# Impact of Media on Conflict Resolution and Education in the New Europe

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## Introduction

For the New Europe, the year 1989 constitutes a pivotal time when social, political, cultural, national and international arenas converged in opening the "Iron Curtain" to the world. The fall of communism and its consequences created undeniable changes impacting not only citizens of the countries in the region, but also scholarship from all walks of academia, in the West and East alike. Over a decade later, countries from this area http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/SubmittedDocuments/archivedpapers/Fall2002/MarinLengel.htm - _ftn3 had changed borders, political systems, and sociocultural dimensions to address democratization and civic participation for all ethnic groups in a more open cultural context of a New Europe. Adding to such dramatic changes, mass media and information and communication technology, primarily the Internet and technological advances of the last decade of the 20th century, present a complex arena for civic participation in the region.

Research on civil society, such as that of Isaac Abeku Blankson (2002) and Marwan Kraidy (2002) elsewhere in this issue of *Global Media Journal*, suggests that citizens are struggling in their complex negotiation processes in relation to the transformations they are experiencing locally, regionally and globally. These transformations often occur against a backdrop of relative insecurity, continuing to remain pertinent to the civic and democratic problematic prevalent in Central and Eastern Europe (Lengel, 1998). And yet, in spite of economic instability, ethnic tensions, political turbulence, and human rights threats, citizens living with changes in their societies seek opportunities to develop a new discourse through which a society forms and declares its values and identity (Kluver & Powers, 1999).

Media plays a part in this discovery. Much research has been conducted on the impact of the media on transformations in the New Europe since the fall of communist rule (see for instance, Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 2000; Ekecrantz & Olofsson, 2000; Hammond & Herman, 2000; Lengel, 2000; Marin, 2000; Rantanen, 2001; Rantanen, 2002). Scholars and media practitioners alike argue that information and communication technology (ICT) advances intercultural sensitivity, growth in participatory democracy, mutual tolerance, and open, peaceful dialogue. Conversely, like more 'traditional' media, ICT can act as a vehicle for increasing ethnic, cultural and political conflict, particularly in regions historically known for their cultural or political tensions.

Looking at some of the most important challenges pertaining to media presence and its impact on the entire Southeastern European region, the study argues for a better understanding of both challenges and strategies salient for education, literacy and civic awareness in the area. Accordingly, the article examines how the role of media and mediated-communication is intertwined with educational and civic programs

designed to invite multiple perspectives beneficial to all participants in Southeastern European arena. In particular, the study provides first an overview of specific challenges in relation to media and conflict resolution in the region. Second, by presenting strategies and programs from Southeastern Europe, the article emphasizes the interconnectedness of media, mediated-communication and educational goals developing media literacy aimed to empower the participants within the area. Last, the essay focuses on the relationship between media and higher education  in Southeastern Europe and Central and Eastern Europe, in order to define some of the future challenges pertinent to an ongoing international effort to expand civic awareness and intercultural contributions and create more democratic venues in the world.

## Media, Culture and Conflict Resolution in Southeastern Europe

Within the last decade Southereastern Europe has experienced an intensification of political and ethnic tensions and border disputes reignited by war. These tensions and disputes have received international attention and have served as the focal point of debates on civic discourse and democracy.  Media and its impact and been and remain inherent to these discussions.  Centralized communication media can strengthen a sense of 'Other-ness' on the part of minority communities (see for instance, Connor, 1994). In an article on Central and Eastern European media, 'The News Media and the Transformation of Ethnopolitical Conflicts', Dušan Reljic (2000) argues "It is not surprising then that ethnic tensions and separatist demands are on the increase throughout the world. In ethnically diverse communities, the media often serves to reinforce existing differences and thus accelerate a disintegrating effect on the homogeneity of the population."

