

***Topoi* in the Media Coverage of Three Countries**

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Статията представя изследване на имиджа на България, Румъния и Белгия, изграден чрез публикациите на уебстраницата на ББС в продължение на година. В теоретичните граници на критическия анализ на дискурса се разработва техника за откриване на топоси в дискурса за трите страни. Установява се наличието на тематични нишки, които лансират дадени линии на аргументация за всяка една от трите страни в изследването. Заключението извлича нова класификация на информационната значимост на темите, разглеждани от ББС. Правят се изводи за създаването на имидж на страните, основано на лансираните ценности от направената класификация.

Abstract

The article presents a study of the images of three countries: Bulgaria, Romania and Belgium - broadcast through the publications about them on the website of the BBC. The study, lodged in the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, explores the analytical procedure of establishing *topoi* in the discourse about the three countries. It launches two new categories describing the types of media coverage: continuous coverage and thematic threads. The latter develop lines of argument feeding into an image for the country in question. The study also develops a new classification of news values which underpins the benchmarks for building an image.

Introduction. Many people show interest in the way their country is represented by international media. Proceeding from this basic human interest, several researches have tried to establish mechanisms which do that. Studying them thoroughly, three strands in representation studies can be discerned. Firstly, in chronological order, researchers – mainly of African origin - track the image of Africa (Okigbo 1995, Ojo, Salawi 2006). Not surprisingly, they reveal that mainly topics of wars, famine and various other disasters direct the attention to such negative aspects of the life on the continent, metaphorically referred to as the Dark Continent. The studies are largely partisan, proceeding from the premise that Africa

tends to be misrepresented. Articles in this vein are additionally proliferated by the UNESCO initiative for the New World Information Order (NWICO) (MacBride, Sean et al. 1980) – a project for a fairer representation of the developing nations in the media. It was, however, dismissed as an infringement on the freedom of speech.

Secondly, studies of media representations of ethnic or professional groups are conducted where bias is expected to exist. Their method is content analysis; quantification reveals whether positive or negative topics dominate the coverage. Such studies envisage reports of minority groups, e.g. the Sami people of Finland (Pietikäinen 2004), doctors in Slovenia (Kovaèiè and Erjavec 2011) etc.

Thirdly, discourse oriented scholars, such as Wodak and Meyer (2001), apply an amalgam of different methods, eclectically drawing data from different research agendas to collate a multifaceted picture of the representations of a group. Wodak's approach is known as Historical Discourse Analysis, where media coverage is compared to historical evidence (Wodak 2001). The trustworthiness of the researches is based on the fact that data from several different sources are analysed, using an eclectic mix of analytical procedures. Particularly useful is the concept of *topoi*, which will be adopted here and discussed at length later on. Thus Classical Greek Rhetoric enriches the array of techniques wielded by Discourse Analysts. Additionally, some of the studies are based on corpus research (Baker et al 2008), which allows for a wider scope of material and a principled narrowing down on significant aspects of the language or topics.

In my study I take a non-partisan point of departure. I will not assume that the image of Bulgaria is necessarily bad and therefore seek out negative terms of reference and biased vision. My intention is to obtain an objective view of what comes across as a result of the media coverage

taking into consideration the specifics of the medium, its audience and possible agendas.

Theoretical Framework: The theoretical framework will be critical discourse studies inasmuch as I will seek to find out how the language is employed to project an image. Discourse is meant here as a category for 'designating particular ways of representing particular aspects of social life'. It represents broadly semiotic elements – language, pictures, typographic features (Fairclough 2005:2).

As my instrument, I exploit the approach of establishing *topoi* in the coverage of three countries. The countries selected for the study are Bulgaria, Belgium and Romania. Bulgaria is in focus, while Romania – a new member of the European Union, like Bulgaria, and Belgium – a well-established EU member – are selected for comparative purposes. The research is based on a corpus compiling all the articles about the three countries on the website of the BBC over one year. Then, via content analysis, the articles are grouped into thematically connected groups, and their analysis leads to the *topoi* deployed to develop an argument about a country. Comparing the coverage of the three countries is expected to lead to conclusions about the way representations are created.

Topoi: *Topos* is a term introduced by Aristotle in his Rhetoric (the Internet Classics Archive). Its translation and definition is a contentious issue among scholars because Aristotle never defined it properly; moreover, in different parts of Rhetoric he seems to refer to different concepts with the term *topoi*. One of the translations into English, Rhys Roberts' (Tindale 2007), is "general lines of argument." Several authors, therefore, view *topoi* as propositions or even arguments. Kennedy (1991:45) puts forward the term "strategies of argument". Smith (Tindale

2007) translates *topoi* as “attack-points”. These translations – rather than definitions – foreshadow a conflict in defining the term: is a *topos* the place we go to in order to convince the listener one way or the other, or the actual procedure or strategy to do so?

