

*Mass Media and Peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina: The Role of the Bosnian Mass Media  
after Dayton Accords, 1995*

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## **Introduction**

This paper examines the role that mass media played in Bosnia-Herzegovina after Dayton Accords 1995. It provides a theoretical framework and explores how Bosnian media outlets contributed to the peace process and national reconciliation. To envisage the difficulty of retooling the Bosnian mass media to promote peace, the paper reflects to the destructive role that mass media played during the Bosnian war. It highlights the roles of media outlets controlled by Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Serbs, and Bosnian Croats. Because these rival ethnic groups had used mass media to fan war before Dayton Accords, the paper examines efforts aimed at utilizing these media organizations to serve the cause of peace. The paper also sheds light on newscasts convergence, namely between Belgrade's media and Bosnian Serb media on the one hand, and Zagreb's media and Bosnian Croat media on the other hand. This newscast convergence influenced the peace process in Bosnia-Herzegovina and affected its multiethnic and multicultural heritage.

The paper underscores the assistance that United States and the European countries provided to Bosnian media to sustain the peace process. It discusses the role that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) played in regulating the Bosnian media to promote peace and democratization. The paper pays a special attention to role of The Media Experts Commission (MEC) in regulating the Bosnian media and utilizing it as a tool for enhancing peace during the 1996 elections.

## **Conceptual framework**

This paper builds on a number of theoretical frameworks, particularly, agenda setting, Ball-Rokeach and De Fleur's (1976) media system dependency theory and Gerbner et al.'s (1980) cultivation theory. According to Graber (1993) agenda setting is the gate-keeping that informs audiences "in fairly uniform fashion which individual issues and activities are most significant and deserve to be ranked highly on the public's agenda of concerns"(p. 216). Iyengar (1988) argues that individual readings of media messages activates selective recall that may challenge these messages and weakens agenda-setting effect (p. 598). Lasorsa and Wanta (1990) provide a different viewpoint and suggest that personal experience might reinforce media messages "rather than interfere with them"(p. 806). McCombs and Shaw (1972) argue that by relaying information to audiences, mass media indicate which political issues are important. McCombs (1996) describes agenda-setting as "an instance of community building"(p. 435).

Brewer and McCombs (1996) delineate two models of agenda-setting: the linear model where influence trickles from the media to the public and then policy, and the independent model which depicts the movement from the media agenda to the policy agenda. It is important to note that agenda setting is related to framing. A number of studies have dealt with the importance of framing in depicting reality (Gitlin 1980; Graber (1989; Gamson 1989; Iyengar & Simon 1993; Entman 1993, 1991; Shah et al. 1996). Entman (1993) argues that media frames rely on salience, repetition and association with familiar symbols while directing "attention away from other aspects"(p.54).

Ball-Rokeach and De Fleur's (1976) media system dependency theory assumes that individuals rely on media for information and orientation. The degree of society's dependence on media depends on the degree of stability or conflict, the society is undergoing, and the centrality of media as a source of information. Ball-Rokeach and De Fleur (1976) develop a model that illustrates the interrelation between media, society and audience, and the link with media effects (p. 264). They argue that at times of crises audiences are expected to be more dependent on media for information. De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989) conclude that the media system control scarce information resources that interact with other systems and "produce cooperation motivated by mutual interest, conflict motivated by self-interest, and change toward greater symmetry or asymmetry of dependency"( p.321).

Gerbner et al.'s (1994) cultivation theory assumes that television content furnishes recurrent patterns of events as a source of perceptions of social reality that could be at variance with the real world. The cultivation theory suggests that heavy television viewers hold distorted image of the real world. Signorielli and Morgan (1990) refer to "cultivation analysis" as the third component of "Cultural Indicators" that deal with media content and its relationship to audience beliefs and behaviors (p. 15). Moreover, the authors suggest that "exposure to the total pattern rather than only to specific genres or patterns is what accounts for the historically new and distinct consequences of living with television: the cultivation of shared conceptions of reality among otherwise diverse publics"(Gerbner et al. 1994, p. 18).

### **A brief historical background**

Pre-1990 conflicts in Bosnia could be attributed to socio-economic factors (Christian rural peasantry versus Muslim landowners); imperial conquest (Habsburg versus Ottoman); and in early 1990s competing Serbian, Croatian and Muslim nationalisms. In addition, religious rivalries pitted Serbian Orthodoxy, Croatian Catholicism and Islam against each other ("Unfinished...", 1996, p. 14; Bennett, 1995).

When the Allies defeated Germany in World War II, Josip Broz Tito the leader of the victorious Partisans emerged as the ultimate leader of Yugoslavia. He adhered to communism and utilized the mass media "to bring Yugoslav people together in the Titoist spirit of 'brotherhood and unity.'"(Bennett 1995, p.10). Tito introduced the 1974 constitution that decentralized power, and tied the six republics in a federation. The constitution also provided autonomy to Kosovo and Vojvodina. Following his death in 1980, Yugoslavia plunged into political and economic crises. In the wake of the fall of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the Yugoslav federation started to disintegrate.

