Nationalism and the media, East and West

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The Media and Nationalism, East and West: A Critical Revision of Existing Debates

Sabina Mihelj


The upsurge of nationalisms and nation-state-building projects across Eastern Europe in the 1990s gave rise to a veritable industry of media monitoring and criticisms of hate speech, as well as numerous insightful case studies. However, apart from a handful of exceptions, the amassed literature available in English has done little in the way of providing theoretically informed comparative analyses, and even less in the way of advancing major theoretical debates on the relationship between nationalism and mass communication. This is partly due to practical obstacles, such as a lack of resources, language barriers, weak research infrastructure, and the relatively recent development of media and communication studies as an autonomous field of scientific inquiry in the region. The other major reason, however, lies in the established theories of nationalism and communication themselves, and in their often indiscriminate application to Eastern European cases.

A more cautious approach to nationalism and mass communication in Eastern Europe has much to offer. The specificities of nation-building and cultural diversity in the region, combined with recent experiences with rapid political and economic transformation, should provide a strong incentive for rethinking some of the well-worn theoretical truisms. This chapter aims to make a first tentative step in this direction. It starts by outlining the major drawbacks of classic theories of nationalism and the media, and then turns to the examination of key differences and similarities between nation-building projects and patterns of cultural diversity in Eastern and Western Europe. The final two sections provide a critical revision of existing literature on nationalism and the media in Eastern Europe, and develop recommendations for future research.

Theories of nationalism and the Media: major blanks

Most of the widely quoted works addressing the relationship between the media and nationalism (Deutsch 1953, Anderson 1983, Gellner 1983, Billig 1995, Castells

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2 For the purposes of this paper, Eastern Europe is meant to include Albania, Bulgaria, The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, and all the states formed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

3 Throughout the paper, references to existing research and literature are meant to refer primarily to available literature in English, though some works written in local languages are surveyed as well.
are drawing primarily on a selection of post-World-War-II experiences in Western Europe and North America, and, to a more limited extent, on post-colonial experiences. Such a selection of cases, particularly when combined with a teleological, Westocentric theory of modernisation (see esp. Deutsch 1953, Lerner 1958, Schramm 1964 and Gellner 1983), easily lends itself to the false assumption that by and large, modern national communicative spaces are internally homogenous and that their boundaries coincide with state borders. Patterns of mass communication that do not conform to this rule are either overlooked or treated as transitional or aberrant stages of development that should eventually give way to a homogenous national communicative space matching the political unit.

This nation-state-centred approach has haunted media and communication research for almost half a century (Schlesinger 2000). Only after being faced with pervasive phenomena that could not be fitted easily into the nation-state centred model – such as the rise of satellite and cable television, increased transnational migration and the proliferation of diasporic communication – have media scholars begun to question the classic theoretical framework (e.g. Morley and Robins 1995; Barker 1999; Morley 2000; Price 2002). Over the past decade, this questioning has led to a denunciation of the nation-state-centred framework, and prompted an exponential growth of research into the media of diaspora, multiculturalism and transnational communication (e.g. Cunningham and Sinclair 2001; Ogan 2001; Karim 2003; Chalaby 2005; Georgiou 2006). These recent theories acknowledge the mismatch between national communicative spaces and states and are therefore better suited to the analysis of patterns of mass communication and their links with nationhood in Eastern Europe. However, it needs to be noted that these theories normally assume the prior existence of strong nationally minded states and equally strong national communicative spaces coinciding with state borders, and their subsequent decline provoked by globalisation. Again, this narrative is not immediately applicable to Eastern Europe, and in fact does not fare too well in several Western European states either.

In Western Europe, departures from ideal-typical national public spheres are most clearly apparent when we take into account long-established multinational and multilingual media systems such as those of Switzerland and Belgium. The Swiss Broadcasting Corporation established its three national transmitters – French, German and Italian – already in the early 1930s, later adding regular programmes in Romansch, with an analogous development taking place in the realm of television since the late 1950s (Erk 2003). Belgian broadcasting history is similarly linguistically diversified, and resulted in separate radio and television services for the three main language communities: Flemish, French and German (Jongen et al. 2005). The narrative premised on a simple progression from the national to the European becomes even more implausible once we turn to the new and aspiring EU members states of Eastern Europe. For all the newly formed nation-states that emerged out of the rumbles of multinational socialist federations, things national were obviously not a matter of the past: instead, the post-Cold-War European integration went hand-in-hand with nation-state building. Furthermore, most of the newly formed states remained ethnically mixed despite recent attempts at national homogenisation. Although the recent wave of nation-state building in the region initially included several unambiguous attempts to – paraphrasing from
Gellner (1983) – make culture coincide with the state, all states have since abandoned these extreme measures, and have, however begrudgingly, accepted some form of multicultural provisions. This shift is closely related to the fact that this wave of nation-building was faced with parallel processes of institution-building and integration on a supra-national, European or global level. Willy-nilly, the prospective EU member states were forced ‘to choose between the economic advantages of membership in the EU and legislation designed to protect the language and culture of the majority group’ (Johns 2003: 682). Last by not least, the media environment of these recent nation-building efforts has been considerably different from the one accompanying similar historical efforts in Western Europe. Not only has the technological environment been dramatically different; what is more interesting is that nation-building was happening precisely at a point when the media spaces in the region were subjected to a swift deregulation and re-regulation, transnationalisation, commercialisation, tabloidisation and audience segmentation. The new distribution of powers between the state, the market, and the media is one of the most prominent lines of inquiry in existing scholarship on the media in Eastern Europe (e.g. Splichal 1994; Corcoran and Preston 1995; Sparks with Reading 1998; Paletz and Jakubowicz 2003). Yet curiously, available explorations of the media and nationalism in the region hardly ever consider the implications of this shift for nation-building.