Clearly, Southeastern Europe is one such region where ethnic tension has had such a disintegrating effect. Primarily in the last decade, political and civil changes in the region have dramatically altered citizens' perspectives on democracy, civic participation and cultural tensions, among others. Throughout CEE and SEE, hate speech has been increasingly prevalent online (Gaines, 2000). Racist discourse continues to be disseminated on the regional media. Journalists exacerbated already existing tensions (Thompson, 1994; Pech, 2000). George Krimsky (1996), co-founder of the International Center for Journalists, notes "irresponsible and inaccurate journalism (or its nefarious cousin, the hate-mongering media) can fan the flames of violence in ethnic or communal confrontations." Irresponsible journalism has played such a vast role in the increase of conflict in the region, that media practitioner Maida Berbic of Radio Kameleon in Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina has announced, "The media started the war in the former Yugoslavia; they will have to end it, too" (cited in Burton, 2001). These articles present a number of efforts addressing, in particular, the role media, higher education, and ethnic tension play in CEE and SEE toward democratization and civic participation.

In the face of these concerns, there are efforts to link media and education to combat ethnic tension and increase cultural sensitivity and awareness in the region. As mentioned, the media have played an increasingly important role in the educational process in CEE and SEE. Lubecka (2000) suggests in the New Europe 'the newly empowered local governments show much interest in creating citizens who value and understand democracy, its privileges and duties, and who, because of participatory competencies, help bring reforms. Media provide significant support to create a new awareness of acting 'civis'" (p. 37). Polish television series such as *Young People Vote*, *Civis Polonus*, and *The River Speaks*, all which are geared to educate youth in the region, have played a role in raising awareness about civil society in adult as well as youth audiences (Lubecka, 2000l; Remy & Strzemieczny, 1997). In Macedonia, the television series *Nashe Maalo* [Our Neighborhood] has been reportedly reducing ethnic tension in the nation (IJNet, 2000, September 12). Reaching 95% of Macedonian households, Nashe Maalo portrays ethnic Albanian, Macedonian, Roma and Turkish children playing together harmoniously, hence, creating the civic ground to diminish ethnic tensions from the area. As research indicates that ethnic Macedonian children, after viewing Nashe Maalo, were more willing to invite children from the other ethnic identities represented in the program into their homes, the results need to speak for themselves in the  ways media can impact conflict-resolution in an area torn among too many ethnic and cultural tensions in the last decade (Common Ground Productions, 2002).

Thus, ethnic reconciliation, post-conflict recovery and civil society building are the goals for programs such as Nashe Maalo. They are also shared as overarching tasks of an on-going vast project established by the Office for Central and Southeastern Europe (IWA/OCSE) and the Institute of World Affairs (IWA) and supported by the Center for Civic Society in South-eastern Europe (CCS). The organizations have established three Centar za građansku suradnju (Centers for Civic Cooperation) in eastern Croatia and northeastern Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina to ease ethnic tension and facilitate minority refugee return (Primorac, n.d.). The Centers are each overseen by two multi-ethnic coordinators and a multi-ethnic board of educators, media practitioners and business leaders who develop programs on conflict resolution and to raise awareness about ethnic discord. The Centers provide "the institutional vehicle through which people can translate good intentions into practical activities" (Primorac, n.d.). Accordingly, such Centers attempt to reach ethnic and cultural groups along with creating precedence on tolerance and cooperation strategies so much needed in the history of Southeastern Europe.

One of the three Centar za građansku suradnju, in the Bosnia-Herzegovina municipality of Gradačac, in conjunction with the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, has involved media practitioners in efforts such as the Citizen Action Election Program. The program was created in response to the Code on Media Rules for Election developed by the Sarajevo-based Independent Media Commission (IMC), which indicates "all broadcast and print media shall give fair coverage and equitable access to all registered political parties, coalitions, and independent candidates in elections at any level in Bosnia and Herzegovina" (IMC, 2000, p. 1). This program involved, first, a series of ten, hour-long phone-in radio broadcasts focusing on election issues leading up to the April 2000 national elections. Second, to prepare for the October 2000 elections, local radio station "RADIO GRADAČAC" hosted eight broadcasts featuring local representatives on the importance of voting, electoral laws and procedures, women in politics, democracy, civil society building, education, and human rights in Bosnia-Herzegovina (CGS-Gradačac, n.d.).

