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To Be Or Not To Be A Part Of Europe: Appropriations Of The Symbolic Borders Of Europe In Slovenia

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Abstract

The post-Cold-War transformation of Central and Eastern Europe involved a complex reconfiguration of existing collective identifications, territorial attachments and borders, which included both establishing new attachments and borders and dispensing with the old ones. This article traces this reconfiguration by looking at the case of Slovenia. After briefly sketching the transformation of symbolic attachments and borders during the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the article analyses the appropriations of this new symbolic mapping in the public debates and immigration and citizenship policies related to the two major instances of immigration in Slovenia after the establishment of an independent Slovenian state in 1991: the arrival of Bosnian war refugees in 1992, and the increase in undocumented immigration in 2000-2001. Particular attention is paid to the conceptualisation of borders, especially the relationships between symbolic and institutionalised borders. It is argued that state borders are far from being the sole institutional vehicle of the symbolic borders separating the Self from

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² This paper draws upon the doctoral research project supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Slovenia (1999-2003) and the Central European University Doctoral Support Grant (2002-2003), as well as upon research conducted within the frame of the European Science Foundation *Changing Media – Changing Europe* programme (2000-2004).

its Others. Policy measures regulating immigration function as an additional vehicle for these borders, and thus provide a complement to the institution of state borders: if the state border marks the perceived *territorial* borders of the Self, the immigration-related policy measures serve to maintain the perceived *population* borders distinguishing the Self from its Other(s).

<<Please include one or more maps, to geographical position the paper>>

Introduction

As several works published over the course of the past few decades have demonstrated, virtually all of the European societies have a centuries-long record of constructing Europe as a spatial and socio-cultural entity starkly opposed to those parts of the world which are conceived as non-European or at least not sufficiently European: the Orient, Africa, Eastern Europe, the Balkans etc. (Said 1978; Wolff 1994; Delanty 1995, 1996; Lewis and Wigen 1997; Todorova 1997). While the majority of these studies focussed almost exclusively on the ways Western European authors imagine the Balkans and the East, some scholars have pointed to the fact that these symbolic geographies are far from being an exclusively Western European product. Instead, they are often (re-)produced locally, within the despised regions themselves, whose inhabitants tend to internalise the categories applied to them by their Western observers, or use them to distinguish themselves from inhabitants of neighbouring states (Gal 1991; Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992, Norris 1999; Iordanova 2001; Bjelić and Savić 2002; Patterson 2003; Kuus 2004; Lindstrom and Rasza 2004).

Yet unlike the old EU member states such as Germany, Britain and Denmark, which seem to be propelled towards Europe mainly via a number of negations (Hedetoft 1995: 527-581), and to which Europe offers only “an indirect avenue towards national identity confirmation” (579), the Central and Eastern European states are characterized by a much more affective,

positive involvement with European issues. For states such as Hungary, Poland or Slovenia, belonging to Europe was, years before actually joining the EU, a crucial positive element of national identification. The transformation following the collapse of the Cold War arrangement of the world was often framed as a journey ‘back to Europe’, and joining the EU symbolised the ultimate station of this journey (Henderson 1999). Each of the nations presented itself as fundamentally European; a long-lost child of Europe who, after decades of Soviet or Yugoslav domination, was finally re-joining the ‘common home’ of Europe.

This marked emphasis on belonging to Europe is hardly surprising. Unlike the Northern, Southern and Western borders of Europe, which follow the coastline and are thus fairly unambiguous, the Eastern and Southeastern borders are notorious for their malleability and multiplicity (Connor 1994 [1969]; Wolff 1994; Lewis and Wigen 1997; Todorova 1997). Due to that, in regions positioned to the East and Southeast of Europe, belonging to Europe is not necessarily an obvious choice. Over the course of time, these regions have often been seen as cleaving to other spatial units, for example Asia or the Balkans.

Thus, the assertion of belonging to Europe should not be seen simply as a description of the real position of these countries, but rather as a wishful projection that was itself involved in shifting the borders of Europe eastwards and southwards. Or, to put it differently, the East and Central European countries and nations were in fact stretching the external borders of Europe to include themselves (Mihelj 2004b), thereby also delineating themselves from their immediate neighbours whom they perceived as not sufficiently European. Therefore, the post-Cold-War transformation of Central and Eastern Europe involved a complex reconfiguration of existing collective identifications, territorial attachments and borders, which included both establishing new attachments and borders and dispensing with the old ones.

This article traces this reconfiguration by looking at a specific case, namely the case of Slovenia – the only part of the former Yugoslav federation that joined the EU in 2004. It starts

by discussing the conceptualisation of borders, focussing in particular on the relationships between symbolic and institutionalised borders, and arguing that a full examination of border-making mechanisms should take into account not only the discursive construction of collective identity and borders and the actual functioning of the state frontiers, but also the various citizenship and immigration laws, related policy measures and discourses which justify them. After briefly sketching the transformation of symbolic attachments and borders during the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the article analyses the appropriations of this new symbolic mapping in the public debates and immigration and citizenship policies related to the two major instances of immigration in Slovenia after the establishment of an independent Slovenian state in 1991: the arrival of Bosnian war refugees in 1992, and the increase in undocumented immigration in 2000-2001.

