, 17.
\textsuperscript{51} Puar, *Rethinking Homonationalism*, 336.
\textsuperscript{52} Puar, *Rethinking Homonationalism*, 337.
appeal to queer-friendliness through marketing strategies; applications of this term to the Israel–Palestine conflict demonstrate the political implications of this appeal and its connections to homonationalist discourse. While homonationalism is useful for explaining how discourses of human rights and tolerance are used to differentiate between the liberal, progressive West and the rest, pinkwashing is an apt descriptor for Russia’s strategic appeal to liberal sexual politics in its attempt to secure a Eurovision victory and begin to lay the groundwork for its series of high-profile international events, such as the Winter Olympics and the upcoming 2018 FIFA World Cup. Arguably, however, recent controversies regarding homosexuality and human rights in Russia, such as the furore surrounding the Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014, suggest that Russia, having secured hosting rights for these events, currently has little need of the pinkwashing tactic but may return to it, depending on the international climate.

Homonationalism can and should be seen as an extension of Orientalist discourses and conservative imperialist thought, particularly in the post-Cold War, post-9/11 climate of global Islamophobia. While there has been a shift in the focus of anxieties from Communism to religious and cultural difference, such anxieties nevertheless symbolise the West’s ongoing desire or need to define itself against an ideological other. The boundaries between the Western self and its shifting other, as well as the role of homonationalism within this, becomes particularly relevant as the EBU expands to include Muslim-majority nations, such as Turkey and Azerbaijan, alongside the growth of Muslim populations within other European states through the processes of immigration and settlement. Within some homonationalist discourses, pro-LGBT agendas have been co-opted into anti-Muslim sentiment in order to create a further ideological boundary between the West and the Islamic world; whereas in older colonialist/Orientalist discourses the practice of homosexuality was considered a mark of lack of civilisation in Middle Eastern nations, in the homonationalist reiteration of this tradition it is now oppression of these sexualities and rights that signify this lack. Homonationalism, as an extension or continuation of the Orientalist tradition that is concerned with issues of social justice, can also serve to highlight the imperialist dimensions to humanitarian and human rights discourses that serve to promote Western interests, including those pertaining to sexuality.

Examining the intersections and contradictions between local LGBT activism in Azerbaijan and the deployment of human rights and sexuality discourses by foreign activists during the 2012 ESC at Baku, Gluhovic explores how sexuality discourse is used to construct and emphasise an image of a progressive (western) Europe that is at odds with the Eastern “margins”, which are in turn constructed as less progressive and, in some cases, oppressive. Even within

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these Eastern European states, gay-friendliness is used to delineate important regional differences and to signify increased allegiance with Europe and its values; although there were several dissenting voices within Western press, particularly from exiled Azeris, some activists in Azerbaijan sketched a picture of an Azeri society that was relatively tolerant to homosexuality in comparison with its neighbours such as Iran. Iran, in turn, characterises Azerbaijan’s still relatively conservative attitudes to homosexuality as permissive, and as a degradation of morality resulting from their increased Westernisation and desire to construct themselves as a European nation. In fact, Azerbaijan’s hosting of Eurovision caused significant strain on the relationship between the two countries; Iran withdrew its ambassador from Azerbaijan after clerics criticised the event and characterised it as a “gay parade”, leading to the misunderstanding that a specific pride parade would be held as part of the event.

Azerbaijan’s official position on homosexuality is a useful barometer of its shifting position within the international community, although its acceptance and tolerance at a grassroots or societal level is more complex than the laws might suggest. The nation’s original laws against homosexuality were residual of its Soviet membership rather than pre-Soviet Azeri legal tradition. In Soviet discourse, Muslim-majority states, such as Azerbaijan, were sites of “Eastern” (homo)sexual perversion due to their bathhouse cultures. The elimination of such practices with the expansion of Soviet ideology into these zones was part of Russia’s “civilising mission”, and reflects the same Orientalism that permeates current Western human rights discourse. Anti-sodomy laws were introduced in Azerbaijan in 1923, with similar laws passed in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in 1926 and 1927 respectively as a result of Soviet expansion.

Just as anti-sodomy laws were a mark of Soviet membership, repeal of these laws was a condition of European membership, because the Council of Europe requires its member states to assure certain human rights and democratic standards. In order to join the Council in 2001, Azerbaijan reviewed its criminal code, which included the excision of the anti-sodomy article. It should be noted, however, that expansion of gay and lesbian rights into equal civil rights and anti-discrimination policy does not feature amongst Azerbaijan’s further commitments to the Council and its various human rights projects. Reluctance to progress on these issues is perhaps a more accurate reflection of attitudes to homosexuality in Azerbaijan than the change to legislation suggests. In 2010, Azeri officials in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) boycotted debates about same-sex marriage and

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57 Jussi and Ercanbrack, *Finland Votes to Legalize Same-Sex Marriage*.
discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. As the chair of the parliamentary committee on social policy stated on the matter, “Yes, we have declared integration with European structures as our priority, but we must also protect our national and cultural values.”

Azerbaijan was again in the PACE spotlight in May 2012 in the lead-up to the Baku ESC when the assembly adopted a resolution on Azerbaijan’s human rights situation in response to the furore surrounding the contest, including a condemnation of radical Islamist threats against the participants of the ESC and the LGBT community while “strongly support[ing] the secular identity of Azerbaijan and its free choice of foreign policy orientation”. The resolution also noted that the “violation of Azerbaijani citizens’ rights and freedoms goes against [the] goal of using “the Eurovision Song Contest in Baku to promote Azerbaijan”.

