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Recognizing Croatia

How the Representation of Actors and Events shaped Policy
Priorities towards the Balkans in the United States and Germany

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1 Introduction

At the beginning of 1991 a broad consensus existed internationally that the unity of Yugoslavia had to be preserved to guarantee international stability. However, on December 19, 1991, the German government announced its decision to recognize the former Yugoslavian republics of Slovenia and Croatia. Shortly after (1992), the international community took similar action.

Today, German policy makers regularly assert that the decision to recognize the seceding Yugoslavian republics was the logical response to the developments in Yugoslavia. In this paper I will argue differently: the Western reaction was not an immediate result to what happened in Yugoslavia, but rather the result of how these events were represented in the Western discourse. The basic assumption of this paper is that no objective meaning can be assigned to political events and actions. In other words, meaning is not taken as a naturally occurring property of a given entity, but as a cultural unit, a societal convention applied to the entity and thus is open for reinterpretation. Therefore, the arguments on how we should react to an event depend on our cultural background and on the dominant reading (or interpretation) of a particular situation.

Democracies require that political action be legitimized, and that foreign policy make sense in the framework of how we interpret the world. In the absence of fixed meaning, the processes of how meaning evolves become crucial. The present paper addresses two questions lying at the core of foreign policy-making in democracies: how do collective interpretations and views of the world emerge, and how do they affect our foreign policy decisions?

The present paper discusses some epistemological assumptions and the objective of discourse analysis (Section 2). Section 3 briefly presents some background information on the diplomatic recognition of Croatia. And in Section 4 examples are given of how the discourse analysis is actually performed. Four statements, two taken from the German discourse and two taken from the US-American discourse will be examined in more detail. On the basis of this analysis, shared interpretations and dominant readings will be identified, and the relationship of representation and political action are addressed. Finally, Section 5 presents some concluding remarks about the utility of discourse analysis.

2 Aims of Discourse Analysis

In order to outline what an analysis of discourse can and cannot achieve it is useful to discuss some of its underlying epistemological assumptions. One of the main critiques of discourse analysis concerns the reliability of results. Indeed, reliability cannot be guaranteed, as independent researchers are likely to draw different conclusions upon the basis of their individual interpretations. It is helpful to think of the results of discourse analysis as a series of interpretations consisting chiefly of three nodes: 1) the actors' interpretations; 2) the researcher's interpretation of the actors' version, and 3) the researchers conclusions which are, essentially, an interpretation of the previous node. Therefore the results of discourse analysis can be regarded as interpretations of interpretations of interpretations.

The scientific claim of this type of research is not to present objective ‘truth’, but to make intelligible how the conclusions were drawn. The result of a discourse analysis can be regarded as ‘evidence-based narration’ from an individual who spent considerable time investigating a certain topic.¹ However, this does not mean that no standards exist for evaluating this kind of research. Most importantly, the researcher must make the interpretations intelligible and the argument must be coherent. The reader must understand on what basis the researcher drew the conclusions. Thus, an important criterion in evaluating this kind of research is the judgement of the reader (or the community of readers) of whether the argument seems coherent and the results plausible. This point affects directly the aim of this paper, since the scope only allows for the analysis of four statements, which is certainly not sufficient to support the conclusions drawn in the final sections. Therefore, the aim of this particular paper is more directed to demonstrate the application of a certain method than to present final conclusions. However, the conclusions draw on the analysis of additional quotes as well as interviews conducted with decision-makers and the analysis of secondary literature² and memoirs.³

A second critical point relates to a methodological question: whether public statements of decision makers can be taken at face value or if they are mere rhetorical devices applied to hide ‘true’ motives. The straight answer to this question is that one does not know if a speaker believes in what she or he is telling. However, this is not the question most discourse analysts are interested in. Discourse analysis tries to identify characteristics and consequences of the public discourse rather than to analyze perceptions of individuals.⁴ In this view, every statement is worth considering even if the statement is

¹ This is also true for all sections of this paper including the seemingly ‘factual’ background information presented in chapter 3 or the information given in the first paragraph of the paper.