### **Balkan media as a tool for waging war**

Slobodan Milosevic emerged as an undisputed Serb leader by 1987. He benefited from the surge of Serbian nationalism that started with the 1986 memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts that called on Serbs to be more assertive (Rogel, 1997, p. 95). In 1989, he amended the 1974 Constitution to annul Kosovo's autonomy. Milosevic

manipulated Serbian mass media and emerged as “a Serbian hero”(Rogel, 1998, p. 95). His central theme was that “all Serbs should be united in a single Serbian state”(Bennett, 1995, p. 97). Serbian media alleged that Serbs were exploited during Tito’s era and they demanded equality. But non-Serb nationalist leaders in the other Yugoslav republics challenged Milosevic’s move for centralization and used mass media in their republics for their advantage. Media war aggravated nationalist grievances and precipitated the disintegration of Yugoslavia (Snyder & Ballentine 1997, p. 30; Hampson, 1996, p. 154). Zimmermann (1995) asserts, “The manipulators condoned and even provoked local ethnic violence in order to engender animosities that could then be magnified by the press, leading to further violence”(p. 12).

Milosevic’s desire to dominate the Yugoslav federation ignited ethnic wars and led to Yugoslavia’s disintegration. His military assaults against Croatia in 1991 and Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992 failed to quell pro-independence movements. Balkan wars involved disintegration of state structures and “the manipulation of opinion through the electronic media, and widespread violation of humanitarian law, including civilian massacres, mass rape, systematic starvation, hostage-taking, and the destruction of historic and cultural sites”(Kaldore, 1995, p. 19).

On January 15, 1992 the European Community recognized Slovenia and Croatia as independent states. Bosnia-Herzegovina held referendum on independence in February 1992. The European Community recognized it as an independent state on April 6, 1992. The war in Bosnia started the same day. On April 7, U.S. recognized Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as independent states. “The remainder of Tito’s Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro, chose to remain together and officially adopted the name of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) on April 27, 1992”(Rogel, 1997, 27).

Some scholars suggest that it was the media war that ignited ethnic hatred and not “ancient Balkan hostilities”(Bennett, 1995, p. 148; Zimmermann, 1996a, p. 120). But “the impact of the supply of nationalist propaganda must be assessed in light of the demand for it”(Snyder & Ballentine, 1997, p. 29). Thompson (1994) articulates this point when he refers to pervasive prejudice and fear. He argues, “there was a disposition to believe ‘news’ which elicited and exploited the prejudice; without the media, however, Serbia’s leaders could not have obtained public consent and approval of its nationalist politics”(Thompson, 1994, pp. 127-128). The Serbs gave Milosevic and his program “support in three separate elections (1989, 1992, and in December 1993), thereby sharing with him in any guilt for the wars”(Mojzes, 1994, p. 158).

According to the New York Times, “Broadcast propaganda helped foment the ethnic hatred that led to war, and today it is impeding peace and reconciliation. (“Creating...,” 1998, A32). Rogel (1998) concurs and adds that television “was used to spread lies and fear about the enemy (false war information was regularly broadcast) and about political opponents in elections. Both Milosevic’s and Tudjman’s campaigns used media effectively to their advantage”(p.51). Media messages were meant to unify audiences of each ethnic group, and increase their fear of persecution by rival ethnic groups. Thus,

many “radio and television stations were primary targets in the war on Bosnia.” (“Journalists...,” 1996, p. 6).

### **Bosnian media and Dayton Accords 1995**

Following the shelling of a marketplace in Sarajevo in 1995, NATO bombers launched air strikes against Serb targets (“NATO begins...,” 1995, p. 19). NATO’s air strikes and the subsequent Croat and Muslim counterattacks forced the Serbs to soften their position and accept peace (Hoar, 1995, p. 20). After marathon negotiations, and a skillful carrot-and-stick approach, U.S. succeeded in persuading the warring parties to initial Dayton Accords on November 21, 1995, in Dayton, Ohio. On December 14, 1995, a General Framework Agreement was signed by Bosnian President Alija Izetbecovitch, Croatian President Franco Tudjman and Serbian President Solobodan Milosevic in Paris, France. The U.S.-backed Bosnian-Croat Federation “gained 51 percent of the territory of the republic and Sarajevo became again a unified city”(Zimmermann, 1996a, p. 233; “Signing...,” 1994, p. 137). “An imperfect document, the Dayton Accord provided for two recognized political entities within Bosnia separated into three military zones and enforced by 60,000 NATO troops (IFOR)”(Xhudo, 1996, p. 145). When Milosevic endorsed Dayton Accords, Belgrade media stopped mentioning Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic as a hero, but made “hints that he was involved in money-laundering and war-profiteering”(Silber & Little, 1995, p. 335).

Dayton Accords brought peace to Bosnia-Herzegovina, but it did not end the feelings of bitterness, injustice and animosity. In addition, the implementation of Dayton Accords’ military aspects, which stabilized the country, contributed to its virtual dismemberment. Entrusting NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) (and since December 1996, its successor, the Stabilization Force (SFOR)), with patrolling “the 1,000-kilometer demilitarized zone, actually helped legitimize the divide between the Muslim-Croat federation and the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina”(Rogel, 1997, p. 73). In addition, rival Bosnian Serbs and Croats, were “averse to free debate, free movement of journalists and even distribution of publications between the Serb-held half of the country and the Croat-Muslim federation—and even between the federation’s components parts.” (Randal, 1996, A 25).

Bosnian Muslims were dissatisfied with Dayton Accords because they believed it gave the Bosnian Serbs more land than they deserved. Haris Silajdzic, the Muslim prime minister of Bosnia-Herzegovina, criticized the peace deal and stated, “It’s not a just agreement...but it’s probably the best we could get” (Zimmermann, 1996a, p. 232). The Bosnian Serbs who accepted Dayton Accords grudgingly believed that they should gain 64 percent of Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as half of Sarajevo. Since Dayton Accords gave them only 49 percent of Bosnia’s territory, and they “lost Sarajevo and failed to destroy the Bosnian Federation” it was clear that they would aim at undermining Dayton Accords (Holbrooke, 1997, pp. 170-171). Moreover, Bosnian Croats were also dissatisfied with Dayton Accords because they could not sustain their mini-state, Herzeg-Bosna as an independent state. Moreover, they felt that U.S. and European countries forced them to accept living with Bosniac Muslims in a Federation. Thus, as Simic

(1996) has indicated “the future of Bosnia-Herzegovina is still uncertain” because none of “the parties to the conflict had realized its ultimate goals in Dayton”(p. 7).