On a more cognitive basis, Rubinelli (2006) makes the case for the *topos* as a forerunner of the argumentation scheme. She sees *topoi* as rules for inferential processes rather than simply the subject matters of arguments. The researcher focuses on Aristotle’s directive that the *topos* is based on “if-then” clauses, an interpretation first introduced by Braet (2005). This is also the way Wodak (2001) employs *topoi* in her analysis of immigrant discourse in Austria. She formulates the claims about immigrants as conditional sentences, thus revealing the premises and attitudes which follow.

Inasmuch as I will be working with media, Rubinelli’s definition of *topoi* seems most suitable: “a pattern which leads speakers to focus on interpersonal, emotional and linguistic aspects surrounding the production of arguments, including ways of tailoring certain contents according to the audience, the impact of the contents on the public and/or factors related to the psychology of the speakers and their interlocutors” (2006:262). I will not, however, feel obliged to resort to “if-then” clauses, unless the material forces me to do.

Procedure: My method of work builds on a previous study (Tarasheva 2009), where all the articles about a country were established using the search engine of the website of the BBC. The search terms were the country and nationality name, linked by the operator OR. Then the articles were sorted into groups according to the rubric of the article – society, economy etc. This is quite often the case in this type of analysis.

However, the method proved flawed when trying to collect data about one more year. Two years later, the rubrics on the website had slightly changed. Secondly, and more importantly, many articles had reference to more than one rubric – e.g. the lawsuit against the alleged murderers of a building entrepreneur is at the same time about business relations, the legal system and crime. It does not seem reasonable to classify it under all three, and it is equally wrong to ignore aspects of the story. In the third place, many articles simply mention the name of a country in an enumeration list. It would not appear correct to consider that the BBC has published 30 stories about the economy of a country, if it merely mentioned the country in a list. On the other hand, the previous study established as many as 49 articles of this type, which makes up 58% of all the articles. Such a high percentage does not warrant ignoring these articles altogether. Most significantly, the method of counting articles on economy, society etc. disregards the specifics of media coverage. A story is given prominence via the following methods:

- the article is richly illustrated with pictures;
- news of it is broadcast on several media – radio, television, website;
- comments from the audience are invited;
- several voices are heard in the coverage;
- many materials are published/broadcast on the issue.

In my first research I only relied on the quantitative criterion. This time I will try to include these factors giving prominence to a story.

Another issue concerns the reasons for publishing an article. On the one hand, editors follow an event as it evolves over time. A story often spawns several developments and the coverage traces their natural course. This is what I shall call **continuous coverage**. Commitment to its unbroken coverage reveals interest in the topic – because the option always exists to drop the story. However, the length of the coverage depends mainly on the story. A second type of coverage is when several unrelated occurrences follow a thematic line. Such events are connected by a similarity in the values underpinning what is happening. This is what I intend to call a **thematic thread**. Although the concrete happenings covered by the multitude of stories may appear disconnected, take place at different times and locations, a theme can be seen to unfold with them. In this case, the medium seeks out opportunities to engage with the topic, unravel new aspects of what is seen a significant theme. The level of involvement with the topic is greater than for a story with continuous coverage.

General description of the corpora

All the articles about three countries – Bulgaria, Romania and Belgium - were collected in the manner described above. Initially they are presented according to the rubrics they were published under, but the content analysis develops a different classification.

	Bulgaria	Romania	Belgium
Crime	13	12	43
Society	0	38	38
Regional Affairs	2		
Economy	1	0	7

Entertainment & Culture	2	4	7
EU Business	16	3	14
Science And Technology	1	1	
		1 Obituary	
Total	35 items	59 items	109 items

The news in the Sports section was not explored for this study because the approach to those articles should be very different.

Belgium

The articles about Belgium can be thematically grouped around the 19 topics listed below. The list here orders the topics according to the prominence given by: a great number of articles, various media, or rich illustration.

1. Sex abuse scandal with Catholic priests
2. Travel havoc caused by snow
3. WW1 & 2 memories
4. Burka Ban
5. Skydiving murder
6. Flemish separatists
7. EU presidency
8. The Future of the EURO
9. World Cup Bid
10. Islamist terrorists under arrest
11. English singer dies in Belgium

12. Formula 1
13. Moped tour
14. A Belgian musician's fraud exposed
15. A new road project to endanger a wine-producing region in Germany.
16. Fire in a beer producing ancient castle
17. Channel tunnel high speed train
18. North Sea Electric Grid
19. Ice statue festival

Number 2 and 5 in the list above demonstrate the category **continuous coverage**, which was established with the methodology above. The coverage of the traffic havoc obviously traces the meteorological conditions and their impact on travellers. The BBC published so many articles because of the magnitude of the story and the impact on numerous readers/viewers/users of the website. We can say that this is a public story unfolding at the moment and the BBC cannot but cover it. Likewise, the skydiving death also evolves with time – the same participants, the same event undergo development over time, until the murderer is sentenced in court. On the other hand, the sex abuse scandal, topic number 5, includes articles from different countries, different participants; different aspects are picked up with each article. It looks as if the BBC reporters are on the look-out for more of the same, probably because they are eager to delve further into the issue and its implications. That is why I call this a **thematic thread**. With such coverage, I believe the medium tries to highlight an issue and attract public interest.