Nations, states and the media, East and West

Differences between nationalisms in Eastern and Western Europe have long been a topic of scholarly interest and debate. However, these differences have all too often been explained away by referring to the different conceptions of the nation in Eastern and Western Europe. ‘Western’ nationalism was regarded as predominantly ‘civic’, inclusive, intrinsically peaceful and supportive of democracy, while ‘eastern’ nationalism was seen as predominantly ‘ethnic’, exclusive and inherently more amenable to violence (Kohn 1944; Plamenatz 1973; and, more recently, Schöpflin 1995). Yet this is a far too simplistic explanation, and one based on a problematic, value-laden and empirically unsustainable typology of nationalisms. It tends to obscure the violent episodes in the history of Western nations, such as German National Socialism or Italian Fascism (Auer 1995), and the forced assimilation and erasure of sub-national differences (Weber 1976). Also, recent empirical research into popular conceptions of nationality in Eastern and Western Europe showed that the East/West typology does not fit contemporary realities either (Schulman 2002; Janmaat 2006). Due to that, some authors have suggested to abandon the geographically-bound division of nations altogether and approach civic and ethnic nationalism as ideal types that are to varying extent present in every nation, be it Eastern and Western (Smith 1991). Yet this doesn’t seem to be a solution either (Kymlicka 1995; Brubaker 2004), at least as long as we keep assuming that we can distinguish ‘elements’ of nationhood that are inherently ‘civic’ and ‘inclusive’ from those that are indisputably ‘ethnic’ and ‘exclusive’. Language is a case in point, since it was historically used both as an instrument of national assimilation as well as national differentiation and exclusion.

It is obvious, then, that other factors, beyond the conception of nationhood per se, need to be taken into account if we are to grasp the different relationships between
states, nations and communicative spaces in different parts of Europe. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, all nation-states in Eastern Europe are fairly recent and, in many cases, rather weak ventures. Even though institutionally supported nation-building long preceded the creation of sovereign nation-states, its resources were poorer than for example in France, Germany or the UK. Even today, the basic infrastructure supporting social integration, e.g. various communication and transport networks, are weaker than in Western Europe, and many states do not exert a firm control over the allocation of frequencies within their borders. Also, these states have been formed in an area criss-crossed by competing interests and expansionist projects of a number of empires, which left the region with a notorious ethnic maze, a range of contested borders and a long-standing tradition of foreign intervention. Some of these particularities of Eastern Europe have led Ernest Gellner (1997) to develop an argument about the different ‘time-zones’ of Europe, arguing that each of them was characterised by a different timing of the rise of national states and national cultures. East of Italy and Germany, neither national states nor national cultures were readily available when the age of nationalism dawned. Instead, the region was characterised by a complex patchwork of cultural differences, often overlapping with class divisions, which, in his view, was ‘a recipe for catastrophe’ (ibid.: 54).

Gellner’s argument clearly goes further than the simplistic explanations based exclusively on the supposed differences in the conceptions of nationality, and provides important insights into the interaction of nationalist ideas with wider social and political structures. However, the overall narrative remains overwhelmingly teleological, and premised on a West-centred notion of modernisation. This narrative reduces the persistent cultural diversity of modern states, as well as the various historical approaches to cultural diversity that diverge from the nation-state ideal, to mere aberrations that are bound to give way to classic nation-state building. Yet the recent history of European states, and particularly the recent history of states in Eastern Europe, cannot be reduced to a story about the progressive application of the nation-state model. The would-be nation-states established amidst the ruins of the Ottoman, Habsburg and Romanov empires have of course resorted to a variety of strategies that would help them reduce cultural diversity and thereby approximate the ideal of a nation-state by means of forced assimilation, population transfers and ethnic cleansing. Yet several have also, at least for a period, explicitly rejected this ideal, and instead developed alternative approaches to ‘the national question’ – approaches based on the assumption that cultural diversity is an asset to be preserved rather than an obstacle to modernisation that should be overcome. This included expressly acknowledging the existence of different nations and/or national minorities within state borders, and implementing legal instruments aimed at securing their cultural reproduction, including instruments affecting the media.4 Treating all such cases as aberrations and transitional

4 This propensity to reject the model of the homogeneous nation-state was not always driven by strong convictions on the side of Eastern European political elites themselves. With the exception of models of multinationalism developed in socialist and communist states, the main impetus typically came from Western powers, and functioned as a test that Eastern European countries had to pass in order to become members of the European family of states. Ever since the earliest international efforts aimed at safeguarding minority rights in Europe, minority protection obligations had been imposed primarily on the new, newly recognised or newly enlarged states, and in particular on the small and weak states, which
stages, trying to fit them into an overall narrative of the rise and fall of nation-states – and thereby also national communicative spheres – does not seem to be the right solution.