² Literature addressing the recognition of Croatia is extensive and the following list is far from complete: Axt, Jürgen 1992: “Hat Genscher Jugoslawien entzweit? Mythen und Fakten zur Außenpolitik des vereinten Deutschlands.” *Europa-Archiv*, 48: 351-360. Crawford, Beverly 1996: “Explaining Defection from International Cooperation. Germany's Unilateral Recognition of Croatia.” *World Politics*, 48, July: 482-521. Gompert, David C. 1996: “The United States and Yugoslavia's War,” in: Richard H. Ullmann (Hrsg.): *The World and Yugoslavia's War*, 122-144. New York: Council on Foreign Relations. Gow, James 1997: *Triumph of the Lack of Will. International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War*. London: Hurst. Libal, Michael 1997: *Limits of Persuasion. Germany and the Yugoslav Crisis, 1991-1992*. Westport/Conn.: Praeger. Mühlen, Alexander 1992: “Die deutsche Rolle bei der Anerkennung der jugoslawischen Sezessionsstaaten.” *Liberal*, 34: 49-55. Newhouse, John 1992: “Bonn, der Westen und die Aufloesung Jugoslawiens. Das Versagen der Diplomatie - Chronik eines Skandals.” *Blaetter fuer deutsche und internationale Politik*, 37, 10: 1190-1205. Paulsen, Thomas 1995: *Die Jugoslawienpolitik der USA 1989-1994 : begrenztes Engagement und Konfliktdynamik*. Baden-Baden: Nomos. Thumann, Michael 1997: “Between Ambition and Paralysis. Germany's Policy Toward Yugoslavia, 1991-1993.” *Nationalities Papers*, 25, 3: 575-585. Witte, Eric A. 2000: *Die Rolle der Vereinigten Staaten im Jugoslawien-Konflikt und der außenpolitische Handlungsspielraum der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (1990-1996)*. Mitteilungen Nr.32. München: Osteuropa-Institut.

³ Baker, James A. 1995: *The Politics of Diplomacy. Revolution War and Peace 1989-1992*. New York: Putnam. Genscher, Hans-Dietrich 1999 (1995): *Erinnerungen*. Jubiläumsausgabe. Berlin: Wolf Jobst Siedler Verlag. Owen, David 1995: *Balkan Odyssey*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company. Wynaendts, Henry. 1993: *L'Engrenage: Chroniques Yugoslaves/Juillet 1991-Août 1992*. Paris. Zimmermann, Warren 1996: *Origins of a Catastrophe*. : Time Books.

⁴ In 1987, Bonham et. al. describe how their research group made a similar move from cognitive mapping to discourse analysis. In contrast to their earlier research on cognitive mapping, they started to use discursive practices rather than actors as primary units of analysis (Bonham, G. Matthew et al. 1987: “Cognition and International Negotiation: The Historical Recovery of Discursive Space.” *Cooperation and Conflict*, 22, 1: 1-19.)

only made to legitimize certain actions, since the statement nevertheless creates meanings and carries with it certain assumptions. Even if decision-makers are not convinced of their own arguments they might be bound to act accordingly, if their interpretation becomes the dominant representation in a certain discourse.

3 International Responses to the Yugoslavian Crisis in 1991

In June 1991, after the Yugoslavian republics of Croatia and Slovenia declared their independence, all Western countries still supported the unity of Yugoslavia. The declarations of independence passed the parliaments in Zagreb and Ljubljana a few days after US Secretary of State James Baker had visited Belgrade to make a plea for the peaceful negotiation of a future Yugoslavian structure. In the coming months the European Community took the diplomatic lead to mediate the conflict. A 'Troika' consisting of three foreign ministers visited Yugoslavia repeatedly, negotiating cease-fires and procedures to find a common solution. In addition, the newly created emergency mechanism of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was activated and the United Nations dispatched a special envoy to the region.