Thematic threads are what creates cognitive bases for developing an argument. While continuous coverage is stuck on actual developments of the story – and the medium has little control over what needs to be

covered next - thematic threads are issues where the medium builds a discourse steeped in values and projecting an attitude. That is why I think of thematic threads as the *topoi* in the argument of a medium about a country. Continuous coverage may later develop into a thematic thread, when the journalists are ready to place the event together with others related to a value, or problem in society, make sense of it as a springboard for ideas. Several long stories do not do that, for example, travel havoc due to freak weather conditions.

The first thematic thread about Belgium raises the sensitive issue of sex abuse by Catholic priests. Several moral issues are evoked with the coverage. On the one hand, the victims' lives have been irreparably damaged, on the other, the church, while claiming moral authority, does not seem to accept responsibility or offer remedy to those who suffered at the hands of its officials. The BBC writers distance themselves from the promises made by the church to tackle the issue by describing the actions prefaced with verbs such as "pledge to", the future 'to' infinitive and placing the words of officials between inverted commas. The effect is achieved to show that so far only words are spoken rather than actions taken, as can be seen from the headlines quoted below:

Belgian Church to focus on abuse victims

Belgian Church pledges to focus on abuse victims

Pope faces 'most serious crisis since Reformation'

The story does not affect Belgium only, but the BBC gives prominence to the pledge of the Belgian church to focus on the suffering of the victims by involving various media – radio reports, interviews, video coverage and feature articles on the website. It looks as if the position of the Belgian church is showcased as an example of what needs to be done.

The second contentious issue broached with a thematic thread also has international existence although it began life in Belgium, which fact is acknowledged in all the articles. This is the case of banning the Islamic veil, the *burka*. On the one hand, the ban infringes on the rights of Muslim women, but on the other creates security problems, goes counter to European values and lifestyles. The BBC presents the issue as a dilemma, as can be seen from the title of one of the articles: *A veiled threat or an attack on faith*. The pun there suggests that wearing veils can threaten the security of citizens, but also – that the issue may threaten inter-religious relations. The coverage seeks out different viewpoints – of the MP who proposed the legislative act, of Islamic women for and against the veil. In all the articles, however, Belgium is acknowledged as the path blazer of a trend which raises problems – so far, too few to make a change, but important to consider in the broad context of a multicultural society. A link is made with Britain – the situation there, an MP suggesting a similar ban, a glossary of the different types of veils worn by Muslim women; even Emily Pankhurst and her ideas are brought into the argument. This thematic thread provides space for a discussion of multicultural issues from many points of view, highlighting, of course, Belgium as the initiator of contentious legislative activity.

The topic of separatism in Belgium is traced in great detail. Firstly, the news of a local election is announced with a focus on the linguistic division between French and Dutch speakers, the difference in the economic development of the two parts, the bilingual capital and the political divisions ensuing from the split. When election results come through, the leading party is named with a phrase which features its position in relation to the rivalry - *Flemish Separatist* - in the title of the publication. Little else is revealed about it. The video coverage begins with images of the

party leader and his statements, but swiftly moves on to the dissatisfaction of the French speaking part with the possible split of the country, presented as inevitable in view of the party winning the election. The claim that the country is based on the collaboration between the two communities is formulated by the BBC reporter himself and because it also wraps up the report, it does sound as the editorial voice.

Further in the thematic thread this topic is linked to Belgium assuming the presidency of the EU. The video opens with a ballet spectacle dedicated to the event and the seemingly unserious opening is linked to the news that government will be difficult to form in Belgium because consensus between the parties does not exist and is hard to find. A British MEP states that Belgium is used to having no government and hopes this will pass unnoticed. Thus Brussels is presented as the capital of Europe, which is, in fact, the capital of a country torn by ethnic and linguistic differences. The image comes across as a spectacle of unity for a city meant to unite, but which is itself disunited; the seat where consensus is to be reached among European partners but stirs conflicts among its own people who speak different languages and differ in economic development instead.