### **Mass media in Bosniac-controlled Federation territory**

When the war started in Bosnia-Herzegovina in April 1992, Bosnian Muslim-dominated government argued that the war was not caused by different faiths or ethnic groups, but “caused by pure and simple aggression”(Silajdzic, 1997, p. 462). To preserve the integrity of Bosnia, Radio-Television Sarajevo (later became Radio and Television Bosnia-Herzegovina (RTVBH)) suppressed the news of the Yugoslav People’s Army’s (JNA) attack on Sarajevo (Stone, 1996, pp. 229-231). Thompson (1994) argues, “As a result, RTVBH’s effect on its audience was precisely opposite to that of TV Belgrade and TV Zagreb on theirs; it disarmed them psychologically”(p. 229). However, by 1993, Radio Bosnia-Herzegovina (formerly Radio Sarajevo) lost its balanced reporting and became the mouthpiece for the Bosnian Government. Media outside Sarajevo were under siege by warring factions. Though newspapers and magazine were shut down, Sarajevo’s daily *Oslobodjenje* (liberation) survived the war.

In mid-1995 Bosniac-controlled territory had about 32 local radio stations and 16 local TV stations, 170 magazines and uncounted newspapers. State-controlled television (RTVBH) could be seen by “at least 30 percent of the population of Republika Srpska as well as 78 percent of the population of Bosniac-controlled Federation Territory” (“Appendices,” 1999, p. 11). Alternative television stations included TV-IN, which was sponsored by the Office of the Humanitarian Representative (OHR). Other television stations that belonged to TV-IN included, RTV Mostar, TV Hayat. In addition, there was Liberty Television, which belonged to Radio Free Europe and broadcast to TVX in Sarajevo, TV Mostar, and Zetel in Zenca. However, “The highest profile and most expensive project, TV-IN, which is otherwise known as the Open Broadcast Network and cost \$ 10.5 million in 1996, has been a failure”(“Media in Bosnia...,” 1999, p. 2).

State-controlled Radio Bosnia-Herzegovina (Radio B&H) which covered all of Bosnia-Herzegovina, was the most popular radio. Other radio stations included, Radio Hayat, a nationalist radio; Sarajevo-based Radio Zid, which broadcast BBC, VOA and Deutsche Welle’s Croat and Serb language news services; and Radio Mostar, a Bosniac radio in east Mostar (“Appendices,” 1999, pp. 9-10). Another alternative medium was a Swiss-financed and OSCE-sponsored Free Elections Radio Network (Radio FERN). A number of new radio and television stations were established after Dayton Accords.

The press also flourished after Dayton Accords. The two Sarajevo dailies, *Oslobodjenje* and *Vecernje Novine* (Evening Newspaper) enjoyed relative editorial freedom, though *Oslobodjenje* was “64 percent owned by the state, and *Vecernje* 49 percent.” (Stone, 1996, p. 76). The two papers had regional editions in Tuzla and Zenica respectively. There was also a new daily, *Dnevni Avaz* (Daily Voice) published with material support of the ruling Bosnian Muslim Party, SDA.” (Stone, 1996, p. 76). *Lijiljan*, a weekly magazine was also connected with SDA. It was launched in 1995 with the support of George Soros’ Open Society Fund. *Dani*, a Sarajevo monthly also received assistance

from the Open Society Fund. But the highest recipient of the Open Society Fund financial support was Slobodna Bosna, an investigative biweekly. Another publication was Ogljedalo an "inter-entity monthly joint venture funded by USAID and London's Institute of War and Peace Reporting linking Tuzla's Front slobode, Banja Luka's Novi prelom, Doboj's Alternativa and Bijeljina's Ekstra magazin" ("Appendices," 1999, p. 8). According to International Crisis Group, "Despite a handful of quality publications, however, circulations are generally small and most of the industry would collapse if the donations dried up" ("Media in Bosnia...", 1999, p. 7). Commenting on the difficulties facing his paper, Mehmed Halilovic, editor of Oslobođenje, said, "We survived the war, but in some ways it may prove even harder to survive in peacetime." (Randal, 1996, A 25). The head of the Media Center in Sarajevo said, "We may have a lot of media, but no one is making a profit except one radio and two television stations.... Every thing else is built on air." (Stone, 1996, p. 76). The war has caused many older experienced journalists to flee abroad.

Most of the radio and television programs in Bosniac-controlled areas, were controlled by nationalistic parties. However, there were exceptions "such as Radio and TV 99 and Radio Zid in Sarajevo, as well as some small radio stations throughout Bosnia." (Stone, 1996, p. 76). The Bosniac Government expressed little tolerance for anti-government reports. In one incident, police in Sarajevo seized copies of the Politika satirical magazine because it portrayed Izetbegovic as Tito ("Bosnian press...", 1997, p. 11). OSCE criticized the Bosnian government for confiscating Politika magazine. On their part, Muslims were also critical of NATO. The Muslim-led Government complains that NATO "has forced it to comply with demands of the Dayton peace accords, such as the return of Serbian and Croatian refugees to Sarajevo, while not putting equal pressure on the Bosnian Serbs" (Hedges, 1998, A10). Thus, selective implementation of the Dayton Accords was unacceptable to Bosnian Muslims.