In the fall of 1991, the first governments, like Austria and Germany, started to take the diplomatic recognition of the seceding republics into consideration. At the end of 1991, the member states of the European Community were divided on this question. However, on December 16, the EC Foreign Ministers took the decision to recognize those republics fulfilling certain conditions. An arbitration commission was set-up to deliver opinions of whether the republics fulfilled the necessary requirements. At this time, the United States and the United Nations still expressed concern about possible consequences of recognition. Nevertheless, on December 19, Germany announced already her decision to recognize Croatia and Slovenia. On January 15, 1992 the European Commission followed Germany's lead. In April 1992, the United States finally recognized Croatia and Slovenia, together with Bosnia.

4 The Discourse in the United States and Germany

Discourse usually refers to linguistic activities, like speech and writing, as well as non-linguistic activities.⁵ In this sense, the air raids against Belgrade are part of the discursive totality as well as NATO statements by which they are tried to be justified. From an ontological point of view, it makes sense to speak of a discursive totality. However, for analytical purposes the concept is too broad, as it comprises basically every activity. In the context of this paper 'discourse' refers to a sub-set of this discursive totality. It is limited to linguistic activities and limited to statements which assigned

⁵ A frequently cited definition of discourse by Laclau / Mouffé reads: "This totality which includes within itself the linguistic and the non-linguistic, is what we call discourse. In a moment we will justify this denomination; but what must be clear from the start is that by discourse we do not mean a combination of speech and writing, but rather that speech and writing are themselves but internal components of discursive totalities." (Laclau, Ernesto und Chantal Mouffé 1990: *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*. London: Verso: 100.)

meaning is to the situation in Yugoslavia from 1991 to early 1992. In other words, how the situation in Yugoslavia was linguistically represented in Germany and the United States. In this sense, it is used as an analytical category to make the discursive totality accessible for examination.

The first step of the analysis serves to get an overview of what representations existed in the public discourse on Yugoslavia in Germany and the United States. It serves to re-construct 'readings' and 'fundamentals' of individual statements (section 4.1.). The term 'reading' is used to refer to the essence of the statement, as identified by the discourse analyst, i.e. a short story of what presumably was happening in Yugoslavia. The term 'fundamentals' refers to the elements of a statement, which are essential to present the reading in a meaningful way. Elements that are examined in more detail include:

- actors (Croats, Croats irregulars, Europeans)
- focus of statement (Serbian aggression, Unilateral actions by republics)
- use of concepts ('aggressors', 'East' and 'Irrationality')
- recourse to principles ('self-determination', 'non-violence')
- claims made (historical, moral, causal, utility).

The second step of the analysis serves to identify processes underlying the assignment of meaning such as classification and linkage. An understanding of these processes is necessary to clarify the function of the elements identified in step one, and to demonstrate the contingency of assignment of meaning.

In the final step (section 4.3) an assessment is presented as to what extent the discourse was populated by either a 'dominant reading' or 'shared interpretations'. The term 'dominant reading' is used to describe a situation, in which one interpretation of the situation in Yugoslavia is accepted by most of the discourse participants in one country. The term 'shared interpretation' is used if an interpretation is shared among a group of people (like some Members of Congress) and contested by other groups (like government officials).

4.1 Analysis of Statements

Chancellor Helmut Kohl of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU/CSU) and Norbert Gansel, foreign policy expert of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), made the following statements, in 1991. At this time, the Social Democratic Party was part of the parliamentary opposition.

[Quote FRG.1]⁶ Helmut Kohl (CDU), Chancellor, September 4, 1991:⁷

Those who think that it is still possible to rely on violence, must expect a determined response of all Europeans. This is true also and not least for the Federal Republic of Germany, namely in view of the resulting actions that have to be taken.

If dialogue and peaceful co-existence are no longer possible, then we have to consider, especially from our understanding of the principle of self-determination, the diplomatic recognition of those republics, that no longer would like to be part of Yugoslavia.⁸

Reading presented in Quote FRG.1:

- A federal unit uses violence against republics that intend to leave the federation.