As indicated in this brief overview, the role media plays in developing intercultural awareness and sensitivity continues to demonstrate the engaging processes called into action by strategic mediated information and media access in the region. While some of these examples invoke local access and/or participation, the overall challenge media is faced with in the ethnically sensitive areas such as Southeastern Europe remains an important dimension, providing a forum for civic discourse and more democratic venues in the making. Conflict resolution in the region continues to appear at the forefront of the challenging tasks for media and mediated communication approaches. Accordingly, additional perspectives on the relationship among media, education, and media literacy provide complimentary dimensions necessary to address the complex interconnectedness of cultural, national, and international issues within the Southeastern European social, cultural and political arena of the last decade.

## From Media Criticism to Media Literacy

While media remains a controversial and critical issue for the entire world, for Southeastern Europe it is even more important to learn rather than critique the media, to create it. The Women in the Global Digital Community Research and Practitioner Group (Lengel et al., 2002), in its presentation to representatives of the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs [http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/SubmittedDocuments/archivedpapers/Fall2002/MarinLengel.htm - _ftn4](http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/SubmittedDocuments/archivedpapers/Fall2002/MarinLengel.htm), state that communities traditionally disenfranchised from access to information should have increased opportunities to create it. NGOs such as the Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) offer media literacy training so that women and partner NGOs of WLP can generate content to be disseminated by information and communication technology. WLP argues that information has become a valuable commodity and those who can produce knowledge embody power (Women's Learning Partnership, 2002).

Other NGOs such as UNITED for Intercultural Action, the European network against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees, posts Information Leaflets on its website to teach activists. In its Leaflet on 'Working with the Media: Information on using the media for anti-racist activists,"

UNITED suggests the media is one of the best tools to change perceptions of the world and to persuade people to take action against injustice. The organization states that activists may not like the "commercialism and sensationalism of many media outlets" however "it is necessary to realize that the media cannot be ignored altogether. They are one of the key pillars of today's society. If you want your organization to have any impact you need to have good co-operation with the media. And in many cases the media also play a very positive

role in the fight against racism!" (UNITED, n.d.). The Leaflet offers practical advice on writing press and sending press releases, developing relationships with media practitioners, understanding target audiences, and educating journalists as to the activists' mission and goals. The organization promotes joint training sessions with anti-racist NGOs, journalists' unions and schools of journalism.

Another initiative linking the creation of media and education is the Confidence-building Measures (CBM) Programme, established following the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Member States of the Council of Europe in Vienna, 1993. One of the main objectives emerging from the Summit was protection of national minorities. This resulted in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities drafted by the Council of Europe and the CBM, which was designed to improve tolerance and understanding between the diverse communities of Europe (Council of Europe, 1999, October). The CBM addresses tolerance and understanding in various areas including the media, human rights, education, culture, and transfrontier co-operation. The Programme raises awareness about misrepresentation of national minorities by the media. It also provides support for project development by NGOs, local and regional authorities, media, and educational organizations. It funds projects which, in practical and concrete ways, advance knowledge of intercultural communication, media criticism, human rights, democratic citizenship, and "provide opportunities for people from different communities to work together towards a common objective" (Council of Europe, 1999, October). In 1999 alone, the Programme funded the following media-related educational projects:

| Organization | Nation | Project Description |
| --- | --- | --- |
| CINES Press Center | Croatia | Media activities of CINES Press Center |
| Society of Young Journalists | Bosnia and Herzegovina | School of Journalism: training of young journalists to provide independent, free and multicultural information |
| Media Mind | Bosnia and Herzegovina | Promotion of Human Rights Consciousness through Independent Mass-media |
| Croatian Association RODA | Croatia | Minorities in the Media |
| Council of Europe's Office in Mostar | Bosnia and Herzegovina | Youth radio |
| Arin-Berd | Armenia | Producing TV educational programmes on intercultural issues in Armenia |
| Latvian Human Rights Committee | Latvia | Seminar for journalists "International and regional standards in the field of minority rights" |
| Latvian Human Rights Committee | Latvia | Radio broadcasts for the Latvian language training |
| Human Rights Project | Bulgaria | Documentaries about the cultural heritage and modern identity of Roma in Bulgaria |