### **Bosnian Serb media**

On April 7, 1992, the Bosnian Serbs led by Radovan Karadzic declared their own state, Republika Srpska. Bosnian Serb Army and Bosnian Serb Democratic Party (SDS) established their own television and radio stations (SRT) in addition to a news agency, the Serb Republic News Agency (SRNA) in Banja Luka, northern Bosnia. The agency and the radio-television services in Serb-controlled areas in Bosnia-Herzegovina converged with Belgrade's media, and became almost undistinguishable. For example, during the first year of the war "Kanal S evening news [based in Pale, Bosnia, and owned by Karadzic] was rebroadcast every night on TV Belgrade" (Thompson, 1994, p. 253). The SRNA and Kanal S provided their audiences with war propaganda that was intended to demonize Croats and Muslims and mobilize Bosnian Serbs (Thompson, 1994, p. 257). Serb media in Bosnia-Herzegovina continued their destructive role even after the signing of Dayton Accords. For example, Bosnian Serb "media campaigns seem to have played a very considerable part in persuading Serb residents to flee" Sarajevo refrain from living in the Bosniac-Croat Federation ("Unfinished...", 1996, p. 93). Moreover, Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic continued to characterize Bosnian Croats as "fascists and Muslims as Islamic fanatics" (Zimmermann, 1995, pp. 16-17). According to Abramowitz

(1997) “The Pale news media pose an immediate threat to the Dayton peace agreement”(A34).

In September 1995, the High Representative for Bosnia-Herzegovina, Carlos Westendorp warned the Serbian television for broadcasting reports supporting Karadzic and attacking NATO-led Stabilization Force (SFOR). When pro-Karadzic supporters ignored his warning, NATO bombed SRT's transmitters (“Bosnia's battle ...,” 1997, p. 2). But the Serbs repaired the transmitters and resumed anti-NATO propaganda “comparing SFOR to the occupation forces from the Nazi era.” (“Rebel Serb TV...,” 1997, p. 1). In response, SFOR declared that it would not “hesitate to take necessary measures including the use of force against media networks or programs inciting attacks on SFOR or other organizations.” (“NATO to Bosnia...,” 1997, p. 1).

In late September 1996, SFOR seized four transmitters broadcasting signals from Bosnian Serb state television in Pale and switched their signals to a television in Banja Luka, loyal to NATO-backed Bosnian Serb president Biljana Plavsic. Robert Gelbard, the chief U.S. envoy to Bosnia, said, “the Pale studio had continually broadcast ‘threats...lies and distortions’ about the international organizations enforcing the 1995 Dayton peace accord.” (“Regulate...,” 1997, p. 7). However, when pro-Karadzic elements protested NATO's action, NATO returned the transmitters with certain conditions. “Under the deal, pro-Karadzic broadcasters agreed to tone down anti-NATO and anti-U.N. propaganda” (“Serb hard-liners ...,” 1997, p. 1).

Interestingly, the power struggle over the Bosnian airwaves disrupted a show of a popular Venezuelan-made soap opera, named *Kassandra*. According to Pat Neal “viewers all over the war-torn country were tuning into a Venezuelan-made soap opera for their doses of passion, drama, intrigue and power struggles in what could be called a passionate escape from reality.” (Neal, 1997, p. 1). According to Pat Neal, “concerned that the show's absence could spark unrest, the U.S. Department wanted it back on the air.” (Neal, 1997, p. 2). The show was resumed when U.S. intervened and brought a copy of the soap opera from Miami-based Coral Pictures. According to a media specialist, since Dayton talks, audiences “have shunned news and taken refuge in pop music and pirated movies on television.”(Randal, 1996, A 25). Silva Vujovic, a Bosnian consultant for Sarajevo-based Media Plan, argues, “Bosnians of all political persuasions are sick and tired of news which they automatically equate with the propaganda held responsible for contributing so much to starting and maintaining the war.” (Randal, 1996, A 25).

When the U.N. International War Crimes Tribunal indicted Radovan Karadzic for committing war crimes during the Bosnian war, Bosnian Serb television increased its anti-NATO and anti-UN messages. Hedges (1998) indicates that “nationalist Bosnian Serb newspapers including *Serb Oslobodenje* and *Javnost* refer angrily to Mr. Westendorp as ‘the dictator’ and complain of ‘colonial domination by the West.’”(A10).

To stop Bosnian Serb's inflammatory rhetoric and incitement of violence, NATO requested the U.S. to deploy three EC-130E (a C-130 cargo plane mounted with an airborne television station) specialized aircrafts. These aircrafts were intended to



transmit UN broadcasts and “jam Bosnian Serb broadcasts.” (“U.S. deploys ...,” 1997, p. 1).

During the summer of 1997, SRT “began an anti-NATO campaign, mixing footage of NATO soldiers with that of Nazis in World War II.”(Metzel, 1997, p. 16). Thus, on October 1, 1997, NATO-led troops seized four key Bosnian Serb television transmitters “because of broadcasts considered hostile to the 1995 Dayton peace accord.” (“NATO troops ...,” 1997, p. 1). Moreover, NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana stated that “Bosnian Serb Television was obstructing the peace process by suggesting that the U.N. International War Crimes Tribunal at the Hague, Netherlands, is anti-Serb.” (“NATO troops ...,” 1997, p. 1). Thus, NATO military chief Gen. Wesley Clark told NATO defense ministers that “broadcasts would resume under ‘new management,’ adding that the transmitters were being turned over to supporters of Plavsic.” (“NATO troops ...,” 1997, p. 1). However, Bosnian Serbs continued to obstruct the return of non-Serb refugees and described aid agencies’ efforts as “‘conspiracy’, while the refugees themselves are accused of ‘perpetuating aggression against Serb territory.’” (Peric-Zimonjic, 1997, p. 1).