Fundamentals of Quote FRG.1:

- Actors: Actors referred to are ‘somebody who thinks that violence is an option’, ‘all Europeans’, ‘Germany’, ‘republics’ and ‘Yugoslavia’. Although ‘those’ are not further defined, the context of which the quote is taken makes clear that ‘those’ refers to Serbian leadership and the federal army. Actors are regarded at highly aggregated level, culminating in ‘all Europeans’.
- Focus: The focus of events is limited to the violent actions of one conflict party.
- Concepts: Kohl applies the concepts of ‘all Europeans’ and ‘dialogue and peaceful co-existence’. His use of ‘all Europeans’ has profound implications. First by linking ‘all Europeans’ and ‘determined response to violence’ he suggests that ‘all Europeans’ believe that violence is not an option. Kohl implies by this statement that people applying violence are not part of the group called ‘Europeans’. Furthermore, Europeans not only condemn the use of violence but also are ready to respond to any application of violence. The statement also demonstrates that there exists no doubt about the responsibility for violence, as the European response (diplomatic recognition) favors one conflict party over the other. The meaning of the concept ‘dialogue and peaceful co-existence’ is not further clarified, however it is made clear that the actions of one side of the

⁶ FRG.1 means the first statement quoted of the discourse in the Federal Republic of Germany (compare USA.1).

⁷ Deutscher Bundestag: *Stenographische Protokolle* 12/37, 4. September 1991: 3019.

⁸ Wer glaubt, jetzt immer noch auf Gewalt setzen zu können, muß mit einer entschiedenen Antwort aller Europäer rechnen. Dies gilt auch und nicht zuletzt für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, namentlich mit Blick auf die daraus zu ziehenden Konsequenzen. Wenn Dialog, wenn friedliches Miteinander nicht mehr möglich sind, dann stellt sich für uns, auch und gerade aus unserem Verständnis von Selbstbestimmungsrecht, die Frage, diejenigen Republiken, die nicht mehr zu Jugoslawien gehören wollen, völkerrechtlich anzuerkennen.

conflict parties are in line with the meaning of this concept whereas the actions of the other side violate this concept.

- Principles: Kohl refers to the principle of 'self-determination'. By adding 'from our understanding' he makes clear that the meaning of this principle is contested. However, Kohl leaves no doubt that Germany considers the principle applicable to the situation in Yugoslavia, as a response to the violation of the state of 'dialogue and peaceful co-existence'.
- Claims: The statement contains the moral claim that the application of violence is not compatible with the European value system.

[Quote FRG.2] Norbert Gansel, Spokesman for Security Policy of the SPD Parliamentary Group, October 7, 1991:⁹

Today's air raids of the Yugoslav federal army against towns must have opened the eyes of the last person, that this is a war that is waged by the army against its own population and backed by the Serbians. It is time for the European Community to finally impose tough sanctions against the attacker and, after the three-months moratorium has ended, the European Community has also to clear the way diplomatically and legally for Slovenian and Croatian independence [...]¹⁰

Reading presented in Quote FRG.2:

- A national army attacks its own population.

Fundamentals of the reading in Quote FRG.2:

- Actors: Actors identified by Gansel include 'the federal army', 'Serbians', 'population', 'European Community', 'Slovenia' and 'Croatia'. Gansel treats Croatia and Slovenia as 'black boxes' that are not differentiated, for example into Serbian people living in Croatia. The uniformity of these republics is further supported by the attribute 'population' that is used to describe the target of the attacks of the federal army.
- Focus: The focus of the statement is comparable to the focus of quote 2.1. The statement is focused on the action of the federal army. Nothing is being reported about possible actions of the people attacked.
- Concepts: The actor 'federal army' is linked with the concept 'attackers'. To attack portrays the notion that the federal army is the first actor using violence in this conflict. 'Attacker' has a negative connotation as no reason for the attack is presented and the task of a military is usually to defend the country. The statement can be seen as part of a discursive battle to define the actions of the military. Statements made by Yugoslavian military representatives during this time often

⁹ Gansel, Norbert 1991: "7. Oktober 1991, Interview at SAT1, Guten Abend Deutschland," in. Bonn: Bundespresseamt, Fernseh-/Hörfunkspiegel; 8. Oktober 1991.