At the same time other thematic threads highlight moral issues of less contentious nature. Memories from World Wars 1 and 2 connected with British veterans make Belgium a place for homage journeys of British people. Titles such as "*Somerset cadets 'humbled' by WWI pilgrimage to Ypres*" and "*Attwood pays tribute to war 'sacrifice' of great-uncle*" reveal why the British go back to war memories. The vocabulary choices *pilgrimage*, *humble*, *tribute* and *sacrifice* speak of high moral values, of worship and religious veneration. The stories mainly feature British war heroes and their modern posterity, where Belgium is just the backdrop – a place to venerate and go on journeys named pilgrimages.

The efforts of the police forces of different countries to combat terrorists are meticulously covered wherever they occur. The thematic thread is one of international police collaboration against the modern threat of terror. Belgium is seen as an active participant with several articles.

Outside thematic threads, in two articles Belgium is mentioned to set a positive example. In the first one Belgium is reported to rank 6th in an international survey of end-of-life care. The UK comes first, so Belgium serves to set off the British achievement. In the second article British students are actively encouraged to 'go Dutch', i.e. to study at Dutch Universities, as the pun is obviously meant on this occasion. An English student is quoted praising the low tuition fees and the unique teaching methods. Although this is a single article, it is well illustrated with pictures and told through a most trustworthy source - the voice of a British person having experienced it.

From the continuous coverage it becomes clear that the country is preparing for a bid to host the European championship on football, an English couple passes through Belgium en route their moped journey round Europe, a beer brewing castle burns in a fire, the country is preparing for the Formula One competition, a singer is exposed of fraud and a British entertainer dies while touring Belgium. All these articles report events without contributing to an argument about the country.

Romania

The articles about Romania have been classified to cover the following topics:

1. Roma people deported from France back to Romania.
2. Animal rights violated in Romania – the UK intervenes to set them right.
3. Immigrants from Romania commit/are victims of crime in the UK.
4. The poor condition of the Romanian Healthcare system.
5. Ceausesco's grave.
6. EU criticism for corruption and judicial inadequacy.
7. Romania to host a NATO defence shield, against the wishes of Russia.
8. Romanian talent in music and dance.
9. Western firms expand in Romania.
10. Romania joins anti-austerity protests in Europe.
11. Romanian spy scandal in Russia and retaliation
12. Holocaust memories
13. A new type of dinosaur discovered by Romanian scientists.
14. Aid for Romania from voluntary organizations
15. A criminal gang smuggling Romanian children from Romania into Britain smashed

The thematic threads about Romania are connected with serious moral dilemmas, just like the thematic threads for the coverage of Belgium. First and foremost is the topic of repatriating Roma immigrants from France back to Romania. On the surface of it the BBC traces the reactions of the institutions of the European Union, the Romanian President, even the Pope. The argument is made that the right to free movement of EU citizens is violated by the repatriation and several authorities appeal against Sarkozy's move. The BBC, however, go further than voicing the words of officials. They send a reporter to investigate the living conditions of the Roma people in Romania who shows them to be extremely poor. On the other hand, a scheme is reported siphoning off British tax-payer money to Romania, allegedly to fund local criminal gangs. Thirdly, Roma leaders are portrayed as living in luxury while forcing girls into

prostitution, children into begging and theft and leaving ordinary members of the community in extreme poverty. At the same time, within the same thematic thread, a BBC reporter is shown to visit a “threatened Roma encampment” in the UK. The viewer cannot help noticing the difference with the Roma camps in Romania. Tidy campers surrounded with white fences make up the UK encampment. What the cleanly dressed, articulate inhabitant interviewed has to complain about is the lack of room for inviting company in the campers. Also, she claims to have bought the land, which the town council is now threatening to re-possess – unbelievable in the case of Romanian gypsies. The children who are seen running about are also clean and well-dressed, as well as the other inhabitants of the Roma camp. The contrast with the situation in Romania is stark. Seemingly with no connection to the thread is the story of a 10-year old Roma immigrant to Spain who gave birth to a baby, thus suggesting dubious practices in Roma communities.

The vocabulary selection is interesting for the terms of reference to these people. They are called immigrants, but also the British euphemism for their own Roma is used - ‘travellers’, which portrays them as a specific immigrant group. This thread is long and gives a multi-faceted presentation of a huge story. The coverage is balanced; however, the French reaction is shown as curt, unmotivated and obviously – to the detriment of the Roma, whose poor plight obviously has caught the attention of the BBC. Several Romanian voices are heard: the President, condemns the move of his French counterpart; the Minister for the Interior vouches that none of those deported has a criminal record; a Romanian social worker urges France for co-operation on improving the living conditions of the Roma; the president of a gypsy women association in Romania goes as far as comparing the deportations to the Holocaust. Thus Romania is projected as a poor country, but concerned about the

interests of its Roma population – a message largely enhanced by the vivid images of abject poverty in pictures or film.