Thus, despite decriminalisation for the purpose of attaining membership in a European governing body, Azeri attitudes to homosexuality, as well as broader human rights breaches, highlight the tenuous nature of membership in this political community. Viewed through a homonationalist lens, it could be argued that states like Azerbaijan can adhere superficially to particular requirements in order to attain membership but will remain on the margins of that community until “European values” permeate beyond political and economic structures. Alternatively, Azerbaijan could use its pre-Soviet history of non-heteronormative practices, as discussed above, to redefine ideas about sexuality within an Azeri cultural context that affirms national identity while aligning with “European values”.

The stance articulated by these politicians reflects the significant residual intolerance to homosexuality that remains in Azeri society. Several factors combined, specifically religion, international relations and history, can be used to understand these attitudes. Islam is the dominant religion in the otherwise secular state, but it is important not to fall into the trap of simply dismissing Islam as a monolithic entity with singular views and impacts. Religion is complicated by regional politics and history; in the case of Azerbaijan, the practice and influence of Islam is complicated by its relationships with Russia and Iran discussed above. It is important to emphasise that religious conservatism, while present in Azerbaijan, appears to be more frequently associated with anxiety about Iranian regional influence rather than an accurate reflection of Azeri religious views. Conversely, as previously discussed, Iran decries Azerbaijan’s permissiveness on this issue, evidenced by its decriminalisation and tolerance of the gay culture associated with Eurovision, as a negative sign of their Westernisation and abandonment of Islamic values. Such attitudes were exemplified by the diplomatic furore

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64 Littauer, The Truth about Gay Life.
67 Kotecha, Islamic and Ethnic Identities in Azerbaijan.
caused by the Baku ESC.\textsuperscript{68} The legacy of the Soviet era must be acknowledged for playing a significant role in stigmatising homosexuality in the Caucasus, which is perhaps now strengthened by some anti-gay discourses in global circulation. As with other national contexts, the result of this combined history, religious presence and contemporary international relations is that, while homosexuality is legal in Azerbaijan, it does not follow that it is socially acceptable. As the Azeri author Alekper Aliyev explains,

*People here don’t mind, as long as it’s not in their family. There are several openly gay celebrities in Baku who have money and bodyguards, and they are safe. But nothing will change for the majority of gays, particularly in the provinces. This society will never accept them.*\textsuperscript{69}

Such an observation not only demonstrates the power of socio-economic status in providing protection to marginalised groups but also the gulf between legislative and societal change and between decriminalisation and substantive protection of civil rights. While homosexuals in Azerbaijan have the same age of consent as heterosexuals, and can openly serve in the military, they are not protected by anti-discrimination laws, do not have access to marriage or civil unions, and do not have equal access to adoption and IVF.

Azeri activists’ refuting of the presence or extent of oppression within their society can, like Russia’s gay trajectory, be seen as an act of pinkwashing, but one motivated more by self-preservation than strategic marketing ploys, as they seek to maintain what rights and tolerance they do have within that society. Gluhovic goes as far to suggest that international attention to queer human rights and civil rights issues can be counterproductive for local activism, with particular ramifications for individuals within those local movements.\textsuperscript{70} According to Gluhovic, many Azeri activists distanced themselves from the Sing for Democracy campaign, which sought to highlight human rights abuses in Azerbaijan throughout the ESC event.\textsuperscript{71} He suggests that this distancing may have been from fear and intimidation, particularly given the threats circulating the local LGBT community; to protest could jeopardise their already tenuous place within Azeri civil society. This demonstrates the complexities of how and why homonationalist discourses can be deployed differently within a particular national context and within international contexts. Local Azeri activism for civil and human rights is (arguably) acceptable within the bounds of nation itself and can be used to argue for a modern, European Azeri national identity, but to participate in an international movement to condemn abuse of those rights is, to some officials, to align with foreign political values and therefore against the nation and state.

For nations relegated discursively to be on the “margins” of “Europe”, like Azerbaijan, participation in Eurovision, let alone winning and hosting the competition symbolises belonging within the European community and, as a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{70} Gluhovic, *Sing for Democracy*, 211.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Gluhovic, *Sing for Democracy*, 209–10.
\end{itemize}
consequence, the West. It is also for many an important nation-building exercise. Conversely, Murad Ismayilov argues that, despite the various economic and political opportunities it offered, Eurovision actually interfered with Azerbaijan’s processes of nation-building and national identity formation, including its negotiation of a post-Soviet European identity within the West. Specifically, he argues that the everyday encounter with the diverse, middle-class Eurovision tourists necessitated a “re-appraisal of the many imaginaries [...] the compatibility of values, habits and traditions [...] of the] national cultural Self and the European – Western – Other.” The implication is that this re-appraisal would result in an emphasis of differences between the national Self and the Western Other rather than an affirmation of Azerbaijan’s Europeanness. While the LGBT dimensions of this encounter are relegated to a footnote in Ismayilov’s discussion, he does suggest that Western visitors’ “particular understanding of gender” would be amongst the more trivial reactions. Nevertheless, many have observed that the international spotlight on human rights issues in Azerbaijan, and the related PACE resolution on the matter, exacerbated this difference in the political realm. It jarred Azerbaijan’s political belonging to the European community as much as Eurovision affirmed Azerbaijan’s pop-cultural belonging. Western and Eastern perspectives on the encounter are important to consider: for the West it highlighted the importance of human rights issues, including equal rights for LGBT citizens, in delineating its ideological borders and conditions of belonging; and for the East (as represented here by Azerbaijan) it highlighted the ongoing force of colonial and Orientalist discourses in Western European dealings with its Eastern fringe.