¹⁰ Die heutigen Luftangriffe der jugoslawischen Bundesarmee auf Städte müssen auch den Letzten die Augen geöffnet haben, daß hier ein Krieg einer Armee mit serbischer Rückendeckung gegen die eigene Bevölkerung geführt wird. Jetzt muß die Europäische Gemeinschaft endlich harte Sanktionen gegen die Angreifer ergreifen und, nachdem nun das dreimonatige Moratorium abgelaufen ist, muß auch die Europäische Gemeinschaft diplomatisch und völkerrechtlich den Weg von Slowenien und Kroatien in die Unabhängigkeit möglich machen [...]

referred to the duty of the military to ‘defend’ the federal state. This illustrates how contrary concepts are used to assign opposite meanings to a similar action.

Gansel backs his interpretation by setting up a dichotomy of military/civilian. The military is not fighting Croatian irregulars, Croatian forces or an army, but is attacking ‘towns’ and its own ‘population’. Thereby, the attacked people are presented as defenseless and the action of the army as illegitimate, and not provoked by some other action in the first place.

- Claims: Gansel calls for action of the European Community. The action is morally justified as Gansel implicitly claims by his portrait of the Yugoslavian army that basic shared values of the European Community are violated. Necessary actions include sanctions against Serbia and recognition of Slovenia and Croatia.

To give an example of the US-American discourse, I selected two statements of senior members of the Bush administration in different points in time. The statements are representative for the public discourse at the top level of the administration. Similar statements were made until the United States announced the recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia, in 1992.

[Quote USA.1] James Baker, Secretary of State, June 26, 1991:¹¹

We support the application, of course, of the Helsinki principles, and we support cooperative efforts toward resolving political differences peacefully. We do not intend to reward unilateral actions that preempt dialogue or that preempt the possibility of negotiated solutions, and we will strongly oppose intimidation or the use of force.

[...]

MR. NEUHARTH: How do you balance self-determination or the freedom of people within the geographic area of a country with maintaining the political integrity of that country? SEC. BAKER: You say what I just said in my prepared remarks when I outlined the position of the United States with respect to Yugoslavia, which is that there can be and should be greater autonomy, greater sovereignty for the republics of Yugoslavia, but that that should be accomplished through peaceful means, through dialogue and negotiation, and not through unilateral actions that can lead to or could be expected to lead to violence and bloodshed and that would or could preempt the opportunities for a peaceful resolution of the problem through dialogue and negotiation.

Reading presented in Quote USA.1:

- Republics make negotiated solutions impossible when acting unilaterally against the federal state.

Fundamentals of Quote USA.1:

- Actors: Actors mentioned are the United States, Yugoslavia and the republics of Yugoslavia.
- Focus: Baker addresses the situation in Yugoslavia indirectly. ‘Unilateral actions’ refers to the declarations of Independence of Croatia and Slovenia. The main focus of the statement lies on procedural aspects of the crisis, rather than on the desirability of certain outcomes.

¹¹ Federal News Service 1991: Gannett Foundations Freedom Forum. Remarks by: James Baker III, Secretary of State. Major Leader Special Transcript. Washington DC: June 26, 1991.

- Concepts: Baker uses concepts related to procedural aspects of the process in Yugoslavia (e.g. cooperative efforts, dialogue, negotiation, use of violence) and concepts related to the outcome of the process (autonomy, sovereignty). By referring to the declaration of independences as ‘unilateral acts’ Baker portrays them as a procedure that is not in line with ‘cooperative efforts, dialogue, negotiation’. In addition, he links the declaration to ‘use of violence’ and ‘bloodshed’, by using a causal claim (‘unilateral action ...can lead to violence’). ‘Autonomy’ and ‘greater sovereignty’ are used to outline Bakers understanding of ‘self-determination’. For Baker the meaning of the concept of ‘self-determination’ seems not to require the existence of a fully independent political unit. Yugoslavian republics may seek ‘greater’ sovereignty and autonomy, however the unity of whole Yugoslavia can still be maintained.
- Principles: Baker mentions the ‘Helsinki principles’, without clarifying how they should be applied. However, by saying ‘we do not reward unilateral actions’ he indicates that the declaration of independence were not in line with these principles and that these principles demand cooperation.
- Claims: Baker is using moral arguments as he uses certain concepts like non-violence without giving further reasoning as to why it would be beneficial to follow this line of action.