The interpretation presented in the following sections builds upon existing analyses of Slovenian immigration policies and public discourses on immigration (Doupona Horvat *et al.* 2001 [1996]; Jalušič 2001; Kuhar 2001; Bassin *et al.* 2002 and others), and combines them with an analysis of symbolic geography underpinning the mass media coverage of Bosnian refugees in 1992 and undocumented immigration in 2000 and 2001. The sample of analysed materials consists of newspaper articles published in the main periodical press (the dailies *Delo*, *Večer*, *Dnevnik*, *Slovenske novice*, *Slovenec* and *Republika* and the weeklies *Mladina*, *Mag* and *Primorske novice*), as well as the daily TV news bulletins (*TV Dnevnik*, *Odmevi*), weekly information programs (e.g. *Refugees here with Us*, *Tednik*) and documentaries (e.g. *Persona non grata*, *Refugees-Illegal Foreigners*) produced by the first TV channel (TVS1) of the public broadcasting service Radio-Television Slovenia.

The analysis presented in the paper is, for the most part, limited to the examination of manifest uses of symbolic geography appearing in the media coverage.³ The first step involved a search for all the occurrences of nouns and adjectives referring to geographical regions and territories (e.g. Europe, European, the South, Southern etc.) and other words based on such geographical categories (e.g. the Southerners). Then followed the identification of all those cases where these nouns, adjectives and other words referring to geographical regions and territories were associated with specific characteristics and values (e.g. violence/ peacefulness, democracy/ dictatorship, rate of development etc.). Particular attention was paid to the similarities with various types of discourses involving symbolic geographies, especially the discourse of Balkanism (Todorova 1997) and the discourse of Frontier Orientalism (Gingrich 1998). Finally, the main part of the analysis involved an examination of how these words were used to frame the relationship between refugees and undocumented immigrants on the one hand and Slovenia and Slovenians on the other hand. This involved raising questions such as: Were the refugees and immigrants seen as equally European or Western as Slovenians? How was Slovenia's link with Europe used to justify the introduction of particular policy measures related to refugees and undocumented immigration?

Symbolic and Institutionalised Borders

The construction of the Other and the closely related creation of borders are widely acknowledged and explored aspects of national identity formation and of the construction of other forms of collective identity (Barthes 1969; Cohen 1985). It has also been recognized

³ Arguably, symbolic mappings can underpin also other, less manifest aspects of media coverage, such as for example the compartmentalisation and clustering of news items. These aspects have been explored elsewhere

that the borders of the national Self are often enshrined in laws and institutionalised in the form of state borders. Borders between states can therefore be seen not merely as physical, empirical lines that appear on maps; they are also “social, cultural and political constructs that are made meaningful and exploited by human beings as part of the institutionalization processes of territories” (Paasi 2004: 22). Or, as Malcolm Anderson (1996: 2) argued: state frontiers should not be regarded only as institutions, but also as “markers of identity”, that form a “part of political beliefs and myths about the unity of the people, and sometimes myths about the ‘natural’ unity of a territory”.

Symbolic borders of particular communities, however, are institutionalised not only in the form of state frontiers, but also in the form of citizenship and immigration laws. This is hardly surprising. Within the classical model of the state, the state territory is assumed to be congruent with a territorially bounded population (see e.g. Bendix 1964). The state thus needs to be treated not only as a territorial organisation, but also as a membership organisation, i.e. an association of citizens (Brubaker 1992: 22). In line with that, state frontiers should not be treated merely as borders delimiting state territories but also as borders delimiting the populations of these states. And as populations are not – contrary to much of the popular nationalist imagery – physically rooted in particular state territories, laws regulating the control of state borders need to be complemented by laws distinguishing those who have free access to the territory from those who do not – i.e. laws governing citizenship and immigration. Indeed, as Malcolm Anderson (1996: 149) argues, state frontiers “have always had the general purpose of controlling or preventing the movement of people”; they have been established to prevent what are perceived as ‘intrusions’ of foreign populations.

It could be argued that together, the state borders and laws regulating citizenship and immigration, serve to perpetuate and reify a specific “sedentarist metaphysics” (Malkki

(Mihelj 2004b).

1997). Within this metaphysics, peoples and cultures are conceived as being rooted in a particular territory ('national soil') and thus unavoidably bound to live a sedentary life, while any migration outside the national territory is described in terms of uprootedness, treated as an aberration, and associated with the loss of identity, if not morality. However, with the development of new communication technologies and the ensuing intensification of cross-border communication between emigrants and their home countries, strong ties with family members and friends and their way of life are increasingly easy to maintain. It is becoming more and more obvious that culture and identity are not necessarily dependent on the physical proximity to a particular territory. Or, as Malcolm Anderson (1996: 7) argued, "a process of delocalisation of boundaries may now be under way", and more and more people are, "like the 'wandering Jew', carrying their identity around with them."

This, however, does not mean that the increase in migration and other aspects of globalisation diminished the power of borders. The immigrants may not even want to maintain strong ties with the country they came from, or may explicitly want to adopt the way of life characteristic of their new home environment – yet cannot escape being treated as fundamentally different and belonging somewhere else. While the state frontiers may have become more permeable and have ceased to function as primary markers of collective identity, other forms of collective borders and jurisdictional devices have taken over their role (Cohen 1998: 33). In a context of increased migration, it is precisely citizenship and immigration laws, not state frontiers, that become the fundamental institutional vehicles of symbolic borders, and with that also of collective identities. A full examination of border-making mechanisms in the contemporary processes of European integration should therefore take into account not only the functioning of the state borders of Europe, but also the various citizenship and immigration laws and related institutions and policy measures. All of them can function as

institutional vehicles of symbolic borders, and become infused with various symbolic images of the Self and the Other.