A second long thread is the coverage of economic topics, such as the hope of companies in older EU members to improve their financial situation by expanding into Eastern Europe, which is still a new market. At the same time reports admit that the profits are not high or falling in specific cases. This is a thematic thread where Romania is featured in enumerations, rather than as a stand-alone economy. However, the missed opportunities for growth are clearly seen.

A big thematic thread reveals Romanian immigrants in the UK as victims of crime, but also – as perpetrators. An obituary is dedicated to a woman killed in the London bombing who was happy to find a job and live in England but her life was cut short by the terrorists. A series of articles are about a stabbing committed on Boxing Day, with the body left in a nursery. It involves two Romanians – the suspect and the victim. The event clearly stirs several sensitive issues – a violent crime, committed on a Holy day with children exposed to the consequences. A second case is reported as a moral lesson: three Romanian car washers kicked and beat an English man to rob him of £4. The judge's words – very similar to a teacher's homily to misbehaving first-grade students – are quoted verbatim: that it is cowardly to attack one man in a group of three, with extreme violence and for no obvious reason. Another case appears odd rather than violent – a Romanian fruit picker dazzled the eyes of an RAF pilot with a laser pen, which nearly caused him to crash. The perpetrator comes up with the childish admission that he was exploring the strength of the beam. In connection with the Roma thread, a couple from Romania is sentenced for sending children to beg and steal, making up to £100 000 per year from each child. The children were kept in poor conditions – one

needed seven tooth extractions; despite promises to send the children to school, none of the victims was actually enrolled. To counteract the anti-immigration tone, the BBC publishes an article claiming that social workers will be needed from Romania, among other countries, to cope with social care in England. This thread reveals cruelty, poverty, but at the same time reckless, even childish behaviour on the part of Romanian emigrants, endangering the security of the host nation. The crimes quoted are notable for the stupidity of the perpetrators, their lack of very basic moral values. Although all the cases are newsworthy by the nature of what happened, the BBC never fails to acknowledge the nationality of those involved. Together with the coverage of Poland – which cannot be presented here – the BBC seems to establish the topic of criminality and immigration.

The next thematic thread projects animal rights in Romania, where the help of the UK is seen as much needed. An interview with an Englishman is broadcast who created camps to save bears forced to dance by their captors in Greece, Turkey and Romania. Lions said to have lived in dilapidated and cramped conditions in Romania are transported to England and the story is followed through with pictures, sound and details. Princess Anne is mentioned as the benefactor for building a new enclosure for wolves in England, four of which have been “saved” from Romania. Animal welfare is obviously a great concern for the BBC and ex-communist countries are seen as unaware of their rights.

The people of Romania are also presented as being in need of charity. A feature film shows the improved conditions of orphans after the intervention of UK charities. Wellingtons are donated by an UK community for Romania. Poverty, coupled with neglect for the rights of the helpless in

society comes across as a feature of life in Romania, where the UK intervenes to set things right.

A thematic thread is devoted to the poor conditions in Romanian hospitals and the failing healthcare system. The hygiene in the hospitals is shown to be poor, drugs are insufficient, and doctors are poorly paid, because the system is under-funded. The characters in these stories are the 5-year old son of a poor family who died because he could not be treated and an opera singer with an incurable disease, thus stirring deep emotions for the pain and frustration of the patients.

Quite unequivocal is the attitude to the graves of Elena and Nicolae Ceausesco, the former communist dictator of Romania and his wife. The story resembles continuous coverage, because reports trace the digging up of the graves, the investigations on the remains of the couple and the conclusions. However, the reason why this is classified as a thread is the history of the Romanian dictator's rule, which makes the story a potent reminder of the past.

On the opposite pole we have a report about a dancer who achieved fame in Europe and subsequently – in the UK. Laudatory is also the tone of the articles about the Romanian contestant in the Eurovision song competition, who actually came third. This could be seen as a shorter thematic thread about the talent of the Romanian people.

Like the coverage of Belgium, for Romania the BBC also takes up the subject of the Holocaust. There is extensive coverage of a Jewish immigrant's visit of her hometown in Romania, when her birthplace brings

back the memory of the Holocaust atrocity. On a different note, the Romanian Mint has to apologise for putting the image of an anti-Semitic figure on a new coin. A third story about discovering a Holocaust grave in Romania ends with the sentence: "It is only the second Holocaust-era mass grave discovered in Romania since 1945." The hedge 'only' suggests a mild criticism that Romania seems to have forgotten the issue but forgetting the past is obviously a serious moral offence, in the eyes of the BBC.