Obviously, Western Europe is not immune to ethnic diversity. The wave of ‘peripheral nationalisms’ (Keating 1988) that swept through Spain, Britain and France in the 1960s and the 1970s reminded observers that national identity and unity are not as self-evident and uncontested as they expected, and that national integration policies may easily lead to ‘nation-destroying’ rather than ‘nation-building’ (Connor 1994 [1972]: 28-66). However, despite the growing awareness of the persistence of ethnic diversity in Western Europe, explicit multiculturalist policies took long to develop. For centuries, Western European powers – which, on the eve of World War II, included Italy and Germany – have seen themselves as democratic and liberal enough to solve ethnic tensions by means of securing individual human rights only, without resorting to collective rights (Preece 1998: 96-98). Until the dramatic reconfiguration of the map of Europe after 1989, minority issues were virtually absent from the mainstream Western European agenda, or were subsumed under the umbrella of universal human rights.

Another thing to note when comparing ethnic diversity and minority protection in Eastern and Western Europe is that until the sudden increase in immigration in the aftermath of de-colonisation, ethnic diversity in Western European states was largely containable within the borders of the state. For the most part, this diversity amounted to a form of local, regional or proto-national diversity – a remnant or reactivation of specificities that have not been overcome during nation-building. In the majority of cases, historical Western European minorities – the Catalans in Spain, the Bretons in France, the Welsh and Scottish in the UK etc. – do not stretch across state borders, nor have a putative ‘motherland’ elsewhere. This means that with the exception of countries like Switzerland and Belgium, the coincidence of cultures and state-borders is largely preserved, and that diversity can be described fairly accurately by paying attention exclusively to the interior of each individual media space.

In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, patterns similar to those found in Switzerland or Belgium are the norm rather than an exception. Most historical minorities in the region are not limited to regional/local sub-units of the larger national whole, but instead stretch beyond state borders, and are frequently seen as ‘belonging’
to one of the neighbouring states. This creates a particular ‘triadic nexus’ of relations between the ‘host’ state, the putative ‘motherland’ or the kin-state, and the minority (cf. Brubaker 1996: 55-76). This nexus regularly affects also the regulation, funding and institutional organisation of mass communication aimed at minority populations (Mihelj 2005a). Historically, the triadic nexus has often led to conflict-ridden situations, as the kin-state was trying to intervene into the domestic politics of its neighbour in order to protect the rights of what it saw as ‘its own’ people, or the members of the minority wanted to re-join their kin state. Fears of such foreign interventions and secessionist movements are still very much alive across Eastern Europe, and often surface in the work of media researchers as well, particularly when they address issues of transnational communication (e.g. Kolar-Panov 1997, 2004, see below).

The triadic nexus of relations, long known to Eastern European states, has only recently received its approximate counterpart in Western European states. Arguably, the recent immigrant minorities in Western Europe – increasingly dubbed ‘diasporas’ rather than ethnic/national minorities – are, to an important extent, seen in similar terms as the traditional national minorities in Eastern Europe: as extensions of essentially alien national bodies, inherently inclined to be disloyal to their new state. Due to that, recent debates about diasporas and diasporic media in Western European (and more broadly Western) contexts are at least partly relevant to research on minorities and media in Eastern Europe as well.

**Beyond the nation-state-centred approach**

Existing research on mass communication and nationalism in the region provides little insight into the kind of relationships between states, nations, cultures and the media described in the paragraphs above. Even literature which explicitly deals with cultural diversity – usually in relation to minority media, minority languages and minority access to the media more generally – rarely ventures beyond single-country studies. This automatically results in a neglect of cross-country similarities and thereby also legacies of earlier political arrangements that did not adopt the nation-state model. Researchers of minority media, for example, regularly limit their analysis to minority media aimed at one single minority group in a single state: the Turkish minority media in Bulgaria (Valentovitch 2000), the Russian minority media in Estonia (Jakobson 2002; Keedus 2004), the Romani minority media in Hungary (Matelski 2005), the Romani and/or Albanian minority media in Macedonia (Kolar-Panov 1997b, 2004) or the Hungarian minority media in Romania (Magyari 2003; Papp 2005). If a comparative approach is introduced, the focus is likely to be on minority media of one group only, in several states, for example the Jewish media in Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary (Gruber 2001) or Romani media across the region (Project on Ethnic Relations 1996; Gross 2006). Comparative analyses looking at both majority and minority media or involving more countries are rare (Raudsepp 1998; Šulmane and Kruks 2001, 2004; Nyiri 2005). A particularly notable exception is David D. Laitin’s (1998: 268-299) analysis of the use of different identity terms in Russian-language newspaper articles published in four newly independent states with substantial Russian minorities: Kazakhstan, Estonia, Latvia and Ukraine. Most promising is the situation with existing research into minority media regulation, where considerable advances have been made.
in comparative research into minority media regulation within the region and beyond (Klimkiewicz 1999, 2003; Jakubowicz 2003 and McGonagle et al. 2003).