The Reconfiguration of Borders during the Disintegration of Yugoslavia

In the course of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the subsequent wars, the existing network of collective identifications, including collective memories and collective attachments to space, changed substantially. Before the 1980s, the symbolic divisions of Yugoslavia into its Western and Eastern (or, even more often, Northern and Southern) parts were not seen as insurmountable. Each republic and province was seen as an integral part of Yugoslavia, and thus as a component of a compact spatial and cultural unit which, albeit internally diverse, actually shared a recognizable common identity: it was neither Western nor Eastern. The positioning of Yugoslavia as neither-Western-nor-Eastern penetrated various levels of public discourses in the federation. Different spheres of Yugoslav culture, politics and society were envisaged in terms of their proximity and distance to both East and West. Particularly with the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1950s, the neither-Eastern-nor-Western positioning became one of the central elements of the socialist Yugoslav political identity and one of the defining traits of the Yugoslav foreign policy (Petković 1986). Furthermore, the distinguishing feature of socialist Yugoslav economy (in the official jargon: self-management), in which the business was run in the form of cooperatives in which employees shared profit and took part in the management, was thought of as an economy combining elements of both the Soviet (i.e. Eastern) economic statism as well as the Western free market economy (cf. Sirc 1979).

In the late 1980s, this particular positioning, coupled with the image of Yugoslavia as characterized by a unity-in-diversity, gradually lost its hegemonic status. Especially in Slovenia and Croatia, the internal diversity of Yugoslavia ceased to function as a source of pride. Instead, it was increasingly seen as an obstacle to further development. Yugoslavia began to be perceived as an unviable mixture of incompatible civilisations or cultures: the Western and the Eastern one, the European and the Balkan one. This change crucially affected the particular national identifications and attachments to space, and contributed to a major reshuffling of symbolic borders. According to Milica Bakić-Hayden (1995: 927), the existence of the Yugoslav framework effectively neutralised the usual valorisation of traditional dichotomies such as East/West, Europe/Asia, Europe/Balkans etc. With the destruction of this neutralising framework, however, these categories were re-evaluated and began to be perceived as opposites rather than simply differences, which “has resulted in the destruction of the living communities that transcended them”.

In this process, ‘Europe’ began to be used as a symbol of civilisation and development. Most politicians, intellectuals and journalists would claim Slovenia to be more civilised, developed and progressive—and thus more European—than the rest of Yugoslavia. According to the foreign minister Dimitrij Rupel, for example, Slovenians were actually a major factor in the Europeanization of the Yugoslav state (*Delo*, 18/12/1990). Such a symbolic positioning of Slovenia was also used to justify the claim for independent statehood. To secure and protect its higher level of development and civilisation, it was argued, Slovenia should embark on the process of further Europeanization as a fully sovereign nation-state.

By contrast, the prospect of Slovenia remaining an integral part of Yugoslavia was repeatedly pictured as detrimental to Slovenia’s prosperity. The president of the Slovenian Assembly France Bučar, for example, argued that the failure to achieve full independence would actually mean a “Yugoslavisation of Slovenia”, and that “with that, the right road we have

taken in our republic would be blocked” (*Daily News Bulletin*, TV Slovenia 1, 16/11/1990). The Slovenian Christian Democrats were even more explicit; as they argued in their appeal to the public launched shortly before the plebiscite for an independent Slovenia in 1990, the Slovenian government “could only stop the intrusion of the Balkan violence into our lands, and the ever-more greedy robbing of our hard-earned financial means, by taking the matters into its own hands, as dictated by the interests of Slovenia as an independent unit” (*Delo*, 11/12/1990). The common Yugoslav space came to be equated with underdevelopment, barbarism, disorder, decay and violence, thus assuming the characteristics usually ascribed to the Balkans or Eastern Europe (Wolff 1994; Todorova 1997).

The New Symbolic Mapping of Slovenia as a Frame for the Issue of Immigration

The symbolic mapping of Slovenia as developed, progressive and ‘European’, and the rest of Yugoslavia as underdeveloped, barbarian, and ‘Balkan’, persisted throughout the period of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the formation of Slovenia as an independent state. The southern border of Slovenia, proclaimed as an international border by the Slovenian authorities in 1991, and recognised as such by the international community in 1992, thus also became a border which – at least in the eyes of the Slovenian population – symbolically separated Europe from non-Europe (Zavratnik-Zimic 2001: 76-78). Apart from framing the relationships between the different Yugoslav republics and provinces during the disintegration of the federation, this new symbolic geography also served as a frame for a number of other foreign and domestic issues, including various forms of cross-border migration.

Since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communist regimes, undocumented immigration, predominantly originating in Eastern and Southeastern Europe and the Middle

East, has been one of the major issues on the political agendas in many European societies. Among other things, the immigrants have become targets of a new kind of moral panic (Husbands 1994); they have been charged with abusing the welfare state, committing crimes and ‘stealing’ jobs from established citizens (Koser and Lutz 1998: 3). Perceived in such a way, immigrants have easily become objects of nationalist and racist hatred (Stolcke 1995; Tesfahuney 1998), and have regularly been used as a negative screen to crystallise a positive self-identity of receiving societies (cf. Cohen 1994). In Slovenia, undocumented immigration from other formerly communist states and the Middle East entered the public discussion somewhat later than in Western Europe, yet the dominant representations of the issue have been similarly biased and underpinned by nationalism and racism. Just as elsewhere in Europe, the media have used the representation of immigrants as the Other to frame a positive, self-congratulatory image of ‘us’ (Bassin *et al.* 2002; Drolc 2003; Erjavec 2003; Mihelj 2004a). Moreover, the representational strategies used by the Slovenian mass media are virtually the same as the ones employed by the mass media in other European states (Mihelj, forthcoming).