A richly illustrated thread presents the economic austerity measures as reducing poor Romanians to even greater poverty, against which backdrop the protests are seen as just and right. On this issue the BBC introduces an interactive component by opening its pages for the readers' stories, thus obviously encouraging participation. Specific for Romania is the fact that when members of the police force strike, the president demands – and gets – the resignation of the Interior Minister. His withdrawal from the Cabinet is described with a very strong word – bereavement – and a film and an article are published on the occasion.

The coverage of positive features is completed by a report of a new type of dinosaur discovered by Romanian scientists. The BBC quotes the Bulletin of the Romanian Academy of Science. It is a positive feature that the BBC reporters ever choose to look through such publications, generally considered inaccessible to the public.

With an air of approval the BBC quotes also raids against a child-smuggling ring in Romania conducted with the help of the British police.

The thematic thread of Romania – EU relations is enmeshed with that for Bulgaria. Both countries are criticised for organised crime and corruption. The discussion of this thread is presented with the data about Bulgaria.

In conclusion, the image of Romania emerges as a poor country with achievements in the entertainment industry, engaged in research, but neglecting animal rights, with a failing health system and in need of foreign donations.

Bulgaria

As can be seen from the list below, the stories about Bulgaria are considerably fewer in number than the stories about Romania, or Belgium:

1. Bulgaria – implicated in the scandal with Roma deportations from France.
2. The Bulgarian nominee for EU commissioner rejected and a second one approved.
3. Bulgaria criticized by the EU on several issues: crime, border control, economy, statistics
4. Lawsuits for crimes in Bulgaria.
5. Tensions with ex-partner Russia.
7. Miserable conditions in Bulgaria.
8. Remains of John the Baptist
9. A special brand of folk music – ‘a guilty pleasure’.

For the longest thematic thread of its coverage Bulgaria is mentioned together with Romania as the home country of the repatriated Roma people from France. Unlike the coverage of the Romanian Roma, however, there is no effort to trace back home the Bulgarian immigrants and reveal their living conditions here or eventual criminal doings. There is no official protest on the part of the Bulgarian government, unlike the case of the Romanian – due to the fact that none came from the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Bulgaria is bundled together with Romania with linguistic and rhetorical ploys. Firstly, it appears as the second part of the coordinated phrase “(Roma from) Romania and Bulgaria”. Secondly, a popular argumentation fallacy is deployed, for instance in this sentence in one of the fact boxes:

Roughly 12,000 Roma migrated to France after Bulgaria and Romania's accession to the EU

The temporal sequence is presented as a causative one: the fact that many Roma people migrated to France after the accession of Romania and Bulgaria is not a legitimate premise to consider that they came from these two countries. The whole thread suggests that Bulgaria – together with Romania – caused problems with immigrants trying to escape from poverty in their countries, although this is more visible in the case of Romania than Bulgaria.

A long thematic thread recounts the relations of Bulgaria with the EU. On this occasion the “tandem” with Romania is still observed, however, details about Bulgaria are given this time. A statement of the German and French foreign ministers is reported to the effect that the two countries

will not be admitted to the Schengen area, unless they deal with corruption and organised crime. The qualifications attributed to the two countries are meticulously quoted between inverted commas and little attempt is made to interpret the meaning of what is said. However, the terseness of the phrases and the lack of elaboration make them appear quizzical and enigmatic:

The French and German interior ministers said it was "premature" to let them join Schengen in March 2011.

They said Bulgaria and Romania needed to make "irreversible progress" in the fight against corruption and organised crime.

....

The spokesman said those deficits could have "grave consequences for the European Union's security" and raised concerns about an "overly swift" adhesion to the Schengen area.

In effect, all the phrases between the quotation marks are transitive in nature: 'premature' demands a definition of what is considered 'maturity'; 'progress' requires an explanation which movement is seen as forward; 'overly swift' implies that there is a normal tempo, but unless it is named, the qualification is nothing but a linguistic twist.

Further in this thematic thread, when it comes to reactions from those implicated, the difference between the two countries is immense. On the Romanian side, the President speaks out, boldly condemning the move as *discrimination*. On the Bulgarian side the spokesperson of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs – way under the level of the Romanian reaction - promises that Bulgaria will do "its utmost". The phrase is as ambiguous as the qualifications in the Franco-German declaration. The Bulgarian

spokeswoman motivates this promise with an understanding for “the political situation in some EU member countries”, which is, in her opinion, complicated. Rhetorically, this means that Bulgaria will make efforts to improve because others have domestic problems. Apart from being a *non-sequitur*, the relevance of this reaction is far from clear. Measures are promised to be taken, but not due to faults in the country’s performance. The BBC presents this exchange as a conversation between a tight-lipped master and apprentices who are hard of hearing: one refusing to hear about his own faults, the other blaming the problem of the master’s situation at home.