**Conclusion**

As this exploration of several of the Eurovision performances and events has demonstrated, some of the more interesting explorations are occurring at the boundaries of East and West in both the soft politics of the ESC and the harder politics of nation-states and the organisations and institutions to which they belong. Despite its official rules against political statements in performances, there is still space on its stage (and in its staging) for political expression, albeit conditionally. While direct commentary or incitement on political issues in specific national contexts is censored, such as the Ukrainian entry of 2005, there remains room within this rule for broader statements that help to establish the ideological boundaries of “Europe” as a whole, without drawing explicit attention to its specific internal divisions, as can be seen in the cases of Toto Cutugno in 1990 and Noa and Mira in 2009. Krista Siegfrids’s on-stage kiss, while intended as a statement on the specific situation of Finland, is thus acceptable as it reinforces a broad liberal sexual ideology that has increasingly become part of the definition of modern Europe. Russia’s announced revival of the Intervision Song Contest demonstrates the importance of sexual politics in defining the ideologies of contemporary “Europe” and the reluctance of the more conservative states to be complicit with this, and it will warrant further investigation as this competition develops alongside Eurovision.

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73 Ismayilov, State, Identity, and the Politics of Music, 835.
74 Ismayilov, State, Identity, and the Politics of Music, 837.
Eurovision is, by its very nature of bringing together diverse nations and cultures in an event that celebrates “Europe”, political. The various social, political and cultural concerns of the European citizenry find a place on its stage, which is a platform for nation building in its various overt and covert ways, and for requesting and expressing belonging to the European community. As discussed above, the modern tradition of Eurovision offers queer audiences an important opportunity to experience belonging to Europe. Perhaps ironically, this is an experience of Eurovision shared by both gay communities in Western Europe and the Eastern countries in which dominant social discourses about homosexuality are oppressive. The soft and hard political dimensions of the event are experienced differently according to a nation’s security in its belonging to Europe. In the case of the international concerns about Azerbaijan as a host, it demonstrates the very hard political limitations the nation faced for thinking about its identity as a Muslim state and as member state of Europe. For Finland, on the other hand, its membership in the progressive West, and the Nordic region more specifically, affords performers like Siegfrieds the luxury of depoliticising their actions; while decried on the margins, the EBU’s approval of the so-called “lesbian kiss” implicitly established that in some cases and for some countries it was acceptable to reflect current concerns on the ESC stage. Importantly, Siegfrieds’ kiss was acceptable because it reaffirmed equality as an important part of “European” – and by extension EBU – ideology. Even as the Eurovision Song Contest seeks its song to unite Europe, it remains a prism through which the EBU’s and the community’s shifting boundaries and power relations can be examined.

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Queer to be kind: Exploring Western media discourses about the “Eastern bloc” during the 2007 and 2014 Eurovision Song Contests
Research Article

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Queer to be kind: Exploring Western media discourses about the “Eastern bloc” during the 2007 and 2014 Eurovision Song Contests

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This article examines the voting results and Western European media coverage of the 2007 and 2014 Eurovision Song Contests. The Austrian drag act Conchita Wurst (the alter ego of an openly gay man) won in 2014, whilst Serbian entrant Marija Šerifović, portrayed in Western European media as lesbian at the time, won in 2007. We first explore the extent to which there was an East-West voting divide in both contests. In 2014, while there was some elite hostility against Conchita in Eastern Europe, the popular support was on a similar level to that in Western Europe. In 2007, we find no significant geographic divide in support for Šerifović. However, when we examine mainstream UK and German media coverage during and after both contests, we find strong anti-Eastern European discourses that are at odds with the similarity in the public voting. We employ the concept of homonationalism to interrogate inconsistent Western media discourses: the East was depicted as a site of homophobia and the West as a site of tolerance in 2014, whilst the queer aesthetic / identity of Šerifović was largely overlooked in 2007.

Keywords: homonationalism, queer politics, xenophobia, voting behaviour, Eurovision

Introduction

When Eurovision is accused of being “political”, this usually refers to voting based on national blocs. The 2014 edition, however, seemed to have become political in a more complex way. Austria’s entrant, drag act Conchita Wurst, challenged heteronormative gender conventions through her performance, and faced hostility both in the run up to the event and after winning. This hostility was widely reported, and tended to be ascribed to a group of countries collectively represented as Eastern European. There was concern whether Conchita would fare less well at the competition due to widespread homophobia in Eastern Europe, and the competition was stylised into a political contest about the status of LGBT rights.

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We want to critically interrogate this discourse connecting Eastern Europe and LGBT rights. We will be arguing that it is not really the result of a sincere commitment to LGBT liberation, but rather builds on a longer-standing anti-Eastern European discourse. In 2014, this discourse was combined with a homonationalist discourse to construct a particular picture of a backward, homophobic Eastern Europe and a progressive LGBT-friendly Western Europe.

We will contrast the media coverage and voting related to Conchita with Serbia’s 2007 winning entry Marija Šerifović. Although Šerifović only came out publicly in 2013, her sexuality “was not secret to [Serbian] tabloids” as far back as 2004 (when the tabloid Kurir published a story that she had revealed her sexuality to her father), and she was described as lesbian by media outside Serbia at the time of the 2007 ESC. We identified the 2007 Serbian entry as an appropriate comparative case, instead of other drag acts, such as Verka Serduchka (Ukraine, 2007 runner-up), for three primary reasons. First, we focus on winning acts, as these allow for sufficient media coverage to make a more informed analysis. Second, the Serbian victory in 2007 led to widespread Western media accusations of Eastern bloc voting. Third, both Conchita and Šerifović were identified as non-heterosexuals, contrary to Verka, who is an act performed by a heterosexual man.

We employ a mixed-methods approach to ground our observations about a particular schema of representation in the context of actual voting behaviour. Our focus is not confined to the politics inherent to Eurovision itself, but rather the way the event serves as a platform for particular political discourses. Thus, we seek to reveal the inconsistencies in how Eurovision results are represented by media in two particular Western European countries, Germany and the UK (both of which are part of the ‘big five’ funders that do not need to qualify for the main event), despite evidence of similar televoting behaviour across the East-West divide. Rather than providing an exhaustive account of all media coverage in these countries, we have focused on examples that illustrate particularly well the way that Eurovision is reported on, allowing us to present a rich and textured picture of the way Eurovision is represented.