However, unlike the case of Western European states, where the immigrants predominantly functioned as the mirror image of ‘us’ as a nation, the immigrants entering Slovenia also served as the Other for ‘us’ as Europeans. Both in the case of Bosnian refugees and in the case of undocumented immigration, Slovenia was symbolically positioned as a part of Europe, while everything beyond the Slovenian southern and eastern borders was disparaged as a part of the Balkans or the East. One of the main arguments fostered in this analysis is that this symbolic positioning played a major role in framing the public attitudes as well as political decisions related to immigration, including the introduction of new policy measures. The immigrants were not seen only as being fundamentally different from Slovenians as such, but also as being different from Slovenians as members of a larger collective of Europeans.

Their integration was therefore seen not only as a threat to national homogeneity, but also as a threat to the homogeneity of Europe. In fact, various measures adopted vis-à-vis the Bosnian refugees, undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers could be interpreted as particular institutionalisations of this symbolic geography, more specifically of the border between Slovenians—as a part of Europe or the West—and the immigrants—as a disturbing element coming either from the Balkans or from the East. As such, these policy measures can be seen as a complement to another form of institutionalisation of the border between Europe and the Balkans (or between the West and the East), namely the state border between Slovenia and Croatia—currently the southern border of the EU.

Case Study I: Bosnian Refugees (1992)

The refugees who came to Slovenia first from Croatia and then, in much larger numbers, from Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, were a veritable test of the declared democratic standards and respect for human rights in Slovenia. Along with presenting Slovenia as distinctively European in terms of culture and civilisation, the Slovenian political elites have regularly spoken of Slovenia as uniquely democratic, contrasting its political culture with the totalitarian one characteristic of the other formerly Yugoslav republics. However, the symbolic mapping that saw Slovenians as inherently more civilised and European than the other Yugoslav nations inhibited the full endorsement of equality and human rights. After the outbreak of the armed conflicts in Croatia and later in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia first adopted a policy of open borders, and several governmental bodies were actively involved in setting up refugee centres, securing financial means, and boosting public support. Yet alongside with that, the refugees were often pictured as fundamentally different from the

Slovenian population, and on several occasions, these differences have been explained by reference to geographical categories.

One of the most explicit examples can be found in a letter tellingly entitled *Against the Balkanisation of Slovenia* (*Slovenec*, 22/08/1992), written by the president of the Slovenian National Party, Zmago Jelinčič. According to Jelinčič, accepting war refugees from Bosnia and Croatia or other former co-citizens seeking refuge in Slovenia could only lead to a “Balkanisation of our country”. “The South” – another geographical term often used as a tool for the exclusion of the non-Slovenians – is, in his view, characterised by “mental, political, behavioural, family or sexual patterns” that are clearly distinct from those in Slovenia, and if anyone is attracted by them, “he should move out and let the Slovenians tailor their own future”.

The use of such pompous mapping of Slovenia and Slovenians was, however, neither limited to the far-right segment of the political spectrum nor to the right wing or tabloid newspapers. A similarly unambiguous framing of Bosnian refugees as ‘Balkan’ could be found, for example, in an article published in the major, most widely read Slovenian broadsheet newspaper, *Delo* (11/07/1992). Like the above-mentioned letter, also this article had a title that clearly indicated the presence of the Balkanist frame, namely *In the Embrace of the Balkans*. Furthermore, it was replete with negative representations of refugees, explicitly presenting them as potential criminals.

Institutionalisation of the Border between Europe and the Balkans

The representations of Bosnian refugees such as the ones presented above are remarkably similar to the representations of the Balkans that were first formed by Western European writers in the late 19th century, and permeated much of Western political commentary of the post-Cold-War developments in the region. As Maria Todorova (1997) argued, the Balkans

tended to be represented as “an incomplete self” or “the structurally despised alter-ego” (18). They “served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the ‘European’ and the ‘West’ has been constructed” (188). In a similar vein, Bosnian refugees functioned as a repository of the Slovenians’ negative characteristics, including the inclination to violence and criminal activities, dirtiness, laziness, nationalism and other traits usually ascribed to non-Europeans. Against that image, a positive image of the Slovenians as a peaceful, tidy, diligent, democratic, and thus ‘European’ nation could be established. Obviously, if the Slovenians were to retain their putatively European culture, the mixing of the Slovenian population with populations that were deemed to be insufficiently European – including Bosnian refugees – had to be kept at a minimum. Yet if Slovenia was to behave as a democratic country observing humanitarian principles, Bosnian refugees could not simply be refused the right to enter the state. Instead, several policy measures have been introduced – ranging from segregated education to a total closure of Slovenian borders after the country’s hosting capacities have been filled. These measures have effectively prevented the full integration of the refugees into the Slovenian society. By curious twists of argument, they have been presented as uniquely democratic and entirely consistent with the European standards.

The central trait of Slovenia’s refugee policy adopted after the start of the Yugoslav wars was the official definition of Bosnian refugees as *temporary* refugees. Although the notion of temporary refugees appeared in the documents issued by the United Nations High Commissariat for Refugees (UNHCR) only exceptionally and without a clear, legally defined meaning, the Slovenian politicians and representatives of various state bodies used it as if it were a well-established category of international legislation (Doupona Horvat *et al.* 2001 [1996]: 29). In an interview, Mirjam Škrk, a lecturer at the Faculty of Law, explained that the refugees from Bosnia were defined as temporary because of their large numbers and because

of their “personal wish” to return home, not to stay and integrate into the Slovenian society (*Refugees Here with Us*, TVS1, 30/08/1992). With such arguments, the temporary status was presented as a confirmation of Slovenia’s high humanitarian standard – exemplified in the respect for the presumed personal wishes of refugees. However, as Simona Zavratnik-Zimic (2003: 199-200) has argued, the classification of all Bosnian refugees as ‘temporary’ fostered the treatment of the refugees as a homogeneous group, and precluded a differentiated treatment that would be sensitive to the specific circumstances of individual cases. Most importantly, the definition of refugees as ‘temporary’ was also used as an excuse to introduce a number of measures evidently in contradiction with the standards defined in the international agreements on human rights.