[Quote USA.2] Lawrence Eagleburger, Deputy Secretary of State, November 8, 1991.¹²

Basically, I tell them [the leaders of the Yugoslavian republics], you know, if you want a relationship with the United States in the future that means anything, you’d better understand that our position is that you must negotiate these changes, you can’t do them at the point of a bayonet, and that we simply are not prepared to recognize the individual acts or acts where you change borders by force. That all sounds great but if you’re dealing with irrational people, and by and large that’s what this is, I’m not at all sure that it makes much difference.

[...], I don’t think there’s any doubt that the principal fault lies with the Serbs and the Yugoslav national army, and the sorts of things that they are doing. But I would have to say too I think there is enough fault to go around with almost everybody.

[...] if the West, for example, were prepared to put in a substantial number of troops and force these people to stop fighting, I suppose it could be done.

Reading presented in Quote USA.1:

- Different political groups use violence instead of peaceful negotiations to achieve changes in their political system.

Fundamentals of Quote USA.1:

- Actors: Eagleburger refers to ‘leaders of the Yugoslavian republics’, ‘United States’, ‘Irrational People’, ‘Serbs’, ‘Yugoslav National Army’, ‘Everybody’ and ‘West’.

¹² Educational Broadcasting and GWETA 1991: Interview with Lawrence Eagleburger, Deputy Secretary of State. The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour. Washington DC: November 8, 1991.

- Focus: Both sides contribute to the spreading of violence, whereas Serbs and Yugoslav national army bare the main responsibility
- Concepts: Eagleburger uses concepts like ‘negotiation’ to refer to what the US expects. In contrast he describes the actual events in Yugoslavia as ‘individual acts’ or ‘acts by force’. By using the metaphor of ‘point of a bayonet’ he points to the use of coercive force, which contradicts ‘negotiation’. In the last sentence of the first paragraph Eagleburger makes a linkage between the application of non-violence and rationality. Thereby he presents the US government as rational advisors and the Yugoslavian leaders as irrational people. By this statement Eagleburger alludes to the perception of a rational Western world versus uncivilized Balkans and creates the notion of West/rational and East/Irrational.
Eagleburger addresses the question of responsibility for the conflict. While giving the Serbs and the Yugoslavian army the main responsibility, Eagleburger holds all parties in the conflict responsible.
- Principles: The most important principle, as stated this time by Eagleburger, is the principle of non-violence. Like in the statement of Baker, Eagleburger links future US support for the political units in question to procedural questions not to the outcome of the conflict. It is interesting to note, that Eagleburger considers the Western world not necessarily bound to the principle of non-violence. In the last paragraph Eagleburger regards violence as an adequate option to stop violence in Yugoslavia. Therefore, the principle of non-violence is not applicable in any circumstances, and the linkage between violence and irrationality seems not to be of general character.
- Claims: The statement as presented by Eagleburger combines moral with utility claims. The moral claim is that the use of non-violence is better than the use of violence. However, by referring to people who use violence as irrational, Eagleburger gives the impression that the application of violence must have consequences, which are not beneficial for the people – otherwise their behavior would not be irrational.

4.2 Characteristics of the Assignment of Meaning

Based on the ‘inventory’ of elements identified in the last section, the next step of the analysis is to examine characteristic means of the assignment of meaning. Characteristic means include simplification, classification, linkage or ontologisation. As an example, the use of simplification for the assignment of meaning is briefly outlined.

The term ‘simplification’ may carry a negative connotation in every day language. However, in the current context, it is used as a neutral term to refer to a process, which is inevitable to make a complex word accessible for our understanding. The following examples should demonstrate the implications of the different forms of simplification applied by the speakers.