By 1998, Republika Srpska had “25 news papers and other periodicals, 36 radio stations (seven of which are privately-owned), seven television stations (i.e. production units or studios) and one official news agency, SRNA”(“Media in Bosnia...,” 1999, p. 5). Though, Sarajevo-based television stations, Croatian television as well as Belgrade television could be watched, SDS-controlled television in Republika Srpska was the most influential medium. With regard to radio, the only semi-independent radio was Radio Krajina which became an “influential forum for alternative points of view”(“Media in Bosnia...,” 1999, p. 6).

Bosnian Serbs also managed to control the press. SDS controlled Banja-Luka’s dailies Glas Srpska, and Srpsko Oslobođenje. Otherwise, Belgrade press was available and “read more than anything published in Republika Srpska”(“Media in Bosnia...,” 1999, p. 5). Alternative press included Novi prelom in Banja Luka, Alternativa in Doboj and Panorama in Vijelijina. However, the most influential paper was Nezavisne novine which evolved “with the financial assistance from the UK’s Overseas Development Agency, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and George Soros’ Open Society Fund”(“Media in Bosnia...,” 1999, p. 6).

### **Bosnian Croat media**

Emulating Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats proclaimed their own state, Herceg-Bosna on August 28, 1993. Its leader was Mate Boban who emerged as a Bosnian Croat leader through Tudjman’s patronage (Silber & Little, 1995, p. 293). Bosnian Croats controlled media outlets in areas that they controlled during the Bosnian war. They established Herceg-Bosna News Agency (HABENA) as well as TV Siroki Brijeg near Mostar. This TV station was operated and controlled by Croatia Radio and Television (HRT) in Zagreb, and “there was no attempt to disguise it as a separate entity”(p. 261). Thus, news from Herceg-Bosna and Croatia converged and sustained war

propaganda against Bosnian Muslims, who were characterized as “mujahedin and ‘Islamic fanatics’”(Thompson, 1994, p. 262).

Since Dayton Accords did not recognize Herceg-Bosna as a state, Croatia started to absorb Bosnian Croat-controlled areas. Consequently, “Croatian currency, telecommunications, and media are all in use. In 1995, the Bosnian Croats were granted a number of directly elected members in the Croatian parliament”(“Unfinished...,” 1996, p. 103). In addition, Bosnian Croat’s media continued to impede the implementation of the peace process. According to New York Times, “in the Croatian sector, which is controlled by virulent nationalists, some television and radio stations still incite people to block the return of refugees or call those who work with other ethnic groups ‘traitors’”(“Creating...,” 1998, A32).

After Dayton Accords, Bosnian Croat media market remained almost closed to alternative media. By 1998, there were fifteen radio stations, five television stations and ten papers. The most influential media were TV Herceg-Bosna, and Croatia’s HRT which supported the Bosnian Croat ruling party, HDZ. There was also a privately-owned hardline nationalistic television, Hrvatska Televizija Mostar. Moreover, there was Hrvatska Radio Postaja Mostar, which the Bosnian Croats seized from the Bosnian Government during the war. Under Bosnian Croat control, the radio lost its pre-war multi-ethnic character and became “exclusively Croat and fiercely nationalistic” (“Appendices,” 1999, p. 5).

With regard to the press, there was Hrvatska rijec, which backed the Bosnian Croat party HDZ. There was also Horizont, which was a semi-independent paper. The Bosnian Croats issued a weekly paper, Hrvatski list. This paper had good access to Croatian market because it was “printed at the Slobodna Dalmacija plant in Split, Croatia, and distributed by the same company”(Thompson, 1994, p. 261). Croatia’s press referred to Bosnian Croat news as Herceg-Bosna news in an attempt to boost Herceg-Bosna’s status. In addition, Croatia’s television (HRT) whose signal covered much of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was “the principal information source” in Bosnian Croat controlled areas (“Media in Bosnia...,” 1999, p. 6). Moreover, Bosnian Croat municipal authorities owned Radio Herceg-Bosna.

### **The Serbian media**

During the war, the Serbian mass media referred to Croats as “‘Ustase’ (and later, Muslims became ‘Turks’).” (Zimmermann, 1996a, p.121). Moreover, during the 1992 “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia, Belgrade media portrayed Serbs as victims of Turks, and charged that “Muslims were plotting to establish an Islamic fundamentalist state”(Snyder & Balletine, 1997, p. 28; Globe, 1996, p. 192; Macleod, 1997, p. 250; Zimmermann, 1995, p. 4). Thus, Belgrade’s media played a prominent role in inciting Bosnian Serbs against Croats and Muslims.

After signing Dayton Accords, Milosevic said that he “has instructed the media to tamp down their former anti-Muslim and anti-Croat fervor and get behind the Dayton

Accord.”(Marton, 1996, p.2). This shift in media content by late April 1993, was instrumental in shifting Serbian public opinion in favor of peace in Bosnia (Thompson, 1994, pp. 127-128). However, most Serbs did not “understand why this loss is celebrated as peace.” (Silber, 1996, p. 62). According to Perlez (1997) despite his promise in Dayton Accords to uphold free press, Milosevic “shut some of the regional television stations run by opposition parties. The only privately owned television in Belgrade, Karic TV, was pulled into line after it showed some independence”(Perlez, 1997, p. 5). When Milosevic faced anti-government protests in the winter of 1996 -97, his government “deprived newspapers of newsprint, threatened owners and jammed opposition radio broadcasts”(Wilkinson, 1998, A2).