Firstly, the Bosnian refugees were denied the right of free movement. They had to solicit a permit to leave the refugee centre, and in some centres, each refugee was limited to only two or three such permits per week. Although such an arrangement was a clear violation of refugee’s rights as defined in international charters, it was consistently represented by the state officials dealing with the refugees and by most of the journalists as something normal. Even more, the fact that the refugees were usually granted permission to exit the centres whenever they asked was presented as something positive, as a demonstration of the ‘good will’ of the Slovenians (Doupona Horvat *et al.* 2000 [1996]: 32). Moreover, such attitudes regularly went hand in hand with the expressions of deep sympathy for refugees’ suffering. For example, Damirka Batinić, a journalist of TV Slovenia, was very sympathetic to the suffering of the refugees who complained about their life in the centres, and even compared it to life in prison (*Refugees Here with Us*, TVS1, 30 Aug 1992). However, the views of refugees were introduced only after an opinion of an expert who argued that the temporary status was, in part, a consequence of the refugees’ own wish to return to Bosnia as soon as possible. Based on this, Batinić interpreted the complaints of the refugees as a consequence of

a misunderstanding, and argued: “All these misunderstandings and unrealistic demands by the refugees would not have arisen had somebody explained their status to them at the beginning”. Obviously, in Batinić’s eyes, nothing was intrinsically wrong with the definition of refugees as ‘temporary’.

Secondly, the refugees were not allowed to work. The introduction of this measure was usually justified by reference to the high rate of unemployment in Slovenia. Yet rather than being thought of as a drawback, the prohibition was occasionally represented as a privilege. For example, Ante Livić, another journalist working for TV Slovenia, compared the situation in Slovenia with the condition in Austria, where the refugees “had to work”. He argued that this might be one of the explanations of the fact that the refugees preferred to stay in Slovenia rather than go to Austria (cf. *Daily News Bulletin*, TVS1, 18/05/1992). Such an argument clearly supported the stereotype of refugees as lazy and entirely different from the diligent Slovenians.

Finally, Slovenia also introduced educational segregation. The refugee children were not allowed to attend classes together with Slovenian children in regular Slovenian schools. Instead, special education was provided for them in their mother tongue. Just as the restriction of the free movement and the prohibition of work, this measure has also been represented as perfectly normal. Since the refugees would sooner or later return to Bosnia, went the argument, it was necessary to prepare them for reintegration, thus to preserve their national and cultural identity while in Slovenia (Doupona Horvat *et al.* 2001 [1996]: 32-36). By such a twist of argument, even the segregated system of education was presented as a privilege, as yet another confirmation of Slovenia’s high democratic standards.

In sum, all the policy measures discussed above contributed, first and foremost, to the physical isolation of refugees from the host society. Taken into account their association with the Balkans on the level of representations, these measures also prevented the mixing of the

two poles of the Slovenian imagined geography that were thought to be incompatible: the Balkans on the one hand and Europe on the other. Therefore, they can be seen as particular institutionalisations of the symbolic border that separates Slovenia and Slovenians, as a part of Europe, from Bosnians, as a part of the Balkans.

Closing the Borders as a Way of Protecting Europeanness

Another aspect of public debates that involved symbolic geography focused on who had responsibility for helping the refugees. After the representative of the UNHCR expressed the wish that Slovenia would keep on treating refugees as a regional issue, several journalists, politicians and other publicly known persons in Slovenia protested. The expectations of the UNHCR were based on an assumption that was, in their view, entirely unacceptable: namely the belief that Slovenia was more responsible for the war in Yugoslavia and its consequences, including the war refugees, than other European states. It is important to note that this argument was shared not only by explicitly nationalist politicians and likeminded journalists, but by virtually every political option represented in the Slovenian Parliament and even by the representatives of humanitarian organisations. For example, commenting on the initial reactions of Western European states to the Bosnian refugee crisis, the Minister of Internal Affairs Igor Bavčar stated: “We cannot allow them to treat us, in reference to the issue of refugees, as one of the former Yugoslav republics” (*Daily News Bulletin*, TVS1, 27/04/1992). Opinions expressed by Borut Pahor, a representative of the reformed League of Communists in Slovenia, are another case in point. According to him, UNCHR expectations were entirely unacceptable, since Slovenia is an entirely sovereign state and has no legal or political responsibility for the war in the Balkans. The fact that Slovenia decided to accept the refugees, he argued, “should be understood as a sovereign and humanitarian gesture of a state

which cannot assume any more responsibility for solving this problem than other European states and the international community” (*Delo*, 06/06/1992).

The wish to be treated equally as other European states, however, also served as a justification for closing the borders to refugees if other European states refused to open theirs. Zoran Thaler, a member of the Liberal Democratic Party and a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, mentioned this possibility openly. He argued that “if the influx of refugees would continue with such an intensity as in the last days, then finally there would be no other option for Slovenia than to behave as its neighbours, who closed their borders and who are now, with great difficulties and drop by drop, accepting certain refugees” (*Daily News Bulletin*, TVS1, 18/05/1992). Lev Kreft, a well-known Marxist philosopher and member of the reformed Slovenian League of Communists, shared a similar view: “We have to state that we are otherwise in favour of open borders; yet if we will be faced with the question of whether we belong to Europe or to the Balkans or if the throng of refugees would be stopped in Slovenia because the West would not be prepared to accept them, we have to be clear: the Berlin Wall will stretch along the Kolpa river⁴” (*Slovenske novice*, 18/07/1992). Finally, several journalists also eagerly endorsed the argument that Slovenia should not be lumped together with other post-Yugoslav states and should thus not be expected to take over a larger responsibility for the refugees than other European states. Žarko Hojnik, for example, claimed that both Europe and the Slovenians themselves are too little aware of the fact that Slovenia is an independent and internationally recognised state, and rhetorically asked: “Why should we behave towards the refugees from BiH⁵ differently than the rest of Europe? Perhaps because we once lived in a common state or because this is what they think in the nearby Croatia?” (*Delo*, 29/04/1992).