The term ‘focus’ was used to refer to the events and actions reported by a speaker. Focus is an inevitable tool of simplification, as it is not impossible to perceive and represent all events and actions happening in Yugoslavia. Any action or event is part of a flowing network of preceding (and subsequent) actions, which cannot be represented completely in the discourse. Therefore, any

reference to certain actions (and implicitly the non-reference to others) is always a subjective choice, suggesting certain assessments rather than others. The attribution of responsibility for certain events is usually directly linked to the focus of a statement. In Norbert Gansel's quote (FRG.2) 'air raids' are presented as unilateral activities that are not reported to be a response to prior actions of the Croats (nor do they seem to provoke defensive actions). Therefore, in absence of any rational motives that could have triggered the raids, the Federal army bears full responsibility for an escalation of the conflict. The statements USA.1 and USA.2 however, choose a different focus: the reported sequence of events starts with unilateral actions of Croatia (i.e. the declaration of independence) that are likely to be followed by violent actions of both sides.

One of the most powerful strategies for the assignment of meaning is classification. Like focus, classification is a necessary tool for simplifying, since different elements are subsumed under the label of a common category. Classification is a precondition to make the world understandable and communicable. Without the notion of 'animals', 'humans' or 'trees' we would not be able to identify the subjects or objects we encounter. Choosing certain classifications rather than others, bears implications, which we are rarely aware of. The act of classification consists of two steps: first, categories have to be created and second, the object encountered has to be subsumed under a certain category. It is important to bear in mind that both steps require a substantial amount of subjectivity. However, once the categories are established they are often no longer perceived as a product of human mind but as an objective representation of reality, a process, which is also referred to ontologisation.¹³

The most wide-ranging categorization is the use of dichotomies. In our examples, Kohl (Quote FRG.1) builds up a dichotomy of 'Europeans' and 'actors applying violence' and Gansel refers to 'attackers' and implies the category of 'civilians'. These dichotomies seem to be clear-cut and once accepted, it is self-evident which side of the category has to be preferred over the other. The use of such concepts is a useful tool to reduce the complexity of a situation to a point, which urges us to take position and eventually to act. The following quote of the SPD politician Freimut Duve expressed this view in a pointed manner: "Those who ask for neutrality between culprit and victim while murder is going on become accomplices."¹⁴

4.3 Dominant Reading and Shared Interpretations

The examples of the discourse analysis given in section 4 demonstrated that different meanings were assigned in Germany and the United States to similar events in Yugoslavia. The limited length of the paper allowed for only four examples. Although they demonstrate how the method can be applied to

¹³ This phenomenon has already been described by Berger and Luckmann. To them, ontologisation describes the paradox that human beings produce a world, which they do not experience as their own product (Berger, Peter L und Thomas Luckmann 1977 (1966): *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit. Eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie*. Frankfurt: Fischer: 77). For them, one of the main challenges of sociological theories is to describe, how it is possible that in everyday life subjective meaning is perceived as objective certainty (*ibid.*: 20).

¹⁴ Duve as quoted in Thumann, Michael 1997: "Between Ambition and Paralysis. Germany's Policy Toward Yugoslavia, 1991-1993." *Nationalities Papers*, 25, 3: 578.

analyze the text, they are not sufficient postulate final conclusions about the development of the whole discourse. For this reason, the interpretations presented below are based on the analysis of additional statements that are not reproduced in this paper (see section 2).

In Germany, a dominant reading of the situation in Yugoslavia existed at the end of 1991: Croatia is legitimately striving for independence and needs international support against its attackers. Therefore, the international community should not hesitate to recognize Croatia. This reading was shared by government officials, the foreign policy bureaucracy, the political parties (with the exception of the former communist socialist party) and by most of the media. The interpretation of events left no doubt about which actions of the conflict parties were legitimate and who was to blame for the escalation of the crisis. Thereby, the complexity of a crisis was reduced to a point in which the events in Yugoslavia were represented as an archetypical plot of the 'good' versus the 'bad'.