In the next section, we situate our study within the study of Eurovision, and we outline the concept of homonationalism. In the subsequent section, we clarify the terminology we use in regards to “Eastern Europe” and “Conchita”. We then turn to an analysis of voting results in the 2007 and 2014 contests, with a particular focus on East-West bloc voting. Next, we analyse the predominant discourses in German and British media in relation to Conchita’s participation and victory in 2014, followed by a comparison with 2007. This section particularly illustrates the depiction of unfair bloc voting whilst ignoring the lesbian and ethnic minority identity of Marija Šerifović in 2007. We then offer
conclusions on how a homonationalist framing allows us to be critical in reflecting Western respect and tolerance for LGBT individuals.

The Eurovision Song Contest as European Homonationalism

Over the years, the Eurovision Song Contest has become more than an annual showcase, revealing something about the countries that participate in the event, and the complex relationships amongst them. The spectacle of a European-wide televised event has pushed countries, particularly in Eastern Europe, to streamline the complexities of their national identities in order to present a simplified and stereotypical version during the contest.⁵ The event has been used as an opportunity for nation branding in parts of the post-Soviet space for the purpose of creating an image of a “return to Europe”,⁶ sometimes with the aid of Western European brand consultants.⁷ These diverging currents of simplified national stereotypes on the one hand and a return to a multi-ethnic European ideal on the other have necessitated uneasy, “corrective” Eastern European representations of cosmopolitanism.⁸ As a result, Europeanization through Eurovision is limited, and countries can choose which aspects of European practices to incorporate through an à-la-carte process of “political imagination”.⁹ The tensions in these processes can allow for more “bottom-up” constructions of the nation that are sometimes at odds with traditional representations.¹⁰

More importantly, representations around the Eurovision contest are especially salient in the contestation, confirmation, and problematisation of sexualities, particularly in demarcating the divide between Western and Eastern Europe. For example, resonant with the aforementioned process of “political imagination,” Russia has sought to produce new forms of “camp” in its entries to the contest that nonetheless protect and perpetuate traditional ideas of heteronormativity.¹¹ On the other end of the “divide”, commentators have argued that the Eurovision Song Contest press conferences show evidence of a shift from national heteronormativity to a transnational (European) expectation that non-heteronormative individuals should be treated with greater respect and tolerance.¹² We situate our analysis within the literature which critically examines attempts to negatively represent the Eastern “other” unwilling or unable to accept European notions of gender and sexuality, such

as the “frenzied fixation” by Western media and NGOs on LGBT rights in Azerbaijan preceding and during the 2012 contest in Baku.\textsuperscript{13} To do this, we employ the notion of homonationalism.

In order to understand how nation-states are increasingly defined by their gay-friendliness or homophobia, Jasbir Puar developed the concept of homonationalism,\textsuperscript{14} which is “a facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality.”\textsuperscript{15} In recent years, an idealised Europe has become increasingly connected with LGBT rights, and “gay-friendliness”\textsuperscript{16} This narrative can be understood as homonationalist in the sense that it has been built upon the back of the (Eastern) Other, which is constructed as not yet modern, trying to catch up with the West (i.e. “Europe”), or where progress has yet to arrive. In a recent article, Francesca Ammaruto has studied the political use of LGBT rights in what she calls the “Pink Agenda”, which works by “creating and promoting lines of fractures between presumably queer-friendly and homo-transphobic countries both within and outside the European borders,”\textsuperscript{17} in order to create and reinforce (Western) European exceptionalism in the fields of LGBT rights and human rights more broadly. This agenda deepens the already problematic East-West distinction, as it presents the “homophobic East” as a place that is trying to catch up with the West, and at the same time “dragging progress down” (as perceived in the “West”).\textsuperscript{18}

Before proceeding further, it is important to clarify how we use the term “Eastern Europe”. Moreover, given the notion of homonationalism, it is also important to link this concept to understandings of “heteronormativity” and “homophobia”. These terminological issues will be explored in the next section.

\textbf{Clarifying terminologies: Where is Eastern Europe? Who is Conchita?}

We will be using the term Eastern Europe in the same way as the German and British press, that is, referring to the countries that make up former Yugoslavia, the European and Caucasian ex-Soviet Republics, as well as the former Warsaw Pact members (excluding East Germany). The term does not therefore include various participant countries that lie (in the) East of Europe, such as Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, and Israel. The term is associated with former


\textsuperscript{15} Puar, Rethinking Homonationalism, 337.


\textsuperscript{17} Ammaturo, Romana Francesca. 2015. The “Pink Agenda”: Questioning and Challenging European Homonationalist Sexual Citizenship. Sociology (in press).

Communist countries, with Slavs, and at least implicitly with being part of a Russian cultural sphere. As such, we acknowledge that it is a problematic and simplifying term that glosses over and denies great cultural differences as well as local conflicts in order to create a unified sphere that takes its semiological coherence from a Cold-War-era conception of everything Eastern as Russian. However, we will be using it repeatedly in the course of this paper, since the way Eastern European countries are represented in British and German media is precisely such a rendering. That is, when talking of the representation of Eastern Europe one has to use the term, as it is usually not even possible to give it more specificity, since those that employ it have nowhere specific in mind. Nonetheless, we will endeavour to problematise and destabilise the term even while we use it, precisely by looking more closely at the way in which Eastern Europe is talked about when reporting on Eurovision.