⁴ Kolpa is a river running alongside the southern border of Slovenia, separating Slovenia from Croatia.

⁵ Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Evidently, the bottom-line of the public discussion about refugee-related policy measures did not revolve simply about what the right political decision would be, but rather about Slovenia's position vis-à-vis Europe. The latter was obviously deemed to be more important than respect for human rights: if Europe was to adopt policies violating human rights, Slovenia should follow its example nevertheless. That Slovenia might, after all, really have a closer connection to the rest of the Yugoslav states, and that it might be appropriate for it to accept more refugees than the rest of Europe, was out of question. The danger of sliding too close to 'the Balkan tinder-box' was clearly deemed too high.

Case Study II: Undocumented Immigration from the Middle and Far East

Contrary to the arrival of Bosnian war refugees, the sudden increase in undocumented immigration from the Middle and Far East caught Slovenia almost entirely unprepared. In 2000, the number of immigrants found by the police was higher than 35.000, and twice exceeded the number of those found in 1999. The number of applicants for asylum rose from 776 in 1999 to 12.943 in 2000 (Slovenska policija 2002). The number of people accommodated in the so-called asylum homes and centres for the removal of foreigners around the country far exceeded their capacities. The deficit provoked severe criticism from the United Nations Committee against Torture as well as protests among the local population. When faced with the arrival of the refugees in the early 1990s, several governmental bodies were actively involved in setting up the refugee centres and collecting support from the very beginning. By contrast, when confronted with the problem of undocumented immigration, the Slovenian government kept avoiding the issue for several months. It was only in response to the mounting pressure from non-governmental organisation and rising xenophobia among the

population that amendments to the existing immigration and citizenship legislation were introduced.

The major part of the media coverage of undocumented immigration pictured the situation as increasingly dramatic, representing the immigrants as a threat to national security and health, thus contributing to the construction of immigrants as the Other (Jalušič 2001; Kuhar 2001; Bassin *et al.* 2002; Erjavec 2003). As in the case of Bosnian refugees, undocumented immigration from the Middle and Far East was often framed in geographical terms, e.g. described with reference to the geographic region from which it originated. However, while the symbolic map underpinning the mass media representations of Bosnian refugees positioned Slovenia firmly on the side of Europe/the West, and rejected its association with the Balkans/the East, the mass media representations of undocumented immigration revealed an importantly different symbolic positioning of Slovenia. Firstly, the symbolic map included a considerably larger proportion of the globe. It stretched far beyond the Balkans into the Middle and Far East, thereby clearly suggesting that Slovenia is being affected by developments of a global scale. Secondly, the Balkans no longer functioned as the main Other against which the Slovenian self would be defined. Instead, the role of the Other was taken over by 'the East', which most often meant the Middle and Far East and only occasionally included the Balkans. This development confirms Bojan Baskar's (2003) thesis that towards the end of the 1990s, a general decline of balkanophobic attitudes could be discerned in Slovenia. Thirdly, Slovenia was no longer unambiguously represented as an equal part of Europe, but rather as a transit-area at Europe's margins, clearly differentiated from the 'real' Europe/ the West, i.e. the EU. As one of *Delo's* journalists put it: "For the majority of foreigners, our country is only a springboard for the departure towards the West rather than a destination country where they could live a decent life," (27/07/2000). And fourthly, besides being represented as a transit area, Slovenia was also consistently portrayed as a state that is

bound to protect Europe/ the West from the ‘assaults’ of immigrants coming from ‘the East’. This was clearly apparent from the choice of metaphors used to describe the country’s role in relation to the immigration and Europe. For example, Slovenia was described as “a hall of Europe, a security belt and a border gendarme” (*Delo Sobotna priloga*, 10/06/2000), a “migratory sieve for Europe” (*Demokracija*, 05/10/2000) and as “the last barrier before the West” (*Nedelo*, 28/05/2000).

Institutionalisation of Frontier Orientalism

Such symbolic positioning was not entirely new. Quite to the contrary, it was very similar to the one that could be found in the discourse of “Frontier Orientalism” (Gingrich 1998) – a specific local variation of Orientalism established in the 19th century, typical of the regions that once belonged to the Habsburg Empire: eastern Austria, Hungary, north-east Italy, and Slovenia. This variety of Orientalism was deeply embedded in the particular historical narrative and collective self-identifications typical of the 19th century Habsburg Empire. It was recognisably Catholic, included both folk and elite cultures, and consisted of the recollection and celebration of historical encounters with the Muslim world, usually military victories either against Muslims or together with Muslims (123). It was also typically supremacist, characterised by the frequent use of military metaphors, and most importantly, it “place[d] the home country and its population along an adjacent territorial and military borderline which is imbued with a timeless mission” (119).