According to this dominant reading of the conflict in Yugoslavia, diplomatic recognition was the only consequent option being in line with frequently cited 'European' values, like human rights or democracy. Everybody opposing the political option of 'recognizing' Croatia seemed to simultaneously leave the ground of a generally accepted European value system.

In contrast to the German discourse, no interpretation of the crisis in Yugoslavia achieved a dominant status among societal groups in the United States. Even though newspapers like the New York Times and the Washington Post had covered the conflict in Yugoslavia regularly since 1991, public awareness about the conflict remained limited. Within the Bush administration, Congress and the media a variety of viewpoints existed on whether or not to recognize Croatia. People calling for recognition included various members of Congress, particularly a small number of Senators lead by Robert Dole and Albert Gore, who undertook a bi-partisan effort to push the Bush-Administration for recognition. However, Congress as a whole did not share this interpretation and was unwilling to mandate any policy shifts in this direction.

Members of the senior level of the State Department and the White House did not support recognition as late as March 1992. The main line of argument was commonly based on procedural grounds, maintaining that the United States would accept any outcome achieved by peaceful negotiation of the conflict parties in Yugoslavia. The shared interpretation at the senior level in the United States could be summarized as follows: Yugoslavia is in a process of transformation in which different political groups try to follow different aims. The transformation should be achieved by negotiation and peaceful means. The declarations of independence make negotiations impossible. Diplomatic recognition would endorse this unilateral act that had triggered violence. Therefore, officials of the United States regularly opposed to recognize Croatia until March 1992. However, in April 1992 Croatia was finally recognized.

If the representations existing at the senior decision-making level had dominated the US-American discourse, the sudden policy change would have been unlikely. Due to the existence of competing interpretations, the range of possible political actions was not as limited as it was in Germany. In addition, the diplomatic recognition of Croatia by nearly half of the world's nations changed the political framework on which the interpretation of the US-American decision makers was based.

5 Concluding Remarks

The theoretical assumptions underlying discourse analysis are far from being unknown. In modern philosophy the nature of meaning has been studied extensively, semiotics has established itself as a discipline, and scholars like Shapiro and Onuf introduced related thoughts more than ten years ago into the field of International Relations. However, many scholars, preferring explanations to understanding, are still questioning the value of discourse analysis. And indeed, in my view, discourse analysis is not suited to address ‘why’ questions. However, discourse analysis helps to understand mechanisms, which are fundamental to our democracies. It supplies analytical tools to understand, for example, to what extent ‘Bosnia was saved by journalists’ and why journalists like Roy Gutman and Christiane Amanpour are ‘heroes’ in Sarajevo, as pointed out by Bosnian co-prime minister Haris Silajdžić.¹⁵

Democracies depend upon the public support of their policies, which again depends on their representation and our belief systems. Understanding how the categories are formed on which our thinking is based is essential in order to steer clear of the fallacies inherent to a practice were such categories remain unquestioned. The way in which ‘self-determination’ was used in the German discourse exemplifies one of these fallacies: once meaning is temporarily fixed, essential questions are no longer being asked, as they already entered the meaning of the concept as implicit assumptions. Once the link ‘self-determination’ and ‘independence’ was taken for granted, important questions were no longer addressed in Germany, such as how self-determination can be achieved if different nations share the same territory or if minorities should have the right to veto independence.

Current changes in the structures of how representations are conveyed are likely to affect the characteristics of the assignment of meaning. Promising fields for research in the field of International Relations might include an evaluation of the effects of new media proliferation, like the internet. Discourse analysis may prove useful in answering questions like ‘Does the existence of global news networks or the merger of AOL and Time Warner facilitate the development of dominant readings?’ or ‘Is the likelihood of military intervention affected, if 100.000 million internet users simultaneously receive messages like “5.000 Nubilians slaughtered by Red Sierra army forces?”’.

Although discourse analysis will not be able to provide straightforward answers to these questions, it can help to raise awareness about possible effects of the way we communicate and can critically point to desirable effects of alternative interpretations.

¹⁵ McGrory, Mary 1997: “From Bosnia, With Gratitude.” WP, The Washington Post, October 23, 1997: A02.