A similar pattern can be discerned in the literature examining the media portrayal of various national others. Only rare works examine the portrayal of several national others – ranging from national and religious minorities to ‘the West’ – and/or cover a broader number of countries. Such exceptions include the book on hate speech in the Balkans edited by Mariana Lenkova (1998) and the analysis of daily newspaper reporting on ethnic minorities in a number of Southeast European states (Milivojević 2002). By far the largest is the number of works focussing on media representations of ethnic/national minorities in one country only. These include examinations of the media portrayal of various minorities in the Lithuanian (Tereskina 2003), Slovak (MeMo – Media Monitoring 2000), Romanian (Cosmeanu 2000) and Serbian (Media Works 2000) media, the representations of the Jewish minority in the Polish (Stephen Roth Institute 2000) and the Hungarian media (Karsai 1993; Heller 1996; Gerő et al. 2000, 2001, 2003), the media reporting on Bosnian refugees and undocumented immigration from the Middle East in the Slovenian media (Doupons Horvat et al. 2001 [1996]; Erjavec 2003; Mihelj 2004; 2000b), the portrayal of the Chinese minority in the Hungarian media (Tóth 1996; Nyíri 2005), the media reporting on the Hungarian minority in the Romanian media (Papp 2000), the coverage of the Russian-speaking population in the Estonian (Raudsepp 1998; Poleštšuk 1999; Reinvelt 2002; Kõuts 2002; Kõuts and Tammpuu 2002) and Latvian media (Šulmane and Kruks 2001, 2004), and finally the media representations of the Roma in the Slovenian (Erjavec 2001), Hungarian (Kerényi 2001; Roma Press Center 2000; 2003), Russian (European Roma Rights Centre 2005: 130-139), Czech (Fawn 2002) Romanian (Hanganu 1999; Project on Ethnic Relations 1997; Dimitru-Seuleanu 1998; Berry 2004: 97-103), and Bosnian media (Babić 2006). Only exceptionally do authors venture into exploring media stereotypes of groups other than those residing in or in the immediate neighbourhood of a particular country. One such exception is Jana Rozehalnová’s (2005) analysis of the Czech media images of Tibet. Finally, systematic analyses involving both domestic and foreign media coverage are extremely rare (see Fawn 2002 for an exception).

Occasionally, the bias of the nation-state-centred framework becomes even more evident, leading researchers to conclude that minority media are inherently dangerous, since they represent a threat to national unity. Such evaluations are often embedded in discussions on the ‘public sphere’ instead of referring to issues of ‘culture’ and ‘identity’, yet the basic premises remain more or less the same: minority media are believed to hamper the creation of an all-encompassing national public sphere, and are therefore considered harmful. Jack Snyder’s arguments on minority media in Eastern Europe are a case in point: drawing on Todd Gitlin’s (1998) arguments on minority media in the USA, he warns that in a deeply divided society, such sphericules may only exacerbate existing fissures. He therefore concludes that ‘ethnically segmented media markets should be counteracted by the promotion of civic-territorial conceptions of national identity’, promoted through an ‘integrative press’ (Snyder 2000: 180).

Dona Kolar-Panov’s (1997b, 2004) work on the media and the multiethnic media sphere in Macedonia follows a similar line of argument. According to her, the activities introduced into the Macedonian media space by the global flow of electronic
goods and services allowed minority ethnic audiences to link with what they perceived as their co-nationals world-wide and led to a fragmentation of national audiences along ethnic and life-style lines. She is particularly worried about the effects of commercial ethnic televisions, which, instead of promoting integration into the Macedonian mainstream, see their audiences as ‘fragments of a neighbouring homeland’ (1997b: *ibid.*) and encourage them to identify with the neighbouring Kosovo, Albania and Serbia instead of Macedonia. A similar set of fears can be discerned in some of the writings on the media in Estonia. Typically, scholars would reflect on the media consumption patterns and conclude that the media consumption of Estonia’s Russian-speaking population, which is largely orientated towards Russian TV channels, ‘deepens the separation of a large share of the non-Estonians from Estonia’s affairs, preventing their integration into Estonian society’ (Lauristin and Vihalemm P. 1998: 37; quoted in Vihalemm T. 1999: 46). As a whole, studies of transnational broadcasting in Eastern Europe therefore share the weaknesses of the literature on satellite television elsewhere in Europe: they evaluate cross-border broadcasting through the prism of national broadcasting, predominantly treating it as a threat to national culture and identity (Chalaby 2005).