Further, Bulgaria is mentioned as a country with seriously flawed national statistics. Greece is evoked as the analogue, with about double higher figures for its budget deficit compared to those officially declared. The article is illustrated with a picture of a horse-drawn carriage with the European flag going into a field, anchored with the text “Bulgaria only joined the EU in 2007”. However, the BBC publishes statistical data about Bulgaria from European research institutes. A rank list topped by Bulgaria is the one of the countries of origin of sex-labourers in the EU. Bulgaria comes third, after Romania and Russia. Unemployment is above the average, and life satisfaction is among the lowest in Europe, according to a Eurobarometer study. Thus Bulgaria comes across as a country which refuses – and is technically unable – to grasp the gravity of its own problems.

For the thematic thread EU-Bulgaria, the BBC speaks with the voices of Bulgarian officials on two occasions. Firstly, when the PM asks for Bulgarian Ambassadors revealed to have served for the Secret Services to be sacked. The BBC quotes his long statement verbatim, with tacit approval:

"Imagine these agents in Western European countries," Mr Borisov said on Wednesday.

"They once worked against them as ideological enemies and now they are representing our government there," he added.

"My opinion is that we have to part with these people and I suppose my party will back me up," Mr Borisov said.

The BBC quotes the adverse opinion as well: the President qualifies the move as "a political purge". This short attribute is only quoted from the whole statement of the President and presented between inverted commas. The BBC swiftly moves on to specify that the President himself has been named as an associate of the same Secret Services.

The second case when the BBC gladly quotes a Bulgarian official is when the Finance Minister criticizes the EU for its slow reaction to the economic crisis and the dysfunctional institutions. The BBC seems to side with this assessment. A long statement is printed with little intervention from the journalists:

"Currently it does not sound like this is a very fiscally responsible club and it could benefit from new members"

Simeon Djankov

Bulgarian finance minister

These words are boxed and set off with bold and big typeface, grabbing the attention of even those simply skimming the website. The editor adds that Bulgaria is the country with the smallest budget deficit among the 27 members, but this is immediately counterbalanced with the fact that it is

the second poorest country. Poor, but disciplined, with a discerning Financial Minister – this is the message.

The thematic thread of crime is dominated by legal action, rather than criminal deeds. In view of the accusations that tougher penalties for organised crime are needed in Bulgaria, these articles should sound like a step in the right direction. The BBC quotes a Bulgarian English language newspaper that a local businessman and his wife have been jailed for embezzling funds from the European Sapard programme. A particularly high-profile case is that the former PM is accused of failing to return 7 secret files to his office before stepping down. Again the provision is made that they contain state secrets on “security and organised crime” – the *leitmotif* of the Bulgarian *topos* of crime. Further on, the murderer of a mafia chronicler in Sofia is said to have been arrested on the day of the shooting. The suspects, however, have been on trial for other crimes for the fourth consecutive year. A significant feature of this thematic thread is that every story ends with the reminder that Bulgaria lost access to “more than 500m euros (£430m) of EU funding for failing to deal with corruption and organised crime”.

The *topos* of relations with former Big Partner, Russia is revealed in two articles. In the first one the news about a contract for a gas pipe is pushed aside to highlight the present given to Putin by his Bulgarian hosts – a puppy. It softened the macho image of the Russian Prime Minister, as can be seen from the picture illustrating the article. In it Putin is holding the puppy tenderly and looks really melted by the sweetness of the young animal. The second article also gains significance from the illustration. It informs that Russia is to demand explanations from Bulgaria about the plans to host a US missile defence system on Bulgarian territory. All the details of the system – that it will be on Bulgarian and Romanian territory,

that it replaces the plan to build such defence in Poland and the Czech Republic – are familiar from the publications about Romania. Romania is mentioned as taking part in official talks, replying to Russia, while Bulgaria is once again back-grounded. The photo, for its part, shows a neon light bulb at the end of a long pole directed somewhere in a foggy darkness. The meaning gleaned from the representation is pointing in an unknown direction – at Russia, or another undisclosed goal.

The thematic thread about the miserable conditions in Bulgaria backgrounds the country and focuses on the efforts of the volunteers to help. On one of the occasions, English teenage students raised the money to organise a creative Holiday club for children in Bulgaria. Misery is implicated in the story about a young child actor who is about to play “one of the sewer kids from Bulgaria.” Thirdly, an English football fan who dropped a rock on a Bulgarian barman and was sentenced to jail speaks of the “horrible experience” in the country. A reminder of the story is the fact that the parents of the person accuse the Liberal Democrats of using their alleged involvement in ‘saving’ the fan from a Bulgarian prison. The picture of drab existence and injustice looms behind such stories.