The Serbian Government controlled the News Agency, Tanjug as well as Serbian Radio-Television (RTS). An alternative media was Radio B92 which was established in 1989. Its audience was limited to Belgrade area (about 2 million listeners). The largest private radio station was Studio B, which reached one-third of the country. It was “mostly staff-owned and funded by advertising”(Thompson, 1994, p. 118).

The Serbian Government also managed to control major newspapers, namely Borba (Struggle) and Vecernje novosti. The other papers, namely “Politika and Politika ekspres, are controlled via the collaboration of the directorship of the Politika group”(Thompson, 1994, p. 124). A semi-independent magazine was Vreme (Time), which had “never chorused the standard anti-Muslim and anti-Bosnian justifications of the war”(Thompson, 1994, p. 124). Other independent papers that stood out included Nasa Borba, Danas and Dnevni Telegraf.

The Serbian Government continued to harass and intimidate independent-minded media which were depicted as “the American fifth column”(“Current situation...,” 1999, p. 6). Serbian media depicted opposition media as “traitors of Serbian national interests”(Perlez, 1998, p. 6). In addition, the Government managed to takeover local independent media, ration newsprint and exert pressure on businesses not to advertise in unsympathetic papers. The takeover of semi-independent newspaper, Borba was well-known. Harassment of independent Radio-TV Studio B was relentless (Stone, 1996, p. 74). In February 1996, Serbia “revoked the registration of the Soros Foundation Centers in Serbia and Montenegro, which had been working to raise the skills of journalists.” (Stone, 1996, p. 74). Perlez (1997) argues, that for ten years now, “state television has fed the Serbs with an undiluted diet of nationalism”(p. 5). Veran Matic, founder of Radio B-92, adds that Serbian television informed Serbs that Serbia was the center of the world and the West wanted “to destroy it” (Perlez, 1997, p. 5).

In 1998 patriotic fervor continued to dominate state-run media in Serbia. Opposition was described as “treacherous foreign conspiracy.”(Wilkinson, 1998, p. 2). Ivan Mrdjen, editor in chief of Nasa Borba explained that Belgrade authorities summoned representatives of the five independent newspapers and told them that the government “expects a ‘patriotic’ attitude from the media during national crises.” (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 2). Serbian authorities controlled newsprint to control the press. “Nasa Borba, the only major independent daily in Serbia, struggles to reach more than 10,000 readers, whereas

Politika, the pro-Milosevic paper, never suffers from a newsprint shortage and reaches 300,000.”(Marton, 1996, p. 2). Migliarina (1998) argues, “A tight political grip by the ruling parties affected most of the local media scene; even formally private media were often controlled by political forces, and the few truly independent journalists had to fight their own personal battles with self-censorship”(p. 2).

### **Croatian media**

Croatian President Franco Tudjman wanted to divide Bosnia into two entities: a Croat-controlled entity and a Serbian-controlled entity (“unfinished...,” 1996, p. 103; Zimmermann, 1996a, p. 117; Vevoda, 1996, p. 109). He used the war as a pretext to muzzle independent media. In “1992 the respected weekly Danas [Today] was forced out of business and the independent-minded daily, Slobodna Dalmacija [Free Dalmatia], was taken over by HDZ sympathizers”(Bennett, 1994, p. 231). Croatian Television (HTV) and the government-controlled paper Vecernji list were used as tools for Croatian war propaganda.

Croatian media “Coverage of war in Bosnia has been designed to deliver simple messages: Croat forces in Bosnia are only defending themselves and their ‘centuries-old heaths’;... the other sides, the Serb forces and, since early 1993, the ‘Muslim forces’ too ...are expansionist, aggressive and genocidal”(Thompson, 1994, p. 166). Zimmermann (1996a) adds, “The nationalist media sought to terrify by invoking mass murderers of a bygone time. The Croatian press described Serbs as ‘Cetniks’- the Serbian nationalists of World War II”(p. 121). Moreover, Tudjman called Bosnian President Izetbegovic “the mujahedin Alija”(Thompson, 1994, p. 135) and depicted Bosnian Muslims as “dangerous fundamentalists” who wanted to establish an “Islamic state in the heart of Europe”(Zimmermann, 1995, p. 15, 1996a, p. 117). Croatian media repeatedly referred to the Bosnian Army as “mujahedin”. Thompson (1994) contends, “Croatian war reporting is Croatian war lying...it will take decades for the profession [journalism] to recover from producing so many lies”(p. 201). Ethnic-cleansing and other atrocities that Croatian forces committed against non-Croats went unreported in Croat media (Thompson, 1994, p. 199).

Though Dayton Accords called for promoting independent media in the Balkans, Tudjman continued to muzzle media organizations. For example, “nearly all of the fifteen TV stations in Croatia are owned by people sympathetic to the ruling party.” (Brodsky, 1998, p. 23). The state-controlled radio and television (HRT) reached about 74 percent of the population. Another example was the closing down of “Radio 101, an extremely popular radio station whose termination prompted 100,000 demonstrators to march in protest in Zagreb in November 1996”(Rogel, 1996, pp.114-115). Because Croatian authorities controlled the three national television networks and influential radio stations, Croatian journalists “accused President Franjo Tudjman of acting as editor-in-chief of all media, electronic and print.” (Borsky, p. 23). Some writers who called for peace in the Balkans were harassed. Publications that faced intimidation included anti-war biweekly Akzin and Jutarnji List (Morning Paper)( Stone, 1996, p. 75).