We also need to reflect on how to refer to Conchita Wurst, a drag act performed by a gay man, Tom Neuwirth. As this paper focuses on media coverage of the Eurovision act, we will refer in the remainder of the paper to Conchita using either her name or a feminine pronoun. Before we can continue with the analysis, we must also clarify the position of the drag act in a wider heterosexual matrix. Whilst it is beyond the scope of the article to unravel the current academic debate on whether drag acts challenge the binary gender system,20 we want to draw attention to certain aspects of drag in relation to the idea of heteronormativity. We use Samuel Chambers’ conceptualisation of heteronormativity as a regulatory practice,21 which is “the expectation of heterosexuality as it is written into our world […]. It means that everyone and everything is judged from the perspective of straight.”22

The subversive potential of drag in this regard is that it can challenge, call into question, and undermine the presumption of heterosexuality; to expose the internal structure of heteronormativity.23 Conchita, for example, challenges heteronormativity by denaturalising the gender system. Indeed, by appearing as a woman with a beard, she blurs the fixed distinction between the two genders, therefore illuminating the underlying structures of heteronormativity (as the strict distinction between sexes/genders is essential to assume opposite-sex attraction).24

Although often used interchangeably, heteronormativity is distinct from homophobia.25 Contrary to heteronormativity that designates both the political power and social structuring effects of heterosexuality as a norm, homophobia suggests a reduction to the individual. Taking homophobia, rather than

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20 For a good overview of this debate, see Rupp, J. Leila / Taylor, Verta and Shapiro I. Eve. 2010. Drag Queens and Drag Kings: The Difference Gender Makes. Sexualities 13(3), 275–94.
23 Chambers, An Incalculable Effect, 664.
heteronormativity, as a political problem, it is implied that the solution can be found in changing individual attitudes.

Although it is clear that Conchita departs from the heterosexual norm, the media struggle to classifying her according to the known LGBT categories, i.e., she is often described along the lines of transgender or gay identities, ignoring the performativity of the act. More interesting for this paper, however, is that opposition to Conchita is almost always described as homo- or transphobia. By doing so, the heteronormative system seeks to uphold its norms by, first, explicitly marking Conchita’s departure from the norm, and second, making the opposition to Conchita a personal problem that needs to be eliminated, reducing her subversive potential.

In order to better understand the context in which the Western discourses analysed below are operating, we will examine the voting behaviour in the two song contests under study in the next section. We will first look at the 2014 competition and then compare the results with the 2007 competition.

Voting in the 2007 and 2014 Eurovision Song Contests
The long-standing song contest certainly lends itself readily to complex quantitative analyses of voting behaviour, particularly using social network methods.26 These analyses have identified different voting blocs and different voting patterns, like intra-bloc countries’ “favouritism”,27 or voting alongside cultural and linguistic proximity.28 Unlike these past studies, we will employ more modest quantitative techniques in examining the voting patterns for the two song contests under study in this article. We will focus on two voting blocs, Eastern European countries and the other countries, as outlined above. Using the geographic demarcation explained in the previous section, there were 16 countries from “Eastern Europe” out of the 37 participants (including Austria) in 2014, and 21 of the 42 participants were from Eastern Europe (including Serbia) in 2007.

Whereas the data for the 2007 event only comprises the points awarded based on the televote results,29 the 2014 data is much more detailed, and contains the ordinal ranking of the national televote, ordinal rankings of the national juries, ordinal rankings by individual jurors, and the points awarded by each country.30 Thus, we have an unprecedented level of transparency in the scoring. For the comparison between 2007 and 2014, we are limited to an analysis of the awarded points.

27 Blanglardo and Baio, Evidence of Bias in the Eurovision Song Contest.
28 Ginsburgh and Noury, The Eurovision Song Contest.
We first examine whether there is an Eastern bias in the overall vote against Conchita. The average points given to Austria from Eastern European participants were 5.38, whilst they were 10.20 for the rest of the countries. Only San Marino, Poland, Armenia, and Belarus gave Conchita “null points” of the 36 countries voting (Austria could not vote for itself). We conducted an independent-samples t-test, and found that the average overall points given to Conchita significantly differed between Eastern European and other participants (t=4.022, df=34, p < 0.001). This is further corroborated by looking at the ordinal rankings for Conchita. Again, there is evidence of a statistically significant difference of average rankings at all conventional levels (t=3.240, df=34, p=0.003). We are 95% confident that the average ranking given to the Austrian entry was between 1.5 and 6.4 places lower from Eastern European countries compared with her ranking elsewhere. These findings confirm that there was a negative “Eastern bias” in the average points given to Conchita overall.

When we focus only on the jury voting in 2014, however, the picture becomes more interesting. The average ranking of Conchita by juries was 7.14, with a significant difference (t=3.798, df=33, p=0.001) in average ranking between Eastern European countries (11.60) and the other countries (3.80). Thus, Eastern European national juries ranked Conchita significantly lower on average. There are three important observations to add to this analysis. First, the standard deviations (SD) of national jury rankings for both groups are quite different, i.e., compared with non-Eastern European countries (SD = 3.694) there is a high degree of variation amongst Eastern European national juries (SD = 8.166). That is, Eastern European national juries were not uniformly pro- or anti-Conchita. Secondly, given the overall popularity of the Austrian entry across all participating televoters (see below), there were substantial discrepancies between the public vote and national juries, particularly in parts of the former Soviet Union: Armenia (24th in national jury, 2nd in televote); Azerbaijan (24th in national jury, 3rd in televote); and Belarus (23rd in national jury, 4th in televote). Third, this gap between the public and national jury is not confined to Eastern Europe. Despite the high-profile antipathy towards Conchita from Russia, the Austrian entry placed 3rd in the televote but only 11th in the national jury. However, in Germany, Conchita was placed 1st based on the televote, but the national jury placed her 11th – the same as its Russian counterpart.