The main bulk of the articles about Bulgaria, however, is of the type continuous coverage: tracing events as they evolve. Such an event is the hearing of the Bulgarian nominee for EU commissioner which goes through dramatic curves. The first choice, Rumiana Jeleva, withdraws pelted with accusations of illegal income and incompetence. Then a second candidate, Kristalina Gueorguieva is hailed as brilliant and subsequently approved. On no occasion, however, is Jeleva projected as a weak candidate because she comes from Bulgaria: the failure is blamed on an attack against the European People’s Party; on allegations of improper continuing engagement with her consultancy firm – later dismissed; on incompetence about the issue of Humanitarian aid. The BBC also highlights the

inefficiency of the international mechanisms for action and the cumbersome procedure for selecting Commissioners of the EU, but not of any failing on the part of Bulgaria.

A story with a relatively positive ring to it is the discovery of remains of the body of John the Baptist in Bulgaria. A short film shows the ceremony of opening the sarcophagus and blessing the remains by the local bishop. The text, however, poses two hedges – St John the Baptist is venerated mainly by the East Orthodox Church and that remains of his body have allegedly been found earlier in Iran. The main archaeologist in charge of the excavations is given the floor to explain that he considers his finding very precious for Bulgaria; the Bishop calls the remains “imperishable” but the report ends with the reporter’s voice-over that more tests are expected to prove how genuine the finds are.

A special film about Bulgaria presents a genre of music, very popular among the young, but frowned upon by educated people because of its low quality. The BBC reporter calls it “a guilty pleasure”. She interviews a young couple outside the pompous and loud atmosphere of a discotheque; shots are shown of wild dancing on tables and lewd gestures; the reporter specifically disapproves of the whiskey bottles around the club. Connections to organised crime are also mentioned. The fan has no better explanation to offer for her taste than the fact that the music is Balkan and she has enjoyed it ever since she was little. The singer herself, referred to as a “folk diva”, is also interviewed and explains that the music reflects the Bulgarian character and is there for people to relax and enjoy, rather than be burdened with problems. All the voices are Bulgarian with voice-over interpretation in English. The reporter admits that she cannot describe the style of the music but ventures “oriental, local folk, gypsy”, summarised finally as “a bit dumbed down”. The lyrics are acknowledged

to be about how to get rich quickly, and therefore “not something to aspire to”. Although the reporter’s friends were dismissive of the music, they gladly joined her to the club. The impression is of an incomprehensible liking for oriental, flashy, fake lifestyles.

It appears as if positive topics – research findings, art and entertainment – find a place in the coverage of Bulgaria rarely, if at all. None was to be found in the corpus for this study.

Conclusions

News values: Since the time Galtung and Ruge (1965) put forward their classification of what makes news, a long time has elapsed and things have changed dramatically. Several authors have revised their classification (Brighton 2007:8). Also, their research explored American media while mine here deals with a European-based medium broadcasting for an international audience, the BBC. Although this was not my main purpose, this study does seem to shed light on what is considered newsworthy on the old continent. Below is a re-drawn description of what is newsworthy in view of the corpora for this study.

First of all, big international stories unfolding in the public space are traced with what I called continuous coverage. Thematic threads, for their part, proceed from values considered universal. On the one hand these are human rights – of movement, welfare, freedom to worship and maintain one’s own lifestyles. On the other hand in focus is multicultural society and its problems. Thirdly, and quite equivocally, attitudes to history make the headlines: veneration for heroic acts and compassion for the suffering of victims of historic atrocities. No less attention is given to animal welfare. Crime continues to be a source of interest, but with a special reference to multicultural society and economics. Organised crime,

corruption and mafia are frequently mentioned but the cases constituting them differ significantly and the reader remains baffled what actually constitutes the nature of these crimes.

Country images: The image of a country is based on covering stories about it, although it is also significant to notice what has been left out of the coverage. Continuous coverage is related to what happened in a country, while thematic threads draw lines of argument about the country. Thus negativity proceeds from a lack of interest in the social life of a country, its arts and entertainment, its science and achievements. It is also encoded in the implications of stories about charity and the coverage of failing systems. Criticism against a country is usually directly levelled through the exact words of those raising the issues. The medium, however, has ways of taking the side of the accused. Therefore, not all articles containing negative features of reality lead to building a negative image for a country.

The image of Bulgaria cannot be characterised as positive. Quantitatively, it shows less interest than in the other countries for this study. But this does not mean that positive events did not happen in the country. They may have been overlooked, or not properly presented to the media. The main reason for overlooking stories, from this study, appears to be lack of consonance with the newsworthy values enumerated above. They can be said to act as universal *topoi* for media coverage. Unless a country realises those *topoi*, it would be hard for it to transmit a positive image.

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