| Youth Initiative Supporting Center | Armenia | Mass media coverage action on national minorities in Armenia |
|---|---|---|
| Lithuanian Journalism Center | Lithuania | Journalist training for national minority mass media in Lithuania |
| Centre for Educational and Social Research "Baltic Insight" | Latvia | Promoting integration and social cohesion in Latvia through minority language mass-media |
| Center for Civic Initiative | Lithuania | Overcoming stereotypes of national minorities in mass media |
| Ukrainian Legal Foundation | Ukraine | Seminar for journalists "International and regional standards in the field of minority rights" |
| United Roma Union | Bulgaria | Development of Roma public relations |

*Source: Council of Europe (1999).*

Along with the mentioned challenges and strategies pertinent to the impact of media on conflict resolution and on media literacy in the area, it is important to remember the inherent dimension that education and in particular higher education play in empowering more and more participants to the cultural, civic, and global discourse of the new millennium. After all, information communication technology (ICT) and media access remain in developing countries or areas key dimensions for civic participation in the world.

## Media and Education: Challenges for Increased Civil Participation

Realizing that educational efforts need be developed in relation to media, mediated-communication, and media access to information, various centers in Southeastern, Central and Eastern Europe identify as primary task perspectives incorporating the above mentioned challenges to democratic participation. Accordingly, one of the goals of the Centar za građansku suradnju is to educate citizens about media and its social and political impact on local, regional and national audiences. Aligning to similar strategies, other organizations such as the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), a USAID-funded effort in Bosnian media development, provide equipment and education for journalists, through training programs in Bosnia and in the US, through fellowships to attend American universities. The Soros Media Center and the BBC also provide training and education programs for media practitioners (Burton, 2001).

More needs to be done, however, to increase media literacy among non-practitioners in the New Europe. Further, more needs to be done *from within* the region. Researchers have analyzed the uncritical adoption of Western-media style in emerging democracies. Palmer (2001), for example, suggests that "in societies with severe ethnic divides, democratic institutions need to go far beyond standard democratic procedures to ensure adequate ethnic representation and minimize conflict between ethnic groups" (p. 3). Facing such challenges, increasing numbers of organizations link media and education for civil participation in the region.

Along with all educational programs in Central and Eastern Europe and Southeastern Europe during the last decade, higher education had been impacted by dramatic changes within the framework of civil and civic transformations taking place. By bringing to the academic table issues pertinent to a more inclusive intercultural and democratic perspective, the challenges for curricular development in higher education reflect fundamental questions on the processes old and new alike that face students, faculty, and education administrations in their attempts to articulate civic and democratic changes (Marga, 1994; Svejnar, 2000). Since education and its formative processes remain some of the most important issues

articulated in terms of information and communication technology available for faculty and students, how can media and ICT contribute to higher education curricula and faculty development? And also how do these challenges articulate effective strategies to reflect the need for faculty and students alike to diminish ethnic tensions, and create more interculturally sensitive participants able to engage in  civil and civic discourse in and of the world?

Accordingly, looking at some of the challenges pertinent to the transformation of higher education, mediated communication, and intercultural dimensions of participation in the new millennium, this study emphasizes the imperative for more intercultural training and media literacy for faculty, in particular, within academic institutions in SEE. That is not to say that such learning experiences do not exist in the region. On the contrary, there are some important educational programs in SEE reflecting or assessing intercultural awareness and sensitivity in light of media and new technological advances in the world. While the current efforts at bridging media, education and civic participation in the region are a sound beginning, we argue for more curricular development and training programs for faculty from the region, to advance computer-mediated strategies for intercultural awareness and cooperation as well as further exploring the usage of media pertinent to an open and free[d] world.