Croatian government used newsprint, distribution, and legal suits as means to control independent press. According to Borsky (1998) “four of the six newspapers in Croatia are state-controlled and these inform 8 percent of the people while weekly newspaper are the main source of information for about 2 percent.”(p. 23). One independent newspaper, Feral Tribune, which depicted Tudjman and Milosevic as partners in war crime, faced about 80 percent hike in newsprint price. John Fox, the director of the Washington, D.C., office of the Open Society Institute, contends, “The Croatian government is setting the pace for media repression in the region...It uses a relentless strategy of economic, administrative, and police measures against the media and individual journalists.” (Brodsky, 1998, p. 23).

### **Western attempts to retool Bosnian media to promote peace**

Balkan journalists who met in mid-1995 in Ljubljana, Slovenia, recommended that “to ensure that ‘peace’ is translated into democratic institutions, healthy reconstruction and economic development, the West must insist that independent and free media be a precondition, an essential feature.” (Stone, 1996, p. 76). According to the New York Times, “The challenge for Bosnia and international community is to help keep these new media active after NATO troops leave, and to improve the state television and radio stations that are the main source of news for Bosnians”( “Creating ...,” 1998, A32). Another issue facing the Bosnian media resides in the nature the market-driven journalism that Western countries wanted. The challenge will be how to balance profit motives and civic journalism (Vinson, 1997, p. 48).

### **U.S. assistance to Bosnian mass media**

Holbrooke (1997) asserts, “the American policy goal, simply defined, should remain to prevent partition and implement Dayton.”(p. 171). To promote peace, U.S. Government as well as U.S. private sector extended financial and technical assistance to Bosnian media (“Unfinished...,” 1996, p. 93). President Clinton stated, “We’ve helped to turn the media from an instrument of war into a force for peace, stifling the inflammatory radio and television broadcasts that helped to fuel the conflict”(“Clinton announces...,” 1998, p. 109). U.S. also has helped in restructuring the state-run media to meet “international standards of objectivity and access and, establish alternative independent media”(“Clinton announces...,” 1998, p. 109). During her visit to Croatia in August 1998, U.S. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright “called for ‘respect for a free media’ in order to ‘keep leaders accountable.’” (Brodsky, 1998, p. 23). She criticized the state-controlled television (HRT) informed Tudjman that “ ‘HRT cannot operate this way’ ...‘Having an open and free media, especially a television that functions freely, is one of the benchmarks of what has to happen.’”(Brodsky, 1998, p. 23).

Washington warned Bosnian Serb hardliners in mid-August 1997, to halt the ‘vile poison’ from Pale SRT, or face the consequences. James Robin, the State Department Spokesman said, “We call on the Pale leadership to end this rhetoric. Karadzic and his cronies should stop throwing kerosene on the fire”(Peric-Zimonjic, 1997, p. 1). The shift in U.S. policy from focusing a specific date for withdrawing its forces to creating “‘concrete and achievable benchmarks,’ clearly gave the peace process a much-needed

psychological boost early in 1998.” (“To build a peace...,” 1998, p.7). In a nutshell, U.S. commitment to enforce many military aspects of the Dayton Accords was instrumental in sustaining the fragile peace process in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Doherty, 1994, p. 484).

### **The role of the OSCE in regulating the Bosnian media**

Following its deployment in 1996, “the Implementation Force (IFOR) took an important step to improve the media situation when it used its transport helicopters and trucks to take journalists from all sides to joint press briefings with other implementing agencies” (Miglierina 1997, p. 2). In addition, as stipulated in Dayton Accords the OSCE established a Provisional Election Commission (PEC) to conduct elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The PEC created the Media Experts Commission (MEC) in May 1996. The MEC was entrusted with helping the PEC to ensure the fairness of the elections. The mandate of the MEC was “twofold - to enforce the media’s compliance with the PEC’s election rules regarding the media and to advocate for journalists’ freedom of expression” (“The Media ...,” 1998, p. 8). In August 1997, the OSCE created the Media Monitoring Center (MMC) to provide the MEC with information about the quantity and quality of media organizations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1998, the MMC’s role was expanded to monitor the Bosnia media compliance with the PEC rules and regulations. Moreover, the Media Access Support Team (MAST) was created to facilitate the interface between media outlets and political parties.

The MEC imposed sanctions against media outlets that violated the PEC rules and regulations. For example in 1997, at the MEC’s initiative the Stabilization Force (SFOR) seized a Bosnian Serb radio transmitter that used “inflammatory language and hate speech regarding local elections” (“The Media...,” 1998, p. 11). This action demonstrated the MEC’s seriousness in imposing sanctions against those who broadcast inflammatory language. In another incident the MEC imposed sanctions against the Croat Democratic Union (HDZ) which broadcast inflammatory speech from its HTV station in Mostar. When the HDZ refused to condemn hate speech, in compliance with MEC’s rules, the Election Appeals Sub-Commission (EASC) “struck three candidates from the HDZ candidates list” (“The Media...,” 1998, p. 11).

In Serb-controlled areas (Republika Srpska) Karadzic’s television station, Channel S, worked in complete violation of the PEC’s rules and regulations. Under MAST pressure, Channel S accepted some of MEC directives. However, one week before the election, it resumed broadcasts “favoring the SDS/SRS” in its news coverage (“The Media...,” 1998, p. 17). According to MEC other stations including HRT returned to violating MEC’s directives after the election. In addition, MEC instructed Radio St. Jones, which was headed by Karadzic’s daughter, to follow its regulations. But the radio “inexplicably chose instead to cease broadcasting news on August 21, 1998” (“The Media...,” 1998, p. 17).