We then turn to a comparison of the voting between the 2007 and 2014 contests, for which we can only use the televote results (as explained above). In order to compare the two events, we convert the televoting rankings of the 2014 Austrian entry into points. From this it follows that, based on televoting only, Conchita received a remarkable 9.0 out of a maximum 12 points on average. In fact, every country would have given the Austrian entry at least five points except for Estonia, which would have given three points. We then sub-divided

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31 For rankings, “1” denotes the highest rank, “2” as second, and so on. Thus, lower numbers denote a more positive assessment.
32 The ranking from Georgia was nullified by the organisers and is therefore not included in the analysis.
33 The televote scores from Albania and San Marino were excluded due to unspecified issues. Consequently, these countries are not included in the analysis.
the votes by geographic bloc, and found that the average points based on televotes only was 7.6 points within the Eastern bloc and 10.2 points outside Eastern Europe. A difference found to be statistically significant via an independent-samples t-test \((t=3.827, \ df=32, \ p=0.001)\). We are thus 95% confident that Eastern European televoters gave Conchita between 1.2 and 4.0 points less on average compared with televoters elsewhere, if we converted the rankings into points.

Turning to the votes for Marija Šerifović in 2007, we find that the average number of points was 7.59 amongst the 39 countries that gave a televote,\(^{34}\) with Eastern European countries giving 8.40 points on average and other countries giving 6.74 points. The difference between the two blocs was not statistically significant, however \((t=1.444, \ df=37, \ p=0.157)\). We, therefore, do not have sufficient evidence to conclude that there was significant bloc voting (or intra-bloc favouritism) in 2007.

Thus, looking at the televoting in the two contests, we find that there was no statistically significant difference between Eastern European and other countries in the average points given to the 2007 Serbian entry, whilst the televoters outside Eastern Europe gave Conchita significantly higher points than Eastern European publics in 2014. However, if we convert the discrepancy in average scores into ordinal rankings, Eastern European televoters, on average, placed Conchita only between 0.9 and 2.8 places lower than televoters elsewhere (95% Confidence Interval). Thus, although the difference is significant, it is not particularly important. In other words, Eastern European televoters did rank Conchita significantly lower than televoters elsewhere, but the gap is not that stark.

Drawing together the results from the above analysis, we find that overall, there was indeed an "Eastern bias" against Conchita. However, if we divide the televote and jury voting, the picture is more complex, which corroborates voting analyses conducted soon after the event.\(^{35}\) First, although Eastern European televoters did rank Conchita lower on average, the difference is not substantial, and the Austrian entry seemed to enjoy public support across Europe. Second, although given 12 points by its Balkan neighbours, there was not enough statistical evidence to conclude that Eastern and non-Eastern Europeans voted significantly differently on average for Marija Šerifović in 2007. Third, there is a noticeable gap between national juries and televoters in Eastern Europe in 2014, with the former being more negative towards Conchita on average, especially in some of the former Soviet republics. However, there was also a substantial gap between the televote and national jury ranking in Germany.

With these results in mind, we will now turn to the media coverage on Conchita and how it contributed to the creating of the homophobic other (Eastern Europe), in an attempt to highlight Western Europe's "progressiveness" in accepting non-heterosexual subjects.

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\(^{34}\) Serbia could not vote for itself, and Albania and Andorra relied on backup national juries.

Rise like a phoenix: reporting Conchita as a triumph of LGBT rights

The announcement that Conchita would be representing the country at Eurovision garnered considerable media attention. This attention further increased after some hostile reactions, both within Austria and from other parts of Europe. And whilst Austrian negative reactions were reported (mainly in Austria itself),\textsuperscript{36} it was negative reactions from Eastern Europe that went on to receive far more attention across Europe. The form that the hostilities took is interesting in and of itself, and is certainly worthy of media attention, but we are more concerned with the particular form this media attention took.

The story of hostility against Conchita is reported across the board in both Germany and the UK. \textit{Bild} wrote of Conchita being “mobbed” by other ESC countries.\textsuperscript{37} The \textit{Daily Mail} reported “a barrage of homophobic and transphobic attacks.”\textsuperscript{38} The BBC reported that “Conchita recently faced a transphobic backlash online, as conservative protesters in Russia, Armenia and Belarus branded the contest a “hotbed of sodomy.”\textsuperscript{39} The \textit{Independent} ran a story entitled “Conchita Wurst faces transphobic backlash for ‘unnatural’ lifestyle.”\textsuperscript{40}

However, whilst there was initially mention of trans- and homophobia both within Austria and in Eastern Europe, a narrative soon emerged that shifted the focus onto Eastern Europe and identified it as the primary locus of homophobia today. Thus, the Reuters report on Conchita’s selection stated: “her entry has highlighted Europe’s geographical divide on attitudes to homosexuality. Unlikely to raise much controversy in the West, her appearance has prompted criticism by some in the East where anti-gay rhetoric remains more common.”\textsuperscript{41} In a similar vein, \textit{Der Spiegel} wrote that “it fits into the developments of the last few months that the most inhuman comment on the young Austrian, who dared laugh in the face of common gender markers, came from Russia.”\textsuperscript{42}

These sentiments all tie into a larger narrative that portrays Eastern Europe as in various ways culturally backward and in opposition to the progressive values of Western European society. This narrative intensified as the competition drew nearer, and Conchita’s participation became stylised as part of a cultural conflict with Eastern Europe in general and Russia in particular. For instance, the \textit{New Statesman} published a story entitled: “Can a bearded


Austrian drag queen give Putin the bird?" The article writes that the petitions and protests about Conchita:

*illustrate the ever more stark cultural differences within Europe and the widening gulf in attitudes to homosexuality. Whatever you think of the song, [...] a vote for Wurst on the night is another vote against Russian homophobia and transphobia, and a win would send out a strong message of defiance eastwards.*

In a similar, but plainer, expression of the same message, the *IB Times* article “Ten reasons why Austrian drag queen Conchita Wurst must win” listed as its first two items: “1. It will upset the Russians”; and “2. It will upset homophobes in Eastern Europe.” It was thus hardly surprising to find the *Daily Telegraph* refer to the 2014 contest as “the most political Eurovision yet”.