What are then some of the challenges for higher education in terms of novel political, social, and cultural perspectives defining Central and Eastern Europe and Southeastern Europe? Within the context of transition, the challenges for education in the region continue to be articulated within a large body of literature on the subject (see for instance, Bollag, 1999; Hermochova, 1999; Kuklinski, 1993; Lajos & Szucs, 1998; Mannova, Preston & Lengel, 2000; Marga, 1994; Marin, 2001; Marin, 2002; Svejnar, 2000). Before 1989, a centralized system of education was the prevailing model pertinent to all Central and Eastern European and Southeastern European countries, emphasizing more 'pure' theory areas of study, leaving the applicative function of education aside. Thus, the study of media, considered to be treated more  from an application and practice perspective rather than theoretically, was not a part of the curriculum. Further, university life generally, and university curricula specifically remained isolated from the world outside communist rule (Hermochova, 1997). Marga (1994) a former Minister of Education in post-communist Romania, reminds us that that state centralized all university matters, including curriculum decisions, and maintained a separation of teaching and research. This separation resulted in curricula that did not benefit from new knowledge emerging from research. Also, the state, in its control of university curricula, forbade topics such as media, which it regarded as a direct link to the West (Marga, 1994, p. 175).

As mentioned previously, the year 1989 liberated not only the political and social rights for citizens in the New Europe, but also opened up the academic world to a need to reconstruct and innovate the programs and perspectives on education, culture and democracy. It was not easy, however. Funding problems, problems resulting from privatization, new management structures all played a part to slow or even halt efforts to incorporate novel concepts, new technological advances, and increased opportunities for students and faculty to connect with other communities both within and outside CEE and SEE.

During the complex processes affecting education standards in the more open New Europe, the challenges have occurred in curriculum design, teaching and research standards as Hermochova (1997) points out. However, there have also been additional conceptual and cultural problems, due to the advances in media and information and communication technology, particularly increased information access through the World Wide Web. Not surprisingly, there are numerous educational programs sponsored mostly by international institutions and organizations, aiming to assist all SEE countries in their efforts towards better education and democratic participation in the world.

In Europe, organizations and institutions like the PHARE Democracy Program, UNESCO-CEPES (Centre Européen pour l'Enseignement Supérieur) in Bucharest, the European Cultural Foundation, the Open Society Institute, the Euroregional Center for Democracy, and the Research Centre for Interethnic relations in Transylvania at Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj, Romania address education and civil participation in CEE and SEE. Across the Atlantic, the Fulbright Program, the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), and the Institute of International Education (IIE) all demonstrate the

importance of the educational challenges faced in the CEE and SEE to improve not only educational outcomes  but also create civic awareness for students and faculty alike.

The Intercultural Institute of Timisoara, the UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (CEPES), the Higher Education Support Program and the Euroregional Center for Democracy ( GOTOBUTTON BM_3_ www.regionalnet.org) provide important opportunities for citizens in SEE to participate in civil society, to become educated in terms of democratic approaches to social, cultural and political approaches on the tensions and transitions in the area, as well as to offer increased awareness of media representation**.**  All such institutes and organizations articulate the imperative for a broader perspective on international, national, and European views on identity and public discourse while inviting students and academics alike to partake within the problematic of global democracy.

One example is a 'Media and Intercultural Communication' program, offered through distance learning channels by the Südosteuropäisches Medienzentrum (Southeast European Media Center) in Sofia. This program, established by the European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder) and St. Kliment Ohridski University in Sofia, is open free of charge to SEE students and is supported by the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe (European University Viadrina, 2002). Another example is the Intercultural Institute of Timisoara, sponsored by the Council of Europe,  that targets civic involvement at the K-12 level (IIT, n.d.). The IIT projects carry over 20 programs, including programs on critical media awareness, such as "The Press and Tolerance".