However, the consequences of minority media spheres are not necessarily so grim. Both historically and more recently, minority media have often functioned as microcosms of bigger public spheres (Herbst 1995; Cunningham and Sinclair 2001: 28). Although they are expected to be particularizing, this does not doom them from the beginning: ‘They can involve a rejection of universalism but not necessarily so. In fact the discourse of particularism is far from monolithic. The media that ensure the continued survival of certain groups tend to offer these groups competing visions of their identity. Some are lethal. Some are not.’ (Dayan 1998: 105) Even in cases when the projections of identity offered by minority media are expressly homogenising and are trying to establish a clear division between ‘us’, the minority, and ‘them’, the majority, this should not lead us to think that all the members of the minority will necessarily accept such projections as their own. As Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robins (2000) show, Turks in Germany use transnational television from Turkey ‘to think across cultural spaces’ and counter the homogenising national discourse offered by the programme. While the producers may believe that Turkish satellite television keeps Turks in Germany ‘in touch with their homeland’, the viewers were not always eager to accept the claim that Turkey is their true ‘homeland’, and instead situated themselves in relation to, as well as at a distance from, two cultural spaces: the German and the Turkish one.

Furthermore, minority media can often provide a safe space inside which a marginalised minority can search for ways to improve its present situation. This is certainly frequently the case in Eastern Europe, since – as Peter Gross (2006: 490-491) pointed out in response to Jack Snyder’s call for a more ‘integrative press’ in post-communist Europe – the media in the region may simply not (yet?) be integrative enough to be able to co-opt minority media. For example, in the case of Macedonia, the very same media consumption patterns painted in such gloomy colours by Kolar-Panov can be interpreted much more optimistically if looked at primarily from the point of view of minority protection rather than country-wide integration. Zoltan Barany’s
(2005: 83-89) analysis of ethnic mobilisation of Albanians in Macedonia is a case in point. According to him, television broadcasts and newspapers originating in Albania and Kosovo and Albanian-language media within Macedonia have been among the crucial mobilisational prerequisites, and have thus contributed to an improved standard of minority protection in the country. This does not speak against the need for a public sphere cutting across ethnic divisions, yet it does show that minority media are not necessarily an obstacle for the creation of such an integrative public sphere. Quite to the contrary, it demonstrates that minority media are, at least in certain circumstances, themselves contributing to the formation of a more integrative public sphere. While it is true that existing divisions may be deepened and exacerbated if minority media function as self-enclosed ghettos, the very same divisions may also prevent the mainstream media from functioning as truly open, public and integrative forums.

How should we then approach nationalism and mass communication if we are to avoid the bias of the nation-state-centred framework? One solution is offered by those analyses of diasporic communication that focus on the ways in which diasporic audiences challenge the nation-state-centred framework and defy dominant discourses of national identity and belonging (e.g. Aksoy and Robins 2000). Within the realm of Eastern Europe, a closely similar approach, sensitive to the hybrid forms of identity construction, was employed by Maruša Pušnik in her ethnography-based studies into media use and identity-formation among the Slovenian minority in Carinthia (2001a, 2001b) – which are also among the very few existing studies of nationalism and the media in Eastern Europe that explicitly venture beyond the analysis of media texts and media regulation.

However, this solution can fit only research interested primarily in how the nation-state-centred framework is rejected within the context of reception and everyday life. Yet as both the rise of pan-European satellite channels as well as the history of mass communication in Eastern Europe attest, the nation-state model can be rejected also at the level of media production: media regulation is not necessarily governed by the ideal of conformity between signal transmissions and national borders. As Monroe Price notes, analysis needs to look beyond state’s efforts to protect its own information space and include also efforts by a state to influence the media space or infrastructure outside its own borders, as well as efforts of other large-scale competitors for power who use the regulation of communications ‘to organise a cartel of imagery and identity among themselves’ (1995: 60; cf. 2003: 31). In order to appropriately account for various forms of media regulation in expressly multicultural states and multinational federations, however, this model should be diversified further by paying more attention to various competitors for power and markets of loyalties established below the level of the state, within particular federal units, regions or legally recognised minorities.

Another fruitful venue is explored by Jean K. Chalaby who argues transnational broadcasting should not be approached as a deviation from the norm of national broadcasting, but rather examined in its own right. Following this argument, she develops a four-fold typology of cross-border television in Europe, pointing out that each of the types ‘entertain different relationships with the nation-state, geographical space and culture’ (2005: 154). The downside of the approach is that it gives the impression that the principles and solutions adopted by cross-border satellite television...
have no precedence in history, and that the period before the advent of satellite broadcasting can be appropriately described by using a nation-state-centred framework. At least as far as Eastern Europe is concerned, this assumption is false and it is safe to assume that some approaches to transnational broadcasting discussed by Chalaby – most notably perhaps the ‘multi-territory channels’ – approximate solutions developed in the broadcasting systems established in multinational federations such as the socialist Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia or the Soviet Union.