The contest became elevated to a representation of the current state of LGBT rights in Europe. The battle lines were clearly drawn between the progressive West and the reactionary East. After the competition, *Der Spiegel* wrote that Conchita had “turned the competition into a referendum about what society accepts in Europe and what it does not.” The same article goes on to say that Conchita “split the Entertainment- and Economic Community along its invisible value border between East and West.” The German state radio broadcaster *Deutschlandfunk* hit a similar tone in a commentary (itself notable for exhibiting considerable unease with LGBT identities) stating that “[l]ike all politics, the body politics displayed here has certain geographic referents. And so the vote count of the Grand Prix unwittingly provided the opportunity to draw a European map of sexual repression and behavioural norms anew.”

The major weekly *Die Zeit* wrote: “How does the West defend its values? By letting the incomparable artistic figure Conchita Wurst win the Eurovision Song Contest.” That is, Conchita is seen to have won the contest despite Eastern homophobia, rather than the win belying the idea of a homophobic East.

The fact that a number of public figures in Eastern Europe were outspoken in their criticism after Conchita won did not help any move towards a more nuanced analysis. Western media outlets were quick to pick up on this vocal disgust, which seemed to vindicate the previous narrative of a homophobic East. There is no denying the homophobic content of these statements; to give just a few examples: Russian nationalist politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky said of the result “There's no limit to our outrage. It's the end of Europe. It has turned

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wild. They don’t have men and women any more. They have ‘it.’” Russia’s vice premier, Dmitry Rogozin, released a tweet claiming the Eurovision result “showed supporters of European integration their European future – a bearded girl.” The deputy leader of the Russian Communist Party, Valery Rashkin, was quoted as saying that “the last Eurovision results exhausted our patience […]. We cannot tolerate this endless madness.” Some religious leaders even went so far as blaming Conchita for causing flooding in south-east Europe.

This all seems to fit neatly into the established narrative. Conchita’s win can serve both as inspiration for the LGBT community across Europe and demonstrate the persistent homophobia of Eastern Europe, as exemplified by its political, cultural, and spiritual leaders. It was a triumph of Western values. However there are two principal problems with this reading. Firstly, Conchita won, and she won with a large number of points from Eastern European states. How does this fit into the narrative? If the people of Eastern Europe helped vote Conchita to her win, how can we describe them as homophobic, at least in this regard? Statements made by (high-profile) individuals are deemed to be more representative than the decisions made by millions of people. But secondly, and in contrast to this, statements critical of Conchita made by (high-profile) individuals in Western Europe were not treated in the same way. When Terry Wogan, the former host of the British broadcast of Eurovision, called Conchita a “freak show”, this was not taken to be indicative of a general homophobic tendency in the United Kingdom, nor when German rapper Sido kicked off a barrage of online abuse directed at Conchita.

We are not saying that homophobic comments by politicians and protests should not be reported on, but we are suggesting that there is a dubious operation here where this homophobic attitude becomes constructed as an essential feature of Eastern Europe. Moreover, there is a certain elision from simply reporting critically on these things to using the event as part of a “culture war” in which the West – regardless of its practice – is marked as progressive, and the East – regardless of its practice – is marked as reactionary.

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53 More specifically, while the fact that Conchita did well with televoters in Eastern Europe does not prove an absence of homophobia (nor for that matter does her success with Western European televoters), it does suggest that there is no reason to presume homophobia.
Some queers are better than others: Serbia 2007 versus Austria 2014

As seen above, the voting behaviour in 2014 suggests that there was elite hostility towards Conchita in Eastern Europe, but little difference in the popular vote between East and West. By contrast, there seems to be no statistically significant geographic divide in 2007. Before looking into this further, it is worth looking briefly how the 2007 Serbian victory was reported.

One would imagine that there might be parallels in the reception of both Conchita and Marija Šerifović, since both acts represented a form of queer identity. Like Conchita, Šerifović’s performance can be seen as being strategically designed as queer. However, this was not how the performance was read in most media outlets, and the way the Western media reported on the Serbian win was in fact quite different to the reactions to the Austrian win. The form that these differences take is quite instructive in terms of identifying what is problematic about the discourse around Conchita.

When Marija Šerifović won the contest for Serbia in 2007, despite being portrayed in Western European media as a lesbian, there was no concern in Western media about how her sexuality might result in a lack of votes from homophobic Eastern European populaces, nor for the homophobic abuse she might receive. Unlike Conchita, neither Šerifović nor her sexuality was reported on much at all in the run-up to the competition. And in the aftermath, the major talking points were seen to lie elsewhere.

While some of the reactions after her win talked positively about her lesbian and Romany identity, there was nothing like the proclaimed triumph of LGBT rights after Conchita’s win – rather, Šerifović’s win was explained in terms of receiving neighbourly votes. Bloc voting or political voting was in fact the major talking point in most outlets after the event. Bild bemoaned the low placing of Germany’s entry Roger Cicero (rank 19) and said: “Instead of rewarding our swing-king with points, the Eastern European states once again traded points with one another.” The article also stated “Grand-prix-anger against the voting-mafia from the east” and listed a number of “experts” (who happened to be involved in the German production of Eurovision), asserting that there was no chance for Germany because the Eastern states were giving their points to each other. The paper complained that licence fees were being used for a competition in which there was no chance of winning and which did not provide sufficiently strong songs. The following day, Bild’s title page read: “Lowly cheating at the grand-prix: millions of German viewers outraged; East-Europeans hand each other the points; Schlagerstar Nicole: ‘Germany should quit’.”