The representations of undocumented immigration in Slovenia included several elements analogous to those characteristic of Frontier Orientalism. As demonstrated above, Slovenia was represented as a country positioned on the European frontiers and as such performed a specific mission, namely the protection of Europe against immigration. Furthermore, military metaphors permeated the media reports. The efforts of the border police were described as a

‘struggle against illegal migration’ (cf. *Delo*, 03/06/2000; 11/08/2000; *Večer*, 30/12/2000), the coming of the immigrants was labelled as an ‘assault’ (*Delo*, 19/07/2000; *Dnevnik*, 27/07/2000), and various activities undertaken by the police were referred to as ‘operations’ (*Delo*, 01/10/2001). And thirdly, the immigrants would sometimes be explicitly associated with Islam or seen as a modern variation of the Ottoman invasions. For example, undocumented immigration was sometimes referred to as “the contemporary Turkish invasion” (29/01/2001), while the roadblocks and night watches organised to prevent the state officials from accommodating the immigrants in one of the Slovenian villages were represented as a re-enactment of similar protective measures against the foreigners, including those against the Ottomans (*Delo – Sobotna Priloga*, 10/02/2001).

One could perhaps expect that the perception of Slovenia as a transit-zone on the margins of Europe would foster the introduction of policy measures that would speed up the assessment of asylum applications and transform Slovenia into a country of destination rather than transit, thus bringing it closer to the other European states. Yet the reaction to the perception of Slovenia as a transit-zone was exactly the opposite: the amendments to the citizenship and immigration legislation introduced in 2000 and 2001 restricted the eligibility criteria for asylum applications and enhanced the control of state borders. These amendments can be seen as an institutionalisation of the symbolic position of Slovenia as a devoted guard of Europe’s borders. Since the undocumented immigrants were regularly presented as coming from ‘the East’, these amendments can be interpreted also as an institutionalisation of the symbolic border between Europe/ the West (and Slovenia as an aspiring member of the exclusive club) and parts of the globe recognized as ‘Eastern’.

Throughout the year 2000, this position of Slovenia was presented as perfectly normal. The Slovenian border police, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and most of the journalists reporting on their activities insisted that Slovenia had to meet the expectations of EU and perform the

role of the security belt as effectively as possible. Ensuring strict border-control on the future Schengen border was treated as one of the highest strategic priorities, and various border police activities were often explicitly presented as measures needed to protect Europe from immigration and boost Slovenia's image in the eyes of the EU. For example, Rajko Komat, the director of the sector for foreigners and borders at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, argued: "If we want to come into Europe, we have to demonstrate that we are capable of protecting our borders successfully; therefore, we are paying a lot of attention to this problem" (*Stop*, 6 Jan 2000). Furthermore, the representatives of the police would often proudly present their latest successes related to undocumented immigration, for example mixed border patrols organised together with the police from neighbouring countries (e.g. *Daily News Bulletin*, TVS1, 04/12/2000, 06/12/2000, and 24/01/2001; *Delo*, 16/01/2001). As a rule, journalists meticulously reported on such achievements, and also supported the above-sketched imagining of the relationship between Europe and Slovenia. Reports on the number of immigrants caught at the borders formed a regular feature of news bulletins and newspaper pages dedicated to crime. Especially cases when large groups of immigrants had been caught were presented as important achievements, and occasionally entered the cover pages or were listed as the news of the day at the beginning of news bulletins.

'Fortress Europe' – an Excuse for the Introduction of Restrictive Policy Measures

The willing acceptance of the role of the 'border gendarme' of Europe, however, did not last long, nor was it accepted by all the journalists and other individuals and groups involved in the public discussions about undocumented immigration. Especially from late January 2001 onwards, even the representatives of various governmental bodies were less and less proud and self-confident when talking about Slovenia's role in safeguarding European borders. The efforts of the border police were no longer treated as a matter of pride, but only as a part of

the price to be paid in order for Slovenia to qualify for EU membership. For example, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Rado Bohinc, stated that the standards that Europe had set for the candidate states were much higher than the ones it had set out for or complied with itself (*Jana*, 20/02/2001). Journalists and other individuals and groups participating in public debate occasionally voiced similar concerns. According to Jaroslav Jankovič, Western Europe was exerting “considerable pressure on the accession candidates to become a more efficient sieve for migratory currents”, and due to that, stopping illegal migration was becoming “one of the compulsory integration priorities” (*Delo – Sobotna priloga*, 18/12/2000). Vojislav Bercko, a journalist of *Večer*, was even more explicitly critical; in his view, Europe did not care about how and at what cost the candidate states were confronting the problem of migration; all that was important was that these states “protect the borders of the united Europe with all their forces” (12/08/2000).

In some cases, the representation of Europe as a fortress that was reluctant to accept the immigrants would even be used as an argument in favour of the introduction of more restrictive policy measures. For example, Boris Jež, one of *Delo*’s journalists, argued: “The entire Europe defends itself from the refugees, and it is therefore not clear why exactly Slovenia should become a kind of oasis, a safe haven, with high social and cultural standards for the newcomers” (20/12/2000). Similarly, when addressing the issue of xenophobic and racist attitudes towards immigrants, journalists would often refer to xenophobic and racist incidents in the EU member states, thereby trying to rationalise similar incidents occurring in Slovenia (e.g. *Tednik*, TVS1, 15/02/2001).

Evidently, what was at stake here was not whether being xenophobic is acceptable or not, but rather whether or not the Slovenians differ from the Europeans. Similarly as in the case of Bosnian refugees, the behaviour of the Europeans or the European institutions – however deplorable – was used as an excuse for the actions undertaken by the Slovenians or the

Slovenian institutions. It is also important to note that when trying to account for xenophobia and the introduction of restrictive measures, Slovenia was again presented as an equal part of Europe – and not only as an abandoned buffer zone at its margins. Obviously, the symbolic positioning of Slovenia vis-à-vis Europe was malleable, and could be changed and appropriated to suit particular circumstances.