Last but not least, moving beyond a nation-state-centred approach should also entail acknowledging the media involvement in the reproduction of supra-national collective attachments and stereotypes in the region. These are not related only to the European Union, but span a much broader horizon and include regional forms of belonging that feed on imperial and socialist legacies. The notions of Central Europe, the Balkan, East and West and Yugoslav brotherhood are all tightly intertwined with individual nation-building projects in the region (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992; Todorova 1997; Gingrich 1998), and often provide the reference point for newer forms of supranational identification, attached to the EU. Existing literature on the media and nationalism, however, still relatively rarely draws attention to such issues (for exceptions see e.g. Czerwiński 2003; Mihelj 2004, 2005b; Volčič 2005, 2007), thereby again conforming to the nation-state centred perspective.

**Towards a broader notion of nationalism**

Besides being locked in a nation-state-centred approach, literature on nationalism and mass communication has long remained overwhelmingly centered on the early periods of nation-formation, and on the macro-processes and structural issues fostering the *early rise* and proliferation of national movements and nation-states. Much ink has been spent on identifying the exact balance of continuity and discontinuity between modern nations and pre-modern collectivities (e.g. Armstrong 1982; Smith 1986), and discussing the structural aspects of mass communication that allowed the formation of collective bonds on a large scale (e.g. Deutsch 1953; Lerner 1958; Schramm 1964; Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983). In contrast, we know, comparatively speaking, much less about the ebbs and flows of nations and nationalisms after their initial rise, and about the micro-politics of nationalist mobilization and demobilization in established nations and nation-states. Michael Billig’s (1995) study of banal nationalism made a crucial step forward by providing an account of how national attachments are being sustained and reproduced in established states of the West, via a wide array of hardly noticeable routines and categories that permeate the fabric of everyday life, including everyday public communication. Several studies followed, diversifying and complicating Billig’s theory by pointing to the multiple layers of sub- and trans-national belonging that are anchored in everyday routines and categories alongside national ones (e.g. Rosie et al. 2004, 2006). Others have shown how such mindless nation-maintaining routines and habits enter everyday lives of citizens through a range of communication-related institutions and everyday practices not explored by Billig, for example national currencies, public phones, advertising, and consumption (Foster 2002), as well as the various media of timekeeping such as wristwatches, clocks and calendars (Postill 2006).
The range of literature examining media involvement in everyday, hardly noticeable practices of national identity construction forms a relatively minor part of existing literature on nationalism and the media, yet is growing rapidly and is certainly worth being noted. For example, an increasing amount of works pays attention to the use of deixis (Jakobson 2002; Mihelj 2006), to the gendered nation-making through media coverage of sports events (Kotnik 2002; von der Lippe 2002), and to the construction of national normality through entertainment genres (Luthar 1993). Among rare works that explicitly and predominantly focus on the mediated reproduction of everyday, banal nationalism is Václav Štětka’s (2005a) study of Czech television news bulletins, which shows how the least visible aspects of news – the amount, length, hierarchy and thematic structure of national and foreign news stories – contribute to the demarcation of the Czech ‘homeland’. A similar approach is employed also in Kramberger et al.’s (2002) analysis of representations of culture in the Slovenian mass media in the period from 1987 to 2000, which demonstrates how the most basic criteria of selection, framing and hierarchisation of cultural events and issues covered by the media are informed by nationalism.

The large majority of existing research, however, remains limited exclusively to most overtly xenophobic and violent forms of nationalism, thereby unwittingly reproducing the stereotype that equates nationalism, and Eastern European nationalism in particular, with heightened emotions and violence. The dominance of the narrow understanding of nationalism in existing studies of media in nationalism in Eastern Europe is most clearly reflected in the choice of research topics. One of the largest bodies of literature addressing the relationships between the media and nationalism in the region focuses on the involvement of the mass media in the gradual formation and escalation of violent conflicts in the region. Predictably, the role of domestic media in the gradual formation and escalation of inter-ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia was most extensively studied. The war-time involvement of domestic media in igniting nationalism in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina attracted most attention (Hudelist 1992; Mežnarić 1993; Malešić 1993, 1997; Gjetten 1995; Čolović 1997; Malešević and Uzelac 1997; Žarkov 1997, 2001; Reljić 1998; Sofos 1999; Thompson 1999; Skopljanac Brunner et al. 2000; Denich 2000; Oberschall 2000; Theobald 2000; Kurspahić 2003; Senjković 2003; Bozic-Roberson 2004; Reynolds 2004). While most studies have focussed on traditional forms of mass communication, ranging from the press to television, some have also addressed the role of Internet communication (Stubbs 1998; Bieber 2000). Another recurring topic was the relationship between the media and nationalism in Serbia before the outbreak of violent conflicts, and the gradual formation of nationalist stereotypes (e.g. Banac 1992; media-related essays in Popov 2000 [1996]; Slapšak et al. 1997; Jovanović 2000). A substantial number of works also provides an insight into the foreign media’s reactions to the Yugoslav wars (Gow et al. 1996; Myers and Klak 1996; Kuusisto 1999; Sremac 1999; Requate and Vollert 2002), while others focus on Yugoslav diasporic media and their reactions to the wars (Kolar-Panov 1997a; Stubbs 1998; Kaldor-Robinson 2002). More recently, the involvement of the media in the Macedonian conflict also received its share of attention (Crighton 2003), as did the continuing negotiations over the political status of Kosovo (Erjavec and Volčić 2007). Finally, the controversial NATO intervention in 1999 has provoked a veritable outpouring of publications, mostly focussing on the foreign media responses to