Most of these programs reflect strategic actions to reestablish tolerance and coexistence in an area where recent wars, social and cultural disintegration contributed numerous interethnic and international conflicts. Along with media programs, the Institute houses the Banat Network for Intercultural Citizenship Education which uses the Internet as a tool for co-operation and exchanges across the borders (Banat, 2001). Similarly, summer school programs stemming from the sponsorship of the Open Society Institute (OSI)  assist with numerous venues designed to familiarize faculty and student population with new global standards of research and educational approaches within novel disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies such as gender, culture, media, and European identity.

One novel media and education project promoting global views on scholarship, democratic and civic participation is *Frontera* (Frontiers of New Technology Education, Research and Action) which has provided the dialogic space for students to discuss and assess information and communication technology and its role in opening up the gates of a 'global village' for all digital citizens. Small student teams from a range of institutions such as the People's Friendship University in Moscow to Daystar University in Kenya have participated in the program. Through computer mediated communication, the *Frontera* teams work together across national borders and cultural differences, to explore ethnicity, nation, and citizenship, the potential for democratic dialogue (Lengel & Murphy, 2000). Showing how computer mediated communication is capable of forming the basis for cultural and intercultural awareness of its citizens-participants, the project offers insight on the role of media representation of global communities, and the challenges and opportunities that communication technology offers regions in transition like the New Europe.

Faculty must be open to such international initiatives and the extra organization and flexibility required for their success. Olson and Kroeger argue internationalizing faculty is "the first most critical step" in creating more international universities (2001, p.133) Creating innovative curricular, development and training programs that draw on and are implemented by media and ICT is an element of this "most critical step." This is particularly important in CEE and SEE areas where there is limited funding for educational innovations examining the media.

Hence, reiterating the important role media, access to information, and mediated-communication carries on ethnic tensions, civic discourse and the continuous efforts for democratic participation, the study articulates the need for multicultural integration and for  better understanding of the complex relationships created among media, conflict resolution, and education in Southeastern Europe.  The overview provided is intended to signal the salience of such issues and challenges to all participants in the region and to

offer a locus for novel and critical approaches on the impact of media on cultural and civic involvement for the new millennium.

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http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/SubmittedDocuments/archivedpapers/Fall2002/MarinLengel.htm - _ftnref3We define the New Europe as nations in Eastern and Central Europe (CEE), Southeastern Europe (SEE), the Newly Independent States and the Russian Federation. In this article, however, we focus primarily on Eastern and Central Europe (CEE) and Southeastern Europe (SEE).

http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/SubmittedDocuments/archivedpapers/Fall2002/MarinLengel.htm - _ftnref4At the Women in the Global Community: A Fulbright Conference Bridging Academia and Public Policy, September 2002 Istanbul, Turkey.

PHARE Democracy Program of the European Union supports the activity and professional work of NGOs and not-for-profit organizations. It aims to contribute to the consolidation of democratic societies in Central and Eastern Europe. For more information, please see < http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/pas/phare/index.htm >.

Examples here focus primarily on Romania, a country where intercultural and national tensions continue to reveal the salience of intercultural tasks as the one proposed by this study.

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## About Noemi Marin

Noemi Marin is a leading researcher of international and intercultural communication in Romania. She holds degrees from the University of Bucharest, California State University, Northridge, and a Ph.D. from University of Maryland, College Park. Her work on the public discourse from Eastern and Central Europe has been published in *Migration–A European Journal of International Migration and Ethnic Relations, East European Politics and Societies,* among other publications both in the US and Europe.

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## About Laura Lengel

Laura Lengel (Ohio University, 1995) began her research on culture, technology, education, and media representation when she was a Fulbright Scholar and American Institute of Maghreb Studies Fellow in Tunisia (1993-1994). Her books, *Computer Mediated Communication* (Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic, forthcoming 2003), and *Culture and Technology in the New Europe: Civic Discourse in Transformation in*

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