Not everyone involved in the public discussion on undocumented immigration, however, shared these views. Unlike in the case of Bosnian refugees where the restrictive policies were, at least in 1992, successfully presented as uniquely democratic and did not provoke much explicit disapproval, the introduction of restrictive policy measures in the case of undocumented immigration was met with harsh criticism, mostly voiced by non-governmental organisations. Nonetheless, even these criticisms often tended to represent Slovenian immigration policy as a consequence of the pressures exerted by the EU. In an open letter published in several Slovenian newspapers, the members of a non-governmental organisation, the Office for Interventions, claimed that the EU “has reserved for Slovenia the role of a sanitary cordon which should protect Europe from the throng of contemporary barbarians from the deprived world”. Obviously, argued the members of the Office, the state decided to solve the problem by instigating xenophobia, which would lead to the unification of ‘us’ against ‘them’ and would finally make it easier to blame ‘them’ for the government’s own incapability to solve the problems. Even this, however, suspected the members of the Office, might be a strategy which Slovenia had learned from the EU: “Has, perhaps, the Ministry for European Affairs brought this strategy from the training programmes organised for them by the European Union (EU), meant as help with the introduction of the Schengen standards on state borders here? Is spreading xenophobia inwards and grovelling before Brussels’ bureaucracy a recipe for solving the current state of affairs?” (*Dnevnik*, 19/12/2000).

Evidently, the members of the Office maintained that the actor responsible for the situation in Slovenia was, first and foremost, the EU – and the Slovenian authorities, as long as they blindly followed its instructions. Again, the main party to blame was not Slovenia or the Slovenian population itself, but the EU. Curiously, hardly anyone involved in the public discussion pointed out that the EU member states, however restrictive their policies may be, still accepted far more asylum seekers than Slovenia did (one such exception could be found in *Nedelo*, 09/02/2001).

Conclusions

The process of European integration and enlargement has fundamentally transformed the functioning of state borders between the member states, and had strong reverberations for the symbolic borders involved in the construction of collective identities. The internal borders of the EU have lost most of their traditional functions and become notoriously porous. The national identifications and borders, while still firmly in place, have become intertwined with attachments to the supra-national collective of Europeans. However, this weakening of borders within has gone hand in hand with a strengthening of external borders, and a drive to separate Europe and the Europeans from territories and populations perceived as not belonging to Europe.

Predictably, this aspect of European integration has been most visible in member-states positioned on the margins of the EU. The transformation of borders, symbolic geographies and collective attachments in Slovenia examined in the paper is a case in point. Over the past twenty years, its northern and western borders, initially treated as a-parts of the Iron Curtain, hayes been transformed first into a regular international border and then into one-of-the

internal EU borders. Simultaneously, its southern border went from being an entirely porous, purely administrative internal border linking Slovenia with the fraternal Yugoslav republic of Croatia to functioning as a fully fledged international border and finally to being the external border of the EU. A parallel transformation has occurred at the level of symbolic geography: Slovenia was no longer seen as being a part of Yugoslavia, belonging neither to the West nor to the East, but was now positioned as a part of Europe/ the West, clearly distinct from territories beyond its southern and eastern borders. Finally, the attachment to a wider collective of South Slavs or Yugoslavs has been dropped and replaced by an attachment to the collective of Europeans.

Besides providing an insight into these transformations, and particularly into the appropriations of the symbolic borders of Europe, the paper aimed to raise a more general point related to the study of borders. Since the state is not only a territorial organisation, but also a membership organisation, the institutional regulation of, and meanings attached to state borders are closely intertwined with the institutional regulation of, and meanings attached to citizenship and immigration. Due to that, state borders are far from being the sole institutional vehicle of the symbolic borders separating the Self from its Others. Policy measures regulating immigration function as an additional vehicle for these borders, and thus provide a complement to the institution of state borders: if the state border marks the perceived *territorial* borders of the Self, the immigration-related policy measures serve to maintain the perceived *population* borders distinguishing the Self from its Other(s).

As demonstrated through the analysis of mass media representations of two major instances of immigration in Slovenia since 1990, the public framing of immigration was underpinned by assumptions closely corresponding with the symbolic positioning of Slovenia and the collective identifications of Slovenians as established with the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The immigrants were not perceived only as a threat to the national homogeneity of

Slovenians, but also as threat for Slovenia's attachment to Europe. These assumptions were used to frame a number of policy measures designed to regulate immigration. Particularly the adoption of restrictive policy measures, including the prohibition of the free movement, the tightening of border controls, and even the closing of borders for immigration was largely legitimised by reference to Slovenia's position vis-à-vis Europe. In the case of Bosnian war refugees in 1992, the fear of being lumped together with other formerly Yugoslav republics rather than being regarded as an equal member of Europe was so strong that it drew the political elites to support closing the borders for the refugees when it appeared that other European states were reluctant to open theirs. In the case of undocumented immigration in 2000-2001, the introduction of restrictive measures was explained as a consequence of EU pressures, and seen as a prerequisite for boosting Slovenia's popularity as a prospective member state. As such, the policy measures regulating immigration functioned as a complement to the Slovenian southern state borders, and served as additional institutional vehicles of the symbolic borders separating the Slovenian Self from its Others. If the state border served to institutionalise the perceived territorial border of the Slovenian Self, namely the border between Europe and the Balkans (or between the West and the East), the immigration-related policy measures served to institutionalise its perceived population border, namely the border separating the Balkan (or Eastern) population from the European (or Western) one.

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