Even when examining the relationship between mass communication and nationalism in peaceful contexts, the vast majority of existing research deals primarily with instances of hate speech and stereotypes of various national others. An important corrective is provided by the handful of articles that focus on the mediated reproduction of national selves rather than the explicitly xenophobic portrayal of national others. These include analyses of web-sites (Senjković and Dukić 2005) and examinations of media reporting on issues such as international sports competitions (Kotnik 2002; von der Lippe 2002; Pujk 2000; Ilycheva 2005; Barrer 2007), beliefs in historical primacy (Weaver 2005), national holidays (Mihelj 2006), ultra-nationalism (Mondak 2003), and integration into international organisations such as the EU (Golubeva 2005) and NATO (Heller and Rényi 2003a, 2003b). These studies draw attention precisely to those instances of ‘our’ nationalism that tend to be seen as unproblematic, benign or even beneficial. Although most of these studies continue to focus on various instances of ‘hot’ nationalism, many of them also venture in discussing other, less prominent forms of national attachment, and thus help establish a better sense of the multiple ways in which nationalism enters everyday lives of Eastern European citizens.

The adoption of a broader understanding of nationalism has much to offer. For a start, it precludes simplistic explanations that seek the roots of violence in a particular nationalist ideology as such, or assume that Eastern European nationalisms are inherently inclined to violence. Instead, it would encourage raising questions such as: How and under what circumstances is banal nationalism turned into a ‘hot’, violent one, and how do the media contribute to this process? How and under what circumstances is a media war likely to escalate and turn into a real war? How and under which circumstances and with which consequences do wars become perceived as ‘ethnic’ wars? Do these circumstances vary between countries which have different traditions of nation-building, different journalistic culture, different institutional media arrangements? Some tentative answers have already been provided by more theoretically-minded inquiries into the involvement of the media in Yugoslav conflicts (e.g. Denich 2000; Oberschall 2000; Snyder 2002: 213-217), but all remain subject to further elaboration and empirical testing. Particularly good answers could be gained by drawing on a range of case studies taken from social and political contexts which have seen varying levels of inter-ethnic hatred and violence, and are characterised by different political, economic or media systems, both within and beyond Eastern Europe.5

Another field of research that could profit from adopting a broader notion of nationalism is the research on media regulation. This is one of the most developed subfields of research into Eastern European media, and already provides some valuable insights into the relationship between mass communication and nationalism in the region. However, those remain limited largely to explorations of media regulation in relation to minority provisions, minority media and use of minority languages. By

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5 A recently started research project led by Pål Kolstø, involving a broad network of researchers drawn from the region, represents a promising step in this direction (see Kolstø 2006 for a project outline).
contrast, analyses focussing on the broader range of legal provisions that either knowingly or unwittingly foster the mediated construction of national selves are extremely scarce. When discussing the reform of state television in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Romania, Alina Mungiu Pippidi (2003: 50) notes that ‘all of the broadcasting laws have some general provisions regarding cultural and national identity, as well as programmes destined for national minorities’, and mentions examples such as setting quotas for nationally produced programmes, supporting particular (supposedly national) values, or banning ‘country and national defamation’. Similar issues have been raised by a number of other works focussing on single countries (Goban-Klas 1997; Milton 1997: 20), yet systematic analyses are virtually absent. The influence of international legislation is rarely considered in this context, and systematic comparisons with Western Europe and other countries are lacking, except when specifically supported by European or other international institutions (e.g. McGonagle et al. 2003). Moreover, little if anything is known about how the particular aspects of media legislation are implemented in practice and what consequences they have for media production and content. The rare cases in which such issues are raised are cases when the non-compliance with legislation becomes an issue of public concern, either nationally or internationally. Typically this happens either when non-governmental organisations are concerned about the non-compliance with legal requirements regarding hate speech or when national governments and politicians feel the national sovereignty and identity are under threat because the quotas for foreign TV programmes broadcast on domestic channels have been exceeded. Examples of research prompted by breaches of hate-speech regulation can be found across the region, and particularly often in South-eastern Europe (e.g. Lenkova 1998; Kajsiu 2005; Petreska 2005; Spaić 2005; Tomović 2005; Vilović 2005). Studies arising (partly) in response to breaches of quotas for foreign TV programmes can be found in a number works analysing the Latvian media scene, where several stations catering to the Russian-speaking minority have exceeded the total permitted air-time for programmes in non-Latvian languages (cf. Kruks 2001, McGonagle et al 2003: 288-294; Raihman 2003: 8-11).