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57 We found just one amongst the major outlets: Greer, Go, Marija!
60 N.N., ‘Warum mag uns eigentlich keiner?’
This suggestion was reported by the BBC, together with complaints from several other sources. The BBC cited the Liberal Democrat MP Richard Younger-Ross demanding a change in the voting system, because the current modus operandi was both “a joke” and “harmful to the relationship between the peoples of Europe”. He insisted that either the rules needed to change or the UK should withdraw. The article ended with the BBC DJ Paul Gambaccini bemoaning political voting and stating “Now with the public voting instead of the panel voting it is really extensive.” Another article detailed complaints from the head of the Maltese Eurovision contingent accusing several countries of bloc voting and demanding that phone voting be scrapped in certain countries until it could be monitored more closely. The same article finished with Terry Wogan (then still the BBC commentator on Eurovision) stating how aggrieved he was by political voting, saying: “It’s a pity it’s not about the songs anymore. There’s a definite Baltic bloc and a Balkan bloc, and they’ve been joined in recent years by a Russian bloc.”

So we can once again see an anti-Eastern European narrative at work in most of the reporting. The idea that this was a triumph for LGBT rights was almost completely absent from the reactions. In fact, Der Spiegel even went so far as claiming the win was politically reactionary, suggesting that Šerifović’s win was to be regretted as it served as a “fig leaf for anti-European resentment” in Serbia. The larger accusation though was that Eastern European participation in the contest was somehow duplicitous, and rigged against Western states.

Thus, there is a very peculiar understanding of democracy in the discourse around the 2007 event. The outcome of a democratic vote was challenged because it produced what was seen to be an illegitimate result (even though it is not clear how any deliberate illicitness would actually be executed). But the only supposedly legitimate result was a Western European win. Thus when Norway won two years later, after the reintroduction of juries, this was seen as a triumph of process, even though it was less democratic. We might also ask why it is that the supposedly political voting of Eastern European states was seen negatively whereas the mobilisation to vote politically for Conchita in the West was seen as positive. After all, one of the consistent complaints about supposed bloc voting was that the contest was “no longer about the music.”

**Conclusion**

This all suggests that what we really encounter in reporting on Eurovision is a prevalent xenophobic discourse directed against Eastern Europeans that manifests itself differently at different times. In 2014, this combined with a homonationalist discourse to result in a specific narrative around Conchita. What we can see in the context of reporting on Eurovision is the mobilisation of the value of tolerance for intolerant ends. That is, support for LGBT rights and anti-homophobia are rallied around, but they are rallied around in order to

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denigrate a particular identity: Eastern Europeans. In this discursive move, Eastern Europeans are presented as backwards and Other, whereas the West can present itself as the site of enlightened tolerance.

More broadly speaking, this discourse fits into the kind of operation of power where one part of the world is consistently portrayed as the site of injustice, and the other part is portrayed as being in the position of righting these wrongs. This discourse is not limited to a split between Europe and Africa and Asia, which is what most of the literature focuses on. Rather, we can see that within Europe as well, the East is presented as persistently backward, in need of reform, and not quite up to (Western) European standards. As discussed above, a similar trend is identified in the context of LGBT politics, with homonationalism and the Pink Agenda only but two theoretical frames to analyse this phenomenon.

We can see this operation in the reporting of Conchita. Homophobic statements by individual figures in the West, be they Austrian politicians or Terry Wogan, were not seen as the expression of a generalised homophobia. Even though heteronormative discourse is still dominant within Western Europe, the idea that it is the locus of a flourishing of queer rights is not questioned. In the context of Eurovision, we can even see that there have been concerted efforts, in Germany for instance, to de-queer the contest throughout the 2000s. However, this has not tarnished Germany’s image or led to people questioning its record on LGBT rights.

As mentioned above, in the build-up to the 2012 event there were questions as to whether Azerbaijan’s bad record on LGBT rights made it a suitable host for Eurovision. While one could link this to the same anti-Eastern European discourses we have outlined, what is more interesting is the shift that happens from the kind of invocation in 2012 to that in 2014. In 2012, assessments of an on the ground situation regarding LGBT rights were tied up with a homonationalist discourse that constructed East and West in a particular way. In 2014, we witnessed the positing of a particular attitude within Eastern European populaces, for which a quantitative analysis of the 2014 Eurovision voting gives little actual evidence, which is then used for grounding a homonationalist discourse. That is, we are operating on a purely representational level.

What is particularly insidious about this is that Western European states have contributed to the very situation in which the attitudes of Eastern Europe can be read in a way that allows them to be portrayed as homophobic. If voting in

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66 Ammaturo, The “Pink Agenda”; Ayoub and Paternotte, LGBT Activism; Mizielińska and Kulpa, Contemporary Peripheries; Puar, Terrorist Assemblages.
2014 had been carried out purely by popular vote, there would have been little discrepancy between East and West. Elite figures within Eastern Europe may have still expressed their disgust, but this would be operating on the same level as statements by some public figures in Western Europe (although whether this would have led to both of these being reported in the same way is debatable). It is only the partial reintroduction of the jury system that allowed for the perception of a substantive divide between East and West on Conchita, by allowing elite hostility to directly affect the outcomes. That is, the very system brought in to counter the supposedly illicit behaviour of Eastern European publics resulted in the creation of another illicit behaviour. Eastern Europe is thus made to seem illegitimate both when it votes democratically (an expression of tribalism) and when it gives its points by jury (an expression of bigotry).

The homonationalist discourse regarding Conchita has a double function: it reinforces the idea of (Western) European exceptionalism in the field of LGBT rights; and it constructs Eastern European deficiency in terms of individual (but shared) homophobia. By situating its concern in terms of individual attitudes that need to be changed, the West can avoid challenging its own heteronormativity. This discourse, furthermore, proves an easy fit with longer-standing anti-Eastern European discourse in the West of Europe, which likewise denigrates one locale whilst presenting the other as a site of enlightened progressivism. What these discourses share is a profound distrust of the Other and a profound blindness to the limitations of the West. What they show is a severely anti-progressive tendency at the heart of progressive politics.

Bibliography
Queer to be kind: Exploring Western media discourses about the “Eastern bloc” during the 2007 and 2014 Eurovision Song Contests