The MEC’s report suggests that the most pervasive problem facing the media in Bosnia-Herzegovina was “the lack of professionalism”, particularly lack of “distinction between reporting fact and opinion”. The report adds that media outlets in FRY and Croatia

should be monitored because they affect political campaigns in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In addition, many Bosnian “political parties are offshoots of political parties in Croatia and FRY, including: the Croat Democratic Union...; the Socialist Party of Republika Srpska; and the Serb Radical Party of Republika Srpska” (“The Media...,” 1998, p. 28). The MEC concludes, “Overall, it seemed that political parties received equitable access to the media. However, it seems the motivation behind this was more their fear of the consequences of not abiding by OSCE rules than the principle of access” (“The Media...,” 1998, p. 39). It adds, “If we still do not see the media investigating the government or attacking human rights abuses, at least we are seeing greater access to the opposition, fewer attacks on them, and less hate speech” (“The Media...,” 1998, p. 44).

MEC drew criticism for its “ineffective response” to complaints regarding media non-compliance with the PEC rules and regulations (“The Media...,” 1998, p. 10). The New York Times criticized the MEC for regulating the content of broadcasting and argued, “If the commission appears to be imposing Western-backed censorship, it will violate democratic principles, enrage Bosnian citizens and encourage neighboring dictators to strengthen their hold on the media.” (“Creating...,” 1998, p. A32). Proponents of freedom of press criticized MEC’s efforts and considered regulating Bosnian media as “censorship”(Shenon, 1998, A8). In Bosnia-Herzegovina, “Several media outlets complained about having not been involved in drawing up the guidelines” (“The Media...,” 1998, p. 41). According to Miglierina (1997), the OSCE’ s overall media operations can be described as “less effective, though they play a major role in the implementation of the Dayton accord”(p. 3).

## **Conclusion**

It is known that mass media played a destructive role during the Bosnian war. However, they were not the primary cause of the war. Though journalists reported, and often exaggerated what had happened, Muslims, Serbs and Croats were prepared to hear what their respective media had told them. Bosnian politicians manipulated the media to obtain public consent to execute their nationalistic agendas. Moreover, in Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia, which were authoritarian regimes, media independence was tantamount to “treachery”. Thus, media organizations in these countries mirrored their political systems. Biased reporting persisted as Muslims, Serbs and Croats highlighted atrocities committed by their rivals and obscured their wrongdoing.

OSCE’ s support for Bosnian media ranged from fostering media regulation to seeking sanctions against inflammatory language and misinformation. However, OSCE and MEC in particular adopted a top-down approach that ignored daily political realities on the ground. The MEC’s report reveals the Commission’s paternalistic and heavy-handed approaches. Parties to the conflict should have been involved in drafting the rules and regulations that governed their media outlets. However, some of the MEC’s shortcomings could be attributed to the complex nature of ethnic cantonizations and power configurations in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

It is important to note that NATO used force to impose Dayton Accords on Serbs. Moreover, neither Bosnian Muslim nor Croats were satisfied with the peace deal. Thus, the feelings of bitterness and animosity continued to prevail despite the enforced cease-fire. In fact Dayton Accords has contributed inadvertently to dividing Bosnia-Herzegovina along ethnic lines. The elections of 1996 and 1998 brought nationalistic parties to power and reinforced ethnic divisions. This phenomenon could be a harbinger to partition. Most media outlets in Bosniac-controlled territory of the Federation, Croat-controlled territory of the Federation as well as Republika of Srpska were government-controlled. Journalists faced harassment and investigative journalism was discouraged. NATO's attempts to neutralize Karadzic and put his broadcast media in the hands of West-backed rival, Plavsic had failed. Alternative media thrived on foreign aid from Western countries. Thus, its sustainability remains questionable.

While Belgrade's newscasts converged with those of Republika Srpska, Zagreb's newscasts converged with those of Herceg-Bosna. Thus, mass media in Serbia and Croatia continued to affect the peace process in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Moreover, though broadcasting from the three ethnic entities overlapped Bosniac Muslims, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs continued to watch their respective mass media organizations. In sum, Bosnia-Herzegovina remains an ethnically divided society despite Western efforts to maintain its multi-ethnic, multi-cultural identity. In such a deeply divided society it is not easy for mass media to forge national unity and nation-building. Thus, four years after Dayton Accords, the peace process in Bosnia-Herzegovina remains fragile and unsustainable.

To conclude, mass media alone can not sustain peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Since Dayton Accord has inadvertently facilitated the partitioning of Bosnia into two entities, audiences in these entities remain loyal to their government-controlled media organizations. Moreover, because NATO-led forces declined to implement key aspects of Dayton accords, namely the return of refugees and the arrest of indicted war criminals, many Bosnians remained skeptical about the viability of the peace process. Thus, mass media alone may not preserve the Bosnian paradigm as long as Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs continue to harbor animosity for each other. In such a situation, partitioning of Bosnia-Herzegovina into three mini-states, Muslim, Croat and Serb remains a possibility.



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The recent cease-fire in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the euphoria that has accompanied this apparent progress, should not obscure the fact that no peace agreement will be legitimate or stable without justice for human rights abuses. The atrocities described in this report, like the many others that have preceded them in the former Yugoslavia, require of the international community a commitment to reparation for the victims and accountability for the perpetrators.