And lastly – though this does not exhaust the list of possible research venues – an approach employing a broader notion of nationalism and paying particular attention to its most mundane manifestations could also help us understand the relationship between nationalism, mass communication, and the recent shift from socialist to capitalist economies in the region. It should be quite obvious that that media-wise, the post-socialist nation-(re)building in Eastern Europe was not as tightly state-managed as it was traditionally the case in Western Europe. This should have had consequences for the nation-building projects in the region. While the newly formed or newly privatized media may have – and in many cases did – willingly and even enthusiastically fostered the state-led nation-building agenda, many have chose to follow very different, less overtly nationalist strategies of audience-maximisation. Even when the media have exploited the nationalist discourse, their agenda may have been very different from the one initially suggested by the political or cultural elites. It is probably sound to start with the assumption that the shift from the state to the market had similar consequences as in Western Europe: it did not lead to a demise of the national, but rather to its metamorphosis: by using the nation as the market, a new kind of relationship was
established between the state, the media and the nation (Bourdon 2003: 84-86). Or, to put it differently: commercialisation has facilitated the rise of an imagined national community of consumers, and let to a marginalisation of alternative conceptions of the nation, such as the nation of citizens and the nation of workers. How exactly this happened in Eastern Europe and what was the role of the various media genres – including not only the news media, but also the popular media genres, tabloids and advertisements – has yet to be established. Among rare studies that addresses some of these issues are Wieslaw Godzic’s (2003) study of Polish advertisements and the tensions and between the constructions of the viewer/listener as a member of the Polish nation on the one hand and as a consumer on the other hand, and Zala Volčič’s (2007) critical examination of links between capitalism and the nostalgia-driven idealisation of socialist Yugoslavia in the post-Yugoslav realm.

Conclusions

Given the peculiarities of its nation-building, as well as its experience with socialism and transition to democracy and economic liberalism, Eastern Europe provides an excellent starting point for any research that aims to move beyond the truisms of classic theories of nationalism and mass communication. This chapter suggested two broad conceptual and analytical solutions that could prove helpful when developing such research. The first one is based on a rejection of the nation-state-centric bias inherent in most of the classic writings on nationalism and mass communication, but also warns against an uncritical application of the more recent theories of transnational communication. Instead, analysis should start by acknowledging a) the involvement of the media in the reproduction of supra-national collective attachments, not only those stimulated by EU integration and the rise of satellite broadcasting, but also those drawing on imperial and socialist legacies and earlier forms of transnational communication in the region, and b) the existence of several overlapping communicative spaces as well as forms of media regulation that do not conform to the ideal of a national communicative space coinciding with state borders, but instead operate either below and above the level of a particular state, and entertain different relationships between states, borders, nations and other collectivities. The second solution suggested in the chapter entails the adoption of a broader understanding of nationalism, which includes not only the most easily discernable, hate-driven or violent forms of nationalism, but also the more invisible, banal, supposedly benign or ‘peaceful’ forms. The adoption of such a broader notion of nationalism would preclude simplistic explanations that seek the roots of violence in a particular nationalist ideology as such, or assume that Eastern European nationalisms are inherently inclined to violence. It could, among other things, also provide a good starting point for an analysis that seeks to understand the links between nationalism, mass communication, and the recent shift from socialist to capitalist economies in the region.

Comparative research incorporating cases from both Eastern and Western Europe could allow for a better understanding of how and to what extent the relationships between the media and nationalism vary in countries which have different trajectories of nation-state building, different configurations of national identity, and different historical experiences with ethnic conflicts. Recent conflicts in the region
could provide excellent grounds for comparative studies of the role of the mass media in nationalist mobilisation, focussing for example on the preconditions which make the mass media particularly amenable to spreading nationalist prejudices, or social and political contexts which make the audience more or less resistant to mass mediated propagandistic messages. The contribution of the mass media to the nation-building efforts of new states in the region is an equally interesting venue for inquiry, especially since these efforts have been conducted in a heavily mediatised context, and were faced with parallel processes of institution-building and integration on a supra-national, European level. Last but not least, a comparative endeavour including cases from both Eastern and Western Europe could help us better understand the relationships between nationalism, the media and European integration. Nationalist media coverage of European affairs can and indeed often does function as an obstacle to European integration. However, numerous cases from the peripheral members of the European Union also suggest that when ‘Europeanisation’ becomes a national project – as it was the case across Eastern Europe in the early 1990s – nationalism can have the opposite effect. Whether such an alliance between peripheral nationalisms and Europeanisation can last, and what are its consequences for European democracy, is of course a separate issue, and one that will have to be addressed at a different place